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The Washington Post

washingtonpost.com

The Washington Post

July 16, 2002 Tuesday
Final Edition

President To Detail Security Strategy; Plan Seeks Public, Private Teamwork On Array of Threats

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SECTION: A SECTION; Pg. A01

LENGTH: 1270 words

The nation's first homeland security strategy, to be unveiled by President Bush today, calls for dramatic action by government and private industry to prevent a "new wave of terrorism" in the United States, an open society that "presents an almost infinite array of potential targets."

Nine months in the making, President Bush's grimly worded plan urges that security be hardened against "catastrophic threats," such as nuclear, radiological, biological and chemical weapons, as well as cyber-attacks and more conventional weapons.

"Unless we act to prevent it, a new wave of terrorism, potentially involving the world's most destructive weapons, looms in America's future," according to the 88-page blueprint distributed to news organizations yesterday. Preventing such attacks "is a challenge as formidable as any ever faced by our nation," the document states.

The administration has been criticized for proposing a Department of Homeland Security before it put forth a new security strategy. Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge told Congress yesterday that the strategy is a "comprehensive statement of what needs to be done." The creation of a new department is the cornerstone of the overall plan, and Ridge testified that it is critical to sharpening the federal government's response to terrorism.

Bush will release the report on the third day of hearings by a select committee of House members, who are debating the merits of the proposed department. A host of House committees last week suggested changes to the president's plan to merge all or parts of 22 agencies into the new department.

The report identifies three key objectives: preventing terrorist attacks within the United States; reducing the nation's vulnerability to terrorism and minimizing the damage while speeding the recovery from attacks that do occur. Much of the work would be coordinated by the new department that Bush wants Congress to create.

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In coping with such threats, the strategy relies heavily on science and technology. The White House is calling for research on new vaccines and antidotes, the creation of standardized biometric travel documents for foreign visitors and the development of screening tools to predict human behavior, such as "hostile intent."

The strategy also calls for the federal government to greatly expand the use of sensors to detect nuclear and radiological devices at borders, ports and major highways. The government would fund research to improve the capabilities of sensors designed to detect biological and chemical weapons.

Under the strategy, governments and businesses would constantly probe for weaknesses. Within the federal government, the White House wants to deploy trouble-shooting "red teams" of federal workers who would play the part of terrorists to expose the nation's most glaring vulnerabilities, a tactic now used by the nuclear power industry.

"One fact dominates all homeland security threat assessments: terrorists are strategic actors," the report states. "They choose their targets deliberately based on the weaknesses they observe in our defenses and our preparedness.

"We must defend ourselves against a wide range of means and methods of attack. Our enemies are working to obtain chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons for the purpose of wreaking unprecedented damage on America."

Dealing with terrorism will require substantial costs for years to come, the strategy notes. Governments and businesses are now spending more than \$ 100 billion a year on homeland security, with more than half the money coming from the private sector, it said.

Paul C. Light, vice president and director of governmental studies for the Brookings Institution, which on Sunday urged Congress to pare back Bush's plan for a homeland security agency, said the new strategy included "much to admire," such as details about how the pieces of the nation's security network will fit together.

But he also criticized the plan for not paying enough attention to training workers to handle their complex and expanding duties.

White House officials said the release of a national strategy will put the reorganization plan in a broader perspective. The new, 170,000-person department would take the lead in border and transportation security, protecting the nation's infrastructure and coordinating the federal response to terrorist strikes. It also would be responsible for analyzing intelligence from the FBI, CIA and other agencies and issuing terrorism alerts to states, cities, industries and the general public.

The strategy incorporates many initiatives already underway, such as improving the FBI's counterterrorism capabilities; bolstering intelligence collection and analysis; strengthening protections against cyber-attacks and overhauling computer systems so information can more easily be shared throughout government and industry.

But it also looks ahead, saying that the White House will seek significant new money for the FBI and Coast Guard and focus more heavily on issues such as port security. More than 16 million shipping containers enter the United States each year, and better technology would help ensure that they are carrying no weapons, the report said.

In the legislative arena, the strategy calls for making exceptions to the Freedom of Information Act to prevent the release of sensitive threat assessments provided by the private sector. State governments are urged to come up with minimum standards for the issuance of driver's licenses and to update antiquated laws concerning quarantines.

The White House is also seeking federal legislation to expand the list of crimes covered by extradition laws, so that more suspects arrested overseas could be brought to the United States for trial.

The strategy organizes the anti-terror campaign into what it calls six "critical mission areas" -- intelligence and

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warning; border and transportation security; domestic counterterrorism; protecting critical infrastructure and key assets; defending against catastrophic threats and emergency preparedness and response.

Ridge, the former Pennsylvania governor who was named homeland security director in October, has been working on the plan since he took the post. Yesterday he spent nearly two hours fielding questions from the House Select Committee on Homeland Security, the nine-member panel that has promised to assemble the House's version of the reorganization bill by the end of this week.

The Senate Governmental Affairs Committee plans to craft the Senate version next week. House and Senate leaders are still hoping to pass a bill by the one-year anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Many of the questions for Ridge centered on the logistics of the Homeland Security Department absorbing large agencies such as the Coast Guard, with more than 43,000 employees and a wide range of responsibilities. Rep. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) said he feared that agencies no longer would have the money to complete non-terror duties, but Ridge maintained that would not be a problem.

Ridge spent much of his time urging the select panel to reject some of the recommendations made by other House committees last week, such as taking the Coast Guard and Federal Emergency Management Agency out of the proposed new department.

A senior administration official said yesterday that organizations such as Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terror network have strategies, too. "If there is any constant about terrorist strategies, it is that they seek surprise and they target our weaknesses," he said. "As we get strong in an area, they shift to another."

LOAD-DATE: July 16, 2002

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

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