

Changing Homeland Security: What Should Homeland Security Leaders Be Talking About?

Christopher Bellavita

Homeland security has spiraled into Stage Five of the Issue Attention Cycle.¹ Stage Five – the post-problem stage – means homeland security again operates principally behind the public apron. Stakeholders sedulously sift through the grist of homeland security’s congressional, industrial, academic, and bureaucratic complex. The professionals who populate that complex spend their days calibrating the strategies, programs, and institutions disjunctively formed in the earlier stages of the Cycle.

Except for an occasional fifteen minutes of public attention to dead terrorists, disrupted plots, and grant cuts, homeland security is not an issue high on the public’s agenda.² It could leap back on top in an instant.³ But for now most conversations about homeland security take place within a comparatively small community.

The issues are largely the same ones talked about for the last five years: funding, threats, hazards, borders, interoperability, intelligence, response, transportation, equipment, and – recently – pandemics.⁴ Unarguable progress has been made in all these domains. We clearly are better prepared – for some things – than we were in the autumn of 2001. Equally as certain, there are miles to go before most of the nation’s jurisdictions get a “Sufficient” rating in future national preparedness assessments.⁵

Stage Five in the Issue Attention Cycle means there is little political will to substantially alter the hodgepodge federalism that characterizes U.S. homeland security. The system we have is the one we have to work with, at least until something significant happens: another attack, a catastrophic natural disaster, a national public health emergency, or a new political administration.⁶

Until the system is shocked, much homeland security work will be incremental. It will continue to focus on the mundane but institutionally important work of answering “how prepared are we, how prepared do we need to be, and how do we prioritize efforts to close the gap?”⁷ The operational agenda will funnel attention toward measuring outputs and outcomes, and stutter fitfully around peripatetic priorities, like “creating a culture of preparedness” or modernizing “our planning processes, products, tools, and the training, education, and development of homeland security planners who are expected to use them.”⁸

If the country is never attacked again, if there are no more national traumas, then incrementalism is a cautious, stable and appropriate way to continue to improve homeland security. But if something calamitous does happen, incrementalism does not stand a chance.

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Ammunition and Weapons

Management attends to the realism of what is. Leadership looks toward what could be, what should be. What should the future be like in homeland security? And how can we get there?

Future-thinking homeland security leaders are like ammunition, particularly during Stage Five. They are seeking weapons – looking for opportunities to be used. Elected and other political officials are the weapons, especially primed to do battle during times of national crisis, when the Attention Cycle coils around to “alarmed discovery.”

Immediately after the next national trauma, elected officials will be looking for answers, for ideas about what to do to respond to the “discovery” that we remain exposed to a cluster of vulnerabilities already familiar to homeland security specialists. Elementary schools – critical infrastructure to the parents of every student – are unprotected targets. Chemical plants – patiently waiting to be weaponized – sit in the midst of high-density populations. The medical care system has about ten percent of the ventilators needed during a pandemic. Foot and Mouth disease, caused by a virus that can easily be brought into the country, can infect livestock in an entire region and significantly affect food related businesses, employment, and economies. The list of how vulnerable the nation is to harm is practically endless.⁹

The next significant national event will create an environment that supports, if not demands, substantial change. What should those changes be? More of the same, but with added discipline and control? A rededication to the principles of authentic federalism? A re-imagining of our core civil liberties? Something completely different?

What will homeland security leaders recommend after the next tragedy? Less dramatically, what ideas will they champion when city, state, or national political administrations change?

The questions should be discussed now, before answers are needed, before emotion drowns deliberation.

Responses to these open-ended questions will emerge from conversations among people who care about homeland security when it is not on top of the nation’s policy agenda. The discussions will be based on a mix of research, experience, opinion, ideology, and bias. Participants in the conversation will be political officials, interest group representatives, public administrators, academics, professional commentators, the occasional unattached citizen, and others who form the amoebic body of homeland security leaders. These are people who could be called Stage Five leaders.

You Might Be A Homeland Security Leader If . . .

Anyone who has read this far can probably name at least half a dozen people they look to for thoughtful homeland security ideas and perspectives. You can find familiar names on books and articles, in the appendices of Department of

Homeland Security (DHS) and think tank reports, and at congressional hearings.¹⁰ Stage Five leaders routinely appear at homeland security conferences, on workshop panels, and in subject matter expert groups. Recently some of them have been featured in media tales about former government officials who moved to private industry.¹¹

The leaders come from many arenas. Their ideas can help shape the future of homeland security. What should they be talking about?

“What is past is prologue” is inscribed on a statue outside of the National Archives, home of the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and other foundational America charters.¹² The phrase implies those who are interested in



the future have an obligation to know something about the past.

Homeland security is old enough to have a past. Part of that past is encapsulated in the strategies, policies, programs, and processes that shape the work of the homeland security professional. How much of this past do you know?

Try your hand at answering the following questions. Suggestively, they outline what could be called basic homeland security literacy – at least in the cognitive domain.

1. What is the official definition of Homeland Security? Absent an official definition, what is a defensible definition? How does that compare with the official definition?
2. Identify the basic elements of the nation’s homeland security policy.
3. Describe the objectives of the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*. If you have a state or local perspective, also identify the objectives of your jurisdiction’s homeland security strategy. Extra points if you can highlight the prevention elements in any of the strategies.
4. How many of the eight principles that shaped the *National Strategy* can you name?
5. How many homeland security presidential directives have been issued? Extra leadership points given for each one you can describe (and saying “HSPD 1, HSPD 2, ...” doesn’t count).

6. What is the National Preparedness Goal? What is the “vision” for the national preparedness goal? What is the difference between the two? How much of either can you recite?
7. Identify the seven priorities for national preparedness. Add extra points for being able to separate them into “overarching priorities” and “priorities to build specific capabilities.” Double your point score for this question if you can repeat the rumor about an eighth priority, supposedly added after Katrina.
8. What are the National Planning Scenarios? How are they intended to help preparedness? On what basis have they been criticized? Without looking, how many can you describe?
9. What is the difference between the TCL and the UTL? How many items are in each group (plus or minus ten percent)? Where do they fit within the “culture of preparedness?”
10. Explain the difference between, and relationships among, NIMS, ICS, NRP, ESF, unity of command, and unified command. Subtract points from your final score if you have to look up the acronyms.
11. Define “risk.” How is risk determined? How do you distinguish risk from threat and vulnerability? How many definitions of risk can you cite? You get one extra point for each definition, up to a maximum of 22.
12. Provide convincing distinctions among the terms prevention, protection, readiness, and preparedness. Three extra points for identifying the national policy document that defines prevention as activities undertaken “during the early stages of an incident.”
13. Draw your jurisdiction’s homeland security organizational or network structure. Which agency or people are the critical nodes in that system, and why? Extra points if the structure extends beyond your jurisdiction’s political boundaries.
14. Explain the process used to decide the 2006 DHS grant awards. Identify how much it costs your jurisdiction – direct and indirect costs – for each dollar of homeland security funding it receives.
15. Describe how you have, or plan to, or should, measure the impact of homeland security programs and spending in your jurisdiction.
16. Have you seen and understood your jurisdiction’s most recent threat assessment? If no, why not? If yes, what did you do with the information? Who do you tell what your requirements are for intelligence?

17. Have you initiated or responded to a DHS data call? Have you seen or used the results of that call? How?

18. Can you identify the most significant critical infrastructure in your jurisdiction? To whom is it significant? What proportion of your critical infrastructure is outside your ability to control or influence?

19. Describe your jurisdiction's crisis communication strategy. Additional points awarded for identifying the core message that will be communicated for specific catastrophic incidents.

20. How important is homeland security to the public officials and citizens in your jurisdiction? How do you know? Additional points if homeland security is important enough to you to have at least one emergency preparedness kit and a family crisis plan.

Extra Credit – Multiple choice (select all that apply).

You don't know the answer to some or all of the above questions, but you:

- a) Know where to find the answers;
- b) Know someone who can tell you the answers if and when you ever need them;
- c) Know better questions to ask; or
- d) Know more effective ways to figure out who the Stage Five homeland security leaders are.

What Should Stage Five Leaders Be Talking About?

How did you do? In my experience, very few homeland security leaders are able to correctly answer more than half of those somewhat pedantic questions. (In the past year, I have found only one person who can say what the vision is for the National Preparedness Goal.)

The questions have superficial face validity about one's level of homeland security literacy. However, one could argue (perhaps convincingly) that knowing details is not what leadership ought to be about. Leadership should be about big-picture issues; the forest rather than the trees; the 30,000-foot view of homeland security – pick your own metaphor. Details – although important – are for the people who manage what leaders create.¹³

Three Big Homeland Security Pictures

There are at least three big-picture perspectives that can frame conversations about the future of homeland security: strict constructionism, middle-of-the-road moderation, and radical reconstructionism.¹⁴

The traditional view – if one can use the word “traditional” with anything related to homeland security – is that homeland security initially was about preventing and responding to terrorism.¹⁵ The post-Katrina and the pre-pandemic political environment has expanded the scope of what constitutes homeland security. Should that expansion be resisted, embraced, ignored?

Strict constructionists embrace the traditional perspective. They maintain homeland security is about terrorism, pure and simple, just as it says in the *National Strategy*. Other agencies deal with other policy issues. Homeland Security can collaborate with them. Let FEMA, state, and local emergency management agencies have natural disasters. Public health can take the lead for pandemics. The terrorism portfolio belongs unambiguously to homeland security.

Middle-of-the-road moderates are in a second group. They agree homeland security is about terrorism. But they say it should and could be about more than that. Concentrating too much on terrorism reduces overall readiness. They offer the Katrina response as evidence.

“9/11 was a distraction for us,” said one western state emergency management official. “Our threats are wildfires and tornados. Since homeland security showed up, we’ve gotten away from planning, training and doing exercises about our actual threats. Now people are too busy writing homeland security grants and reports to work on our real issues. If anything, we’ve fallen behind.”¹⁶

“When are we going to be finished with this preparedness business so we can get back to our regular work?” asked an eastern state administrator.¹⁷

Middle-of-the-road moderates draw attention to the dual-use value of emergency preparedness structures and processes.

One state emergency management leader said, in response to criticisms that terrorism displaces effort, “What we do to get prepared for an all hazards response can help us respond to other threats, like terrorism and pandemics.”¹⁸

Radical reconstructionists advocate a third perspective. They assert that homeland security is about much more than stopping the next terrorist attack, responding to natural disasters, or getting ready for pandemics. The public safety disciplines struggling to find unifying themes can help the nation by paying more attention to the social and economic conditions that give rise to and support “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.”¹⁹

A lexicographer cautions not to “confuse *sécurité*, the feeling of having nothing to fear, and *sûreté*, the state of having nothing to fear.”²⁰ Radical reconstructionists focus on the state of having nothing (or at least less) to fear. They contrast the comparatively few Americans who have been killed by terrorists with the substantial number of people killed each year by traffic accidents, tobacco, seasonal flu, and other preventable events. They ask why homeland security is not more concerned with gang violence, illegal drugs, inadequate public health and medical care, second-rate educational systems, and

other domestic policy problems that ultimately have as much to do with homeland *sûrete* as countering terrorism.²¹

Many of our national homeland security and defense-related strategies have short-term and long-term elements.²² Short-term strategic work is directed at immediate problems. Long-term activities aim to address underlying causes of those problems.²³ Self-starter Islamic fundamentalist terrorists are a growing domestic threat.²⁴ Left and right wing domestic terrorists are still active.²⁵ Homeland security needs both short- and long-term perspectives. From a social perspective, its current operational point of view is too short, too narrow.

Radical reconstructionists argue the behemoth that is the Department of Homeland Security – and eventually its state and local functional counterparts – could usefully collaborate with other agencies to dampen the social conditions that contribute to domestic unrest, including terrorism. How many years without attacks have to pass before politicians stop providing forty billion dollar budgets? How many uninsured or underemployed or uneducated does it take to create a homeland security problem? As those who focus on social capital and the community development dimensions of homeland security suggest, “It’s tough to be a terrorist in a caring community.”²⁶

AN INVITATION

The conversational terrain shaping the future of homeland security sits somewhere between being able to recite the National Preparedness Goal and advocating that DHS evolve into a social services agency.

Regardless of how you did on the basic literacy test, or what big picture you may subscribe to, you are invited to participate in a thought experiment to answer the question: What should homeland security leaders be talking about?

Envision a strategic conversation among Stage Five leaders. The conversation is strategic in the sense that it concentrates on the large purposes and activities of homeland security as a policy area within the wider social, economic, and political environment.²⁷ It is oriented more toward the possibilities of the future than the pressing concerns of today. It is a conversation in the sense of civil communication among participants. It is characterized by cognitive and affective maturity, listening, risking, and learning. That is the premise for the experiment. Now, what are the participants in this conversation talking about?

If you are interested in sharing your thoughts, please send an email to cbellavi@nps.edu describing what you think Stage Five homeland security leaders ought to be talking about and why.

We will publish creative, provocative, and thoughtful responses in the next issue of *Homeland Security Affairs*.

¹ Christopher Bellavita, "The Issue Attention Cycle," *Homeland Security Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2005). "... Anthony Downs ... argued that certain issues follow a predictable five stage process: pre-problem, alarmed discovery, awareness of the costs of making significant progress, gradual decline of intense public interest, and the post problem stage. Before the [July 2005] London attacks, homeland security was on the cusp of Stage Five. After the attacks, it revisited Stage Two. Before too many months pass, it is likely to recall the difficulties of Stage Three, make a brief return trip through Stage Four, and – if there are no more attacks – settle into Stage Five."

² Polling data present a mixed picture on this point. When people are asked about the important problems facing the country, terrorism is rarely mentioned by more than ten percent (See *ABC News/Washington Post Poll*, June 22-25, 2006; *CBS News Poll*, May 16-17, 2006; *The Harris Poll*, May 5-8, 2006; *FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll*, May 2-3, 2006; and *NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll*, April 21-24, 2006.). Other polls, however, suggest protecting the nation against further terrorist attacks should be an important priority for Congress and the executive branch (see *CNN Poll*, May 16-17, 2006; *Gallup Poll*, March 13-16, 2006; and Pew Research Center survey, Jan. 4-8, 2006). If homeland security were important to Americans, one would expect to see that importance reflected in behavior. An October 2005 survey (one month after Katrina) found that "Americans are no more prepared for a natural disaster or terrorist attack [in 2005] than they were in 2003." There was "a significant decline in both those who indicate that they have a disaster plan and those who indicate that they have an emergency supply kit." (*Citizen Preparedness Review*, "A Quarterly Review of Citizen Preparedness Surveys," February 2006: <http://www.orcmacro.com/ORCMacroPreparednessSurvey.pdf>.). The "Terrorism Index," published by *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2006) shows a wide gap between the perceptions of foreign policy experts and the American public about terrorism-related issues. The Index data adds support to the hypothesis advanced in this article about core, or Stage Five, leaders.

³ Polls show people express more concern about terrorism and homeland security in the immediate wake of incidents like the Madrid or London bombings. See, for example, *CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll*, July 12, 2005. Jenkin, following Slovic, discusses this phenomenon as the "signal value" of an event. See Clinton M. Jenkin, "Risk Perception and Terrorism: Applying the Psychometric Paradigm," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (July 2006). (It will be interesting to see if the July 11, 2006 bombing in Mumbai has any signal value for a Euro-centric U.S. citizenry.) In addition, there is a perspective that says the Republican party fares better with the public than the Democratic party on terrorism issues (for an example, see the historical data provided by the *ABC News/Washington Post Poll*, June 22-25, 2006). If this perception is correct, one would expect to see terrorism and homeland security issues become more important as the 2006 congressional election season approaches. For a theoretical perspective on this issue, see Nick Pidgeon, ed., *The Social Amplification of Risk* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴ "National Survey of State Homeland Security Leaders," (Western Carolina University, Institute for the Economy and the Future, 2006); Center for Best Practices, "2006 State Homeland Security Directors Survey," (National Governors Association, 2006).

⁵ Department of Homeland Security, "Nationwide Plan Review: Phase 2 Report," (2006), 4.

⁶ The emphasis on working with what exists rather than creating new approaches was illustrated by George Foresman, DHS Undersecretary for Preparedness, during a January, 24, 2006 conference presentation. Foresman said, "We have been overly focused on the products we produce. We have missed the process. We need progress, not perfection."

⁷ "Department Of Homeland Security Releases Interim National Preparedness Goal," April 1, 2005, <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=4420>; accessed June 21, 2006.

⁸ United States Government, "The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned," (February, 2006), 79 ff; Department of Homeland Security, "Nationwide Plan Review: Phase 2 Report," xii.

⁹ Katherine Hobson, "Are We Ready?" *U.S. News and World Report*, May 1 2006; John Cline, "State and Local Policy Considerations for Implementing the National Response Plan" (Naval Postgraduate School, 2005 March); Richard Clarke, et al. *The Forgotten Homeland* (Century Foundation, 2006); Center for Best Practices, "National Survey of State Homeland Security Leaders," *2006 State Homeland Security Directors Survey*; Michael E. O'Hanlon, et al., *Protecting the Homeland* (Brookings Institution Press, 2006). On unconventional weapons of mass destruction see Boyd Bender, "Sept. 11 – One Year Later I: Weapons of Mass Destruction Are Top Threat," *Global Security News*, 2002 [cited June 21 2006], available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2002/020909-wmd.htm>. For information about Bruce Schneier's "Big Book of Terrorist Plots" (based on an internet contest to identify "unlikely, yet still plausible, terrorist attack scenarios"), see "The Scariest Terror Threat of All," *Wired News*, June 15, 2006, available at http://www.wired.com/news/columns/0,71152-o.html?tw=wn_story_page_prev2.

¹⁰ See, for examples, O'Hanlon, *Protecting the Homeland*; Clarke, *The Forgotten Homeland*; and Department of Homeland Security, "Nationwide Plan Review: Phase 2 Report," Appendix E. See also articles and links at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/index.cfm>, http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Homeland_security, and <http://www.comw.org/tct/homeland.html#1>.

¹¹ Eric Lipton, "Former Antiterror Officials Find Industry Pays Better," *New York Times*, June 18 2006.

¹² The phrase is from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Act II, Scene 1). The statue, called "The Future," is by Robert Aitken. Interestingly, or perhaps disturbingly, "The Future" rests outside an entrance to the National Archives that is no longer used. The picture is from <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/pa14.htm>.

¹³ On the other hand, maybe leaders should know details. Philip Evans and Bob Wolf suggest that in what they call "vibrant human networks...the credibility and...authority of leaders derives from their proficiency as practitioners. The content of leaders'...communication is less about work than it is work." [Emphasis in the original.] From "Collaboration Rules," *Harvard Business Review* (July-August 2005), 101.

¹⁴ These three perspectives are presented in the Weberian, "ideal type" sense. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 59. See also Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, second edition (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977), 223-224. "An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct." One reviewer of this article suggests there may be at least two more perspectives. One view suggests "preparing for terrorism prepares everyone for everything else, rather than vice-versa. Seems like a little thing unless you are in charge of funding and resources. In that case the "flavor" of execution can be vastly different." Another perspective sees homeland security as the "catch-all for all we do in the realms of public safety, public health and public security. It's not terrorism vs. natural event focus; it is EVERYTHING. I think this is where some in current DHS think they are."

¹⁵ Department of Homeland Security, *National Strategy for Homeland Security* (2002).

¹⁶ Comment from a state emergency management audience member at a May 2006 homeland security conference.

¹⁷ Reported by a state preparedness officer during a June 2006 pandemic flu conference

¹⁸ Comment by a National Emergency Management Association executive in an off-the-record meeting, May 2006. The middle-of-the-road moderate's perspective is also reflected in "The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned," (page 68): "We have thought of terrorism and natural disasters as competing priorities rather than two elements of a larger homeland security challenge."

¹⁹ Title 22 of the US Code, Section 2656f(d).

²⁰ Marguerite-Marie Dubois, *Larousse Modern Dictionary* (Paris: Librarie Larousse, 1960), 657. Cited in David Jablonsky, "The State of the National Security State," *Parameters* (Winter 2002-03), 4-20. While the comment was about semantics, there are functional implications for the work of homeland security. For an extended discussion on the affective elements of risk, see Jenkin, "Risk Perception and Terrorism."

²¹ DHS elements are already involved in counter-gang and counter-narcotic interventions, pornography, medical care and other activities not typically associated with terrorism. See the illustrative documents at http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/theme_home1.jsp.

²² For examples, see the *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, http://www.hsdl.org/homesecc/docs/whitehouse/counter_terrorism_strategy.pdf, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, <http://www.hsdl.org/homesecc/docs/whitehouse/nps08-031606-01.pdf>, and the *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, http://www.hsdl.org/homesecc/docs/whitehouse/nat_strat_hls.pdf.

²³ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002), Chapter 11.

²⁴ Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack: The Failure of the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting It Right* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 27-31. Scott Shane et al. "F.B.I. Killed Plot in Talking Stage, A Top Aide Says," *New York Times*, June 24, 2006, <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F20F1EFB3D540C778EDDAFo894DE404482>. Ian Austen and David Johnston, "17 Held In Plot To Bomb Sites Across Ontario," *New York Times*, June 4, 2006, <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=FA0710F73C550C778CDDAFo894DE404482>.

²⁵ For a review, see Timothy G. Baysinger, "Right-Wing Group Characteristics and Ideology," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (July 2006) <http://www.hsaj.org>.

²⁶ Phil Palin, *Preparing for Catastrophe: Prevention and the Role of Law Enforcement* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006). For the social capital argument, see Russell R. Dynes, "Social Capital: Dealing with Community Emergencies," *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (July 2006). For a discussion about other foci for homeland security, see Marc H. Morial, "Homeland Security Overshadow Efforts to Keep Rates Down," *Louisiana Weekly*, July 10, 2006 (available online at <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/weekly/news/articlegate.pl?20060710v>). For an argument that the nation should expand its counter-terrorism tools, see Don Reed, "On Killing Al-Zarqawi - Does United States Policy Know Its Tools in the War on Terror?" *Homeland Security Affairs* 2, no. 2 (July 2006): "Effective application of the information tool is prescribed within the National Strategy for Homeland Security, but it does not mention the use of the political, economic, or social tools for domestic counterterrorism."

²⁷ Peter Vaill, *Managing as a Performing Art* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989), 162.