



TO STRENGTHEN WMD DEFENSES, INCREASE PUBLIC RESILIENCE

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In an era of evolving security threats, the need to fortify America's defenses against Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) has never been more critical. Traditional approaches focus on intelligence, surveillance, and consequence management. Promoting public resilience stands as a pivotal and often overlooked component in enhancing the nation's capacity to withstand and counter WMD terrorism.

Currently, consequence management is a crucial aspect of WMD protection, but it falls short in mitigating long-term societal harm and undermining the appeal of mass-casualty WMD attacks to terrorists. Strengthening societal resilience to withstand the consequences of both minor and catastrophic WMD events could significantly enhance current counter-terrorism efforts against WMD-armed terrorists. Although consequence management and public resilience are interconnected, they are distinct and mutually reinforcing.

Public resilience starts at the grassroots level, empowering communities to be vigilant and proactive in identifying potential threats. Engaging citizens in educational programs fosters a collective sense of responsibility, turning communities into active partners in national security efforts. Thus, federal, state, and local governments should implement comprehensive public education campaigns to raise awareness about WMD threats, their potential consequences, and the importance of individual and community preparedness. Further, communities should involve residents in emergency response planning and training exercises to foster a sense of shared responsibility and resilience.

Conventional defense strategies typically emphasize physical structures and service continuity while neglecting human and social factors. The enhancement of societal resilience serves a dual purpose. First, by prioritizing public resilience, response efforts can focus on human and social factors rather than solely on physical structures and service continuity. A resilient public

OPPOSITE: Members of the Combat Readiness Training Center Fire Department, Harrison County Fire Department and Gulfport Fire Department render aid to simulated victims during a disaster exercise at Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport, Gulfport, Mississippi, March 28, 2024. Keesler students volunteered in the exercise, which simulated a mass casualty plane crash that required first responders and airport personnel to respond efficiently, render aid to patients and clear the scene. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Kurstyn Canida)

RIGHT: Indian Head - U.S. Marines with Chemical Biological Incident Response Force (CBIRF) show the capabilities of CBIRF, along with a demonstration and practical application, to members of the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Graduate Research Fellowship Program at National Defense University (NDU), aboard Naval Support Facility Indian Head Annex Stump Neck, Md., on February 11, 2022. This exercise was conducted to provide educational support to NDU faculty and students about CBIRF and how we respond to any type of incident that we could get called to. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Gunnery Sgt. Kristian S. Karsten/Released)



is less susceptible to the immediate shock and fear induced by WMD incidents, thereby reducing overall vulnerability. We can improve the public response in an attack by cultivating mental preparedness and imparting coping strategies. Second, a resilient society sends a powerful message to terrorists that the desired psychological response to WMD attacks may not be achievable. By showcasing an aware and prepared citizenry, we force would-be attackers to question whether they could achieve their desired ends through such an attack.

Implementing public resilience into counter-terrorism efforts may face challenges arising from the complexity of developing a model based on various types of actions (pre-WMD action, crisis actions) and roles of elements (public roles, leadership roles, etc.). However, through meticulous planning, training, and exercising programs, public resilience can be integrated into ongoing counter-terrorism efforts. Publicizing the involvement of citizens in exercises and actual disaster responses can promote public interest and participation in training programs. Given the hazardous-material aspects of WMDs, providing advanced training and equipment to news crews and role players are also essential.

Promoting public resilience must be acknowledged and pursued as a critical pillar in strengthening America's defense against weapons of mass destruction. By empowering communities, reducing vulnerability, and undermining the strategic appeal of WMD attacks, the nation can create a robust foundation for countering evolving security threats. The integration of public resilience with existing defense strategies not only prepares individuals for the unthinkable but also positions the United States to face the challenges of the future with a resilient and united front. As we navigate an uncertain world, fostering public resilience is not just a strategy; it is an investment in the collective strength of a nation. ■

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