A Changing of the Guard:  
The U.S. National Guard and Homeland Defense  
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About the Author

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“The highest priority of the U.S. military is to defend the Nation from all enemies...Protecting the American homeland from attack is the foremost responsibility of the U.S. Armed Forces.”

“The military will have a role in homeland security, and that role will be played predominantly by the National Guard.”

Since the September 11 attacks, the federal government has undertaken a fundamental review of the U.S. defense priorities. The terrorist strikes against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon exposed the extraordinary vulnerability of the U.S. homeland that some had warned against over the last several years. There is now widespread agreement that the threat of terrorist attack against the United States is likely to be a long-term reality. Given this situation, the Bush administration’s decision to reassess its policy on homeland security is wholly appropriate.

A key issue to be resolved during this review is the role of the U.S. military. The military is but one of a number of government agencies to be involved in securing the homeland, and within the military, different branches have distinct advantages that may be utilized. Overall, however, the National Guard seems most suitable for this mission. The Guard possesses the organizational structure, legal authority, and traditions that make it the logical choice for homeland security. Guard units are likewise generally well equipped to respond to catastrophic events such as terrorist attacks, while Guard personnel are much more familiar with the communities that they would likely be called to serve.

Nevertheless, giving the National Guard primary responsibility for homeland defense raises a host of questions that policymakers must address. For example, should the Guard focus solely on homeland security and forgo its support role of the active duty force in overseas military deployments? Does the Guard have the personnel, training, and equipment needed to deal effectively with terrorist threats and attacks throughout the United States? Is the Guard’s command structure sufficiently organized to address

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questions to its authority, should they arise? Should the Guard have greater access to military and police intelligence? Is the interaction with federal, state, and local government agencies adequate to ensure a mutual understanding of each other’s roles and capabilities?

Questions regarding the role the National Guard should play in homeland defense are not new. Some observers argue that the Guard's sole mission should be homeland defense. Others contend that in addition to its role in homeland security, the Guard should continue to be involved in other types of missions. This debate will likely become more heated, as the federal government decides how best to protect the U.S. homeland, and as the Pentagon transforms itself to better address terrorist threats. Regardless of the long-term outcome of this debate, the near term withdrawal of the National Guard from supporting the active force is neither likely nor prudent. To increase the Guard’s effectiveness in homeland security, several improvements are needed both within the Guard itself and within other institutions with which it interacts. Before discussing these improvements, it is useful to consider a few assumptions, define homeland security and homeland defense, and briefly review the Guard’s history, structure, and capabilities.

**KEY ASSUMPTIONS**

The argument claim that the Guard is the optimum homeland security force rests on five major assumptions. First, despite its mandate to provide homeland security, the United States will not continue to pursue its traditional grand strategy, which is based in part on the forward deployment of more than 200,000 U.S. forces in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. These troops have several functions, among them, securing U.S. interests abroad; providing regional stability; deterring potential aggressors, which may include “rogue states” such as Libya, Iraq, Iran and others; and obviating the need for regional powers to develop large forces of their own, which could in turn have a destabilizing effect on the region in question. The presence of these forces is generally perceived by policy makers in Washington as critical; as such, they are not likely to be removed in the near future.

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Second, no meaningful increases in the U.S. military’s activity-duty personnel (referred to as “end strength”) are likely over the foreseeable future.  

Third, giving the enduring threat of terrorism in the United States, the federal government will commit to developing long-term defenses against it.

Fourth, the public and private sectors are likely to be engaged, and employers are likely to continue supporting Guard involvement in the homeland defense effort. However, the resolve to remain vigilant against a latent threat (provided that another major terrorist attack does not occur) is difficult to sustain. Sustaining interest in homeland security programs is a key challenge to both employers and employees who continue to make sacrifices so as to contribute to the nation’s defense. Whether that spirit of sacrifice can endure over the long term will significantly influence the choice and design of a homeland defense force.

Fifth, the United States will increase spending for homeland security, a significant portion of which will go to the DoD. The Bush administration’s budget submission for FY’03 requested $38 billion for homeland security (with additional funds to be determined). A fifth assumption is that funding for the area will continue as additional requirements are identified.

DEFINING HOMELAND SECURITY AND HOMELAND DEFENSE

Homeland security encompasses a wide array of activities that seek to deter potential attackers from attempting to inflict damage on the United States; deny success to those who cannot be deterred; and if necessary, to react quickly to attacks and to mitigate consequences should efforts to prevent attacks fail. Homeland security requires a layered defense, the first layer of which involves actions taken beyond American shores. In its broadest terms, homeland security actions involves addressing perceptions of U.S. policies overseas that have led to popular support for actions against the United States; improving human intelligence sources to better track potential enemies; tightening up administrative procedures for

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8 John Winkler, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, in an address to Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government National Security Fellows, 30 November 2001. Despite requests by DoD for additional troops to reinforce a thinly stretched military, active-duty end strength has heretofore remained steady. Recent testimony by senior defense officials including the Army Chief of Staff (March, 2002) indicated the need for increased end strength, but the issue is as yet unresolved.

granting and enforcing visas; improving immigration oversight; enhancing border and port security; and protecting critical cyber activities such as banking.

Homeland security for the military involves the following activities:

1. deterring an attack on U.S. homeland through the credible threat of massive retribution on the potential attackers;
2. conducting preemptive or reactive strikes on known terrorist forces beyond U.S. borders;
3. protecting borders and key sites within the homeland such as dams, bridges, airports, and nuclear power facilities;
4. providing quick assistance to initial response agencies following an attack on the homeland by conventional, chemical, biological, or nuclear means; and
5. managing the longer-term consequences of an attack—for example, overseeing orderly evacuations; providing for crowd control; and assisting with medical treatment and law enforcement activities.

The National Guard contributes to the full range of homeland defense missions. In their capacity as an augmentation force to the active-duty military, Guard units contribute both to deterrence at home and to military operations overseas. The preponderance of the Guard’s contribution to homeland security, however, should focus on three activities (protection, response, and consequence management within U.S. borders).

WHY THE NATIONAL GUARD MAKES THE MOST SENSE FOR HOMELAND DEFENSE

There are at least five advantages to placing the Guard as the head of the military's contribution to homeland security. First, the Guard’s primary responsibility of community protection derives from its militia roots. As California's adjutant general notes:

"...we are the Nation's homeland force. This is why our founders established the militia. Our units are located in over 3,000 communities across the United States, and the
District of Columbia. We have been the homeland security force since 1636 with the formation of the first unit in Massachusetts."  

Second, National Guard units exist in more than 3,000 communities across the country and can be deployed quickly in the event of a terrorist attack. They provide an organized and well-equipped cadre that can be mobilized quickly and sent to areas in need.

Third, the National Guard is best positioned to interact with other organizations likely to be involved in homeland security. As September 11 and other national disasters have demonstrated, the response to such incidents involves a coordinated effort among various federal, state, and local agencies. The success of any crisis response (or for preventing terrorist attacks) often relies on the working relationships that these agencies have developed with each other.

To maximize effectiveness, the military component of the response effort must have a solid understanding of the capabilities of these organizations and a firm grasp of each other’s role. The Guard's role as "citizen soldiers" makes it unique in being able to fulfill this requirement. As police officers, firemen and women, emergency medical personnel, and doctors, many of the Guard’s personnel have jobs that link them closely to their communities and provide a firmer understanding of the capabilities needed to respond to crises. Many have spent all or at least a significant portion of their lives in a particular state and have a vested interest in ensuring security.

Fourth, the leaders of state National Guard units are more familiar with state vulnerabilities within their states than are active component leaders who may have little or no experience operating in a particular state. Of importance, the adjutants general, through his or her close association with the governor and other high-ranking state officials, confer on the Guard a unique ability to identify and plan responses for the most likely targets within the area. Many adjutants general also serve as heads of state emergency management agencies.

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11 The military will be but one of the many important components of America's effort to ensure a secure homeland. Federal intelligence, law enforcement, response and other agencies; state and local police and fire departments; and to some degree the private sector will all join hands under the broader title of homeland security in the effort to deter, stop, or react to further attacks. The list of federal agencies involved in homeland security in some capacity is significant. Included among the participants are the Departments of State, Defense, HHS, Treasury, and Justice, FEMA, and others.
Perhaps of greatest importance, allowing the Guard to focus on homeland defense frees the active-duty force to focus on preparing for and conducting overseas combat commissions. As evidenced by the war in Afghanistan and the war on terrorism; the continuing U.S. presence in the Balkans; Iraq's ever-present threat to stability in the Middle East; and countless other areas of potential involvement by U.S. forces, the United States can ill-afford to allow its forces to lose focus of their traditional role in favor of homeland defense, unless the United States decides to disengage from the rest of the world, a highly unlikely occurrence.

Fifth, when operating under Title 32 of the U.S. Code, National Guard troops can be mobilized without having to address the Posse Comitatus Act. Though interpretations of this law vary considerably, the current practice (generally endorsed by the military) is to prohibit active-duty forces from participating in such domestic operations. Additionally, a part-time force such as the Guard raises much less concern over the possible growth of an invasive military force within U.S. borders that might raise concerns over civil liberties.

If the National Guard seems the most appropriate choice to carry out homeland defense, the next question is whether it can contribute to homeland security, while continuing to fulfill its traditional mission of U.S. active-duty troops overseas. During the 2002 winter Olympics in Salt Lake City Utah, members of the Utah National Guard provided security for the games while other members (13 percent of Utah's Guard) were serving overseas. Was this a one-time occasion, or can the Guard sustain its contribution to homeland security and meet its overseas requirements? Can and should they do both?

SHOULD THE NATIONAL GUARD BECOME ONLY A HOMELAND DEFENSE FORCE?

There is considerable disagreement on whether the National Guard should continue in its present role as an augmentation force for the regular military. Some observers argue that the Guard should curtail its

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12The Posse Comitatus Act, Title 18, U.S. Code, Section 1385, reads in its entirety: "Whoever, except in cases and under circumstances expressly authorized by the Constitution or Act of Congress, willfully uses any part of the Army (or the Air Forces) as a posse comitatus or otherwise to execute the laws shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than two years or both." This act is interpreted widely as a prohibition against the use of regular military forces in domestic law enforcement activities. For an opposing viewpoint (in which the author argues that this prevailing view is a complete misinterpretation of the true and original intent of the act written to protect the army from becoming convenient source of posse manpower), see Brinkerhoff, John R. "The Posse Comitatus Act and Homeland Security" in The Journal of Homeland Security, Feb 2002.

involvement overseas and focus exclusively on homeland security. Advocates of this position suggest that the Guard should transfer its combat and key combat support capabilities to the active-duty forces or to other reserve components and reconfigure itself to conduct only activities related to homeland defense. Some have raised questions regarding the Guard's ability to contribute to the active force. National Guard units do not receive the same level of training as regular troops nor do they possess the most modern equipment. Consequently, units are not as combat ready as their active-duty counterparts. Indeed some Guard units have arrived for duty unprepared to meet their full responsibilities.

It is unlikely that the National Guard will change its focus to a homeland security force for three reasons. First, if the first two assumptions mentioned earlier are valid, then the regular military will have insufficient manpower to meet all of its obligations. Reserve forces, including the Guard, are already involved in Afghanistan and have become a regular part of force rotations in the Balkans and elsewhere.

The National Guard makes up a significant part of the combat capability and key combat support capability of the total U.S. military force. In the Army, 70 percent of all field artillery battalions are members of the National Guard, as are 59 percent of all construction engineers and 49 percent of all combat engineers. All told, 52 percent of the Army National Guard is made up of combat units. Similarly within the Air Force, 33 percent of fighter squadrons, 12 percent of bomber aircraft, 45 percent of tankers, 49 percent of theater airlift, and 100 percent of the air defense capability is found within the National Guard.

The size and composition of the Guard is derived principally from the “total force” concept of the late 1970s whereby reserve forces such as the Guard made up a large portion of the overall military force structure. This plan was conceived principally as a means to meet global commitments while saving money in personnel accounts. By relying on part-time forces whose annual compensation is far less than that of full-time active-duty personnel, and whose retirement benefits take affect much later in life, the

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15 Dave Moniz. “Ghost Soldiers inflate Guard Numbers” USA Today, December 12, 2001. “Misconduct marks Guard command” USA Today, January 8, 2002. “4 More Guard Leaders Probed” USA Today, April 4, 2002. Julie Rosgrant and Richard Falkenrath. The Flawed Emergency Response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots (A). John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University 2000. Cases such as these suggesting corruption in the upper levels of Guard leadership and general ineptitude by certain Guard units have understandably brought into question the ability of the National Guard to serve as a meaningful component of America's other military obligations.

16 Ibid.
DoD found a cost-effective way to meet many of its obligations. If policymakers continue to rely on a reserve component to provide a more economical total force, shifting the National Guard to the single purpose of homeland defense would not be prudent. 17

Second, the morale and eventually the recruitment and retention of National Guard personnel would likely suffer if homeland security was the Guard’s only role. The commander of the Massachusetts Army National Guard notes, "What keeps us motivated is purpose. Soldiers are soldiers and they want to contribute. I think if you made the National Guard just a homeland security force you would begin to see a very different and much less motivated Guard from the one we have today."18 Career military personnel, whether active duty or reserve, are generally motivated by a willingness to engage potential adversaries in conventional conflict. Training that is designed around that willingness, and the satisfaction that members of the military gain from being a well-prepared force are key motivators and reasons why individuals remain in the armed forces.

Day-to-day activities such as guarding airports, borders, and other critical sites; managing crowds; and providing support for whatever other activities may be required as a part of homeland security, though important tasks, do not provide most Guard personnel with the same level of satisfaction that preparation and involvement in more traditional military activities offer.

Third, because of its integration within both state and national security structures, the National Guard tends to enjoy widespread support among governors and members of Congress. As such, any proposal to radically alter its mission and force structure is likely to meet stiff opposition.19

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE HOMELAND SECURITY CAPABILITIES OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

There are a number of steps that the National Guard can take to enhance National Guard’s its performance. The most important requirement external to the Guard is the publication of a national homeland security strategy that defines objectives, clarifies command arrangements, and assigns responsibilities to various agencies throughout the government, including the military. This document

17 Much of the today’s force structure found in the National Guard (as well as the active force) is a result of the post-Cold War- two major theater contingency that guided defense planning for most of the 1990s.


19 Jim Drinkard. “National Guard has Formidable lobbying power,” USA Today, December 17, 2002
A CHANGING OF THE GUARD

has been published by the Office of Homeland Security during the summer of 2002. First the Guard should develop a core set of skills designed specifically for homeland defense, because current training methods are insufficient. At present, National Guard units are responsible for homeland defense, receive ad hoc training to elevate their soldiers to a certain level of performance. Often, soldiers in these units are assigned tasks for which they have not been formally trained. This applies particularly to combat arms soldiers given related to law enforcement, such as airport and border patrol. This oversight is consistent with the military's training philosophy based on the premise that if a unit trains for war (in theory its most demanding requirement), then other less taxing missions, such as peacekeeping, will be effectively carried out.

This approach is understandable in overseas operations with clear objectives and an unambiguous command structure. Homeland security, however, presents a wholly different set of challenges. The operating environment and command arrangements are unlike more traditional military missions. In addition, Guard members should know how to respond to chemical, biological, nuclear, or radiological attacks; have familiarity with potential terrorist targets and plans to foil or respond to such attacks; operate with other agencies during crises; and be aware of the potential implications of their actions on civil liberties.

The National Guard Bureau needs to establish a national standard for training that focuses on homeland defense. It also needs to be held accountable to a national-level government authority for failure to meet standards.

Second, key personnel and material shortfalls must be addressed immediately. Most important, additional Civil Support Teams (CSTs) would provide response capability during a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) attack. Currently, only in about half of the states in the country have a

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21 Major General Paul Monroe; Oliver Mason, Colonel USAR, Chief of Operations, Massachusetts National Guard, in phone interviews, December 2001-January 2002.

CST. Improvements should also be made to medical response, transportation, construction, and communication capabilities throughout the nation.  

Third, the National Guard ought to be represented adequately in the Northern Command (NORTHCOM). This command, which has oversight of the U.S. territory, will be the DoD’s primary military organization dedicated to homeland security. The command is headed by an active duty four-star officer. To ensure the full range of capabilities of the Guard are utilized in planning and execution of homeland defense missions, the deputy commander should be from the National Guard.

In addition, clear command arrangements between active-duty force and the Guard should be developed in NORTHCOM. Command relationships are often unclear for Guard units when a mix of active, reserve, and National Guard units deploy in response to a catastrophic terrorist event. A preexisting understanding of command relationships is therefore critical to rapid response.

Fourth, the Guard's access to intelligence must be improved. Information and intelligence-sharing problems among agencies within the intelligence community have been well publicized. Currently, there is no national-level fusion of intelligence that state, federal, and military personnel can access to retrieve pertinent intelligence about their area of responsibility in the homeland. To contribute meaningfully to the prevention of terrorist attacks, Guard leadership must have access to intelligence from various federal agencies to alert their people and place them in appropriate locales where they can provide security and possibly prevent terrorist attacks. The National Guard generally has adequately trained intelligence personnel, but since September 11, Guard leaders have complained increasingly about not receiving the intelligence they need to assess the vulnerability of individual states to terrorist attacks.

This is not to suggest that all Guard personnel be given access to all intelligence information, but rather to argue that the leadership within the Guard, including adjutants general and unit commanders, be granted clearance and access to information that intelligence and law enforcement agencies deem necessary to maintain security. The Guard in turn must put in place safeguards to prevent the dissemination of classified material.

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23 Research presented in this paper as well as a RAND study conducted in 1995 indicate a common set of shortfalls. See appendix A

24 Bremer and Meese, p. 77.

25 Lowenberg and Monroe interviews.
Fifth, there must be compatible command and control equipment and procedures among agencies and among each of the Guard commands, as well as adequate facilities to house them. This includes rapid communications between state, federal, and military emergency response agencies; adequate operations centers; CRTs that are trained and ready; and coordinated and agreed on terminology for describing levels of threats and warnings for use with the population. Existing command and control centers in all fifty states are inadequate. In addition, states that do not have a National Guard division headquarters often lack the command and control facilities, equipment, and personnel that the Guard would need to respond to a terrorist event. Those with facilities still do not have sufficient and rigorous enough training exercises to practice statewide command and control in an emergency.

Sixth, National Guard personnel should receive equal compensation for performing the same tasks as they assume a different status of activation. Compensation for Guard personnel may vary depending on the type of activation they are serving. There are anecdotes where some Guard personnel are activated as state active duty while other Guard personnel in the same state are activated via federal call-up, both performing the same mission such as airport security, but being paid differently. Seventh, assuming that there will be no reduction in commitments for U.S. forces overseas, National Guard end-strength needs to be increased to allow it to meet its myriad demands. End-strength in the Guard has eroded over the past decade concurrent with reductions in the other components of the armed forces. However, the demands being placed on personnel from units activated for extended periods (whether to stand guard at a site within U.S. borders or to participate in peacekeeping rotations in the Balkans and elsewhere) will likely begin to take a toll on employer support, and consequently on retention.

CONCLUSION

Given the vulnerability of the United States to terrorist attack, U.S. policymakers must continue to find ways to enhance domestic security. Shifting the focus of U.S. defenses toward this task is no small undertaking. The shift will require a frank acknowledgment of a revised world order as well as creative modifications in some quarters of the U.S military to accommodate it. The now constant threat of attack posed by a global network of determined if not sophisticated actors poses a set of challenges unique from those our nation and our military is accustomed to addressing. To address the terrorist threat, federal, state, and local governments must coordinate their efforts. The National Guard seems to be the appropriate component of the military to deal with homeland defense.

26 Gary Pappas. Comments at Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis Conference-Meeting the Homeland Security Challenge, Maritime and Other Critical Dimensions (March 26, 2002)
As the Guard settles into its homeland security role, however, some unresolved questions remain that must be addressed at the highest levels of policymaking. Key among these is whether the Guard should continue to support overseas active-duty troops or whether it should dedicate itself solely to homeland security. Additionally, policymakers must address the level of commitments that the overall U.S. military, including its Guard and reserve component, will be expected to meet in the future, and determine whether its current size and structure of all components are up to the task. Finally, policymakers need to determine how much the nation is willing to spend to meet these commitments, both at home and abroad. The future size and structure of the future National Guard will be determined by those discussions, and long-term changes in the shape of the organization will likely occur.

Meanwhile, in order for the Guard to best perform the homeland security mission, some focused improvements are needed quickly both within the Guard and externally within the broader national security apparatus that will enable the National Guard to successfully contribute to the defense of the American homeland while maintaining its ability to support other defense needs. Focused training on those disciplines required for homeland security determined at the national level; participation in intelligence sharing as appropriate with other defense and law enforcement agencies; proper communications, transportation, medical and other equipment; certification of Civil Support Teams throughout the nation and assurances of adequate compensation will go a long way toward enhancing the Guard's ability to contribute to the nation's homeland security.
Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness

John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University

The John F. Kennedy School of Government and the U.S. Department of Justice have created the Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness to focus on understanding and improving U.S. preparedness for and response to domestic terrorism. The Executive Session is a joint project of the Kennedy School’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs and Taubman Center for State and Local Government.

The Executive Session convenes a multi-disciplinary task force of leading practitioners from state and local agencies, senior officials from federal agencies, and academic specialists from Harvard University. The members bring to the Executive Session extensive policy expertise and operational experience in a wide range of fields - emergency management, law enforcement, national security, law, fire protection, the National Guard, public health, emergency medicine, and elected office - that play important roles in an effective domestic preparedness program. The project combines faculty research, analysis of current policy issues, field investigations, and case studies of past terrorist incidents and analogous emergency situations. The Executive Session will meet six times over its three-year term.

Through its research, publications, and the professional activities of its members, the Executive Session is a major resource for federal, state, and local government officials, congressional committees, and others interested in preparation for a coordinated response to acts of domestic terrorism.

For more information on the Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness, please contact:

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The Center’s Director is Graham Allison, former Dean of the Kennedy School. Stephen Nicoloro is Director of Finance and Operations.

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*The Saguaro Seminar for Civic Engagement in America* is dedicated to building new civil institutions and restoring our stock of civic capital.

*The Program on Strategic Computing and Telecommunications in the Public Sector* carries out research and organizes conferences on how information technology can be applied to government problems -- not merely to enhance efficiency in routine tasks but to produce more basic organizational changes and improve the nature and quality of services to citizens.

*The Executive Session on Domestic Preparedness* brings together senior government officials and academic experts to examine how federal, state, and local agencies can best prepare for terrorist attacks within U.S. borders.

*The Program on Labor-Management Relations* links union leaders, senior managers and faculty specialists in identifying promising new approaches to labor management.

*The Internet and Conservation Project*, an initiative of the Taubman Center with additional support from the Kennedy School's Environment and Natural Resources Program, is a research and education initiative. The Project focuses on the constructive and disruptive impacts of new networks on the landscape and biodiversity, as well as on the conservation community.


2002  Peterson, Paul.  “While America Slept.”


2001  Gomez-Ibanez, Jose A.  “Deregulating Infrastructure: Breaking Up Is Hard to Do.”


2001  Kayyem, Juliette N.  “U.S. Preparations for Biological Terrorism: Legal Limitations and the Need for Planning.”

2001  Koblentz, Gregory D.  “Overview of Federal Programs to Enhance State and Local Preparedness for Terrorism with Weapons of Mass Destruction.”


2001 Pate, Jason and Gavin Cameron. “Covert Biological Weapons Attacks Against Agricultural Targets: Assessing the Impact Against U.S. Agriculture.”

2001 Peterson, Paul, David Campbell and Martin West. “An Evaluation of the Basic Fund Scholarship Program in the San Francisco Bay Area, California.”