



SURE PATROL. Officers of the U.S. Coast Guard and New York Police Department monitor traffic near the Statue of Liberty.

ALERT—AND ANXIOUS

There are still lots of holes in the U.S. security blanket

BY CHITRA RAGAVAN
AND DOUGLAS PASTERNAK

Long before the air raid sirens went off in Baghdad last week, U.S. officials were sounding alarm bells in Washington—about possible retaliatory strikes by Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein’s agents, assorted other terrorist groups, and various wannabe suicide bombers. The FBI issued a grim advisory to police, seeking a 27-year-old Saudi Arabian named Adnan el Shukrijumah, saying he may have lived in Florida, trained at a flight school around the same time as some of the 9/11 hijackers, and could be planning attacks. Even be-

fore that, the tension ratcheted up when the homeland security secretary, Tom Ridge, raised the color-coded terror alert level a notch to orange, or “high.”

In an effort to shut down illegal money schemes tied to terrorists, federal agents last week staged raids in five states, arresting nine people connected to smug-

gling money abroad and selling fake passports to people in Lebanon, Yemen, Pakistan, and other countries. Across the country, police departments canceled vacations, ordered plainclothes detectives to wear uniforms, posted National Guard units at sensitive sites, and beefed up security at bridges, power plants, tunnels, and monuments. Near Phoenix, the National Guard was deployed at the Palo Verde nuclear power plant after intelligence reports indicated al Qaeda might target it. At one U.S. border checkpoint, radiation alerts went off. “They go off all the time,” says one federal law enforcement official, “but we have to check them out.” Says another: “There are so many threats that we’re running down right

WANTED. The FBI issued an advisory on Adnan el Shukrijumah, saying he may be a threat to national security.



FBI / AP

now, everybody is absolutely swamped.”

Ridge announced a sweeping list of federal antiterror measures, called “Operation Liberty Shield.” It includes beefed-up Coast Guard patrols; enhanced cargo, petroleum, nuclear, and chemical plant security; more agents at the borders; and increased food safety. The FBI and immigration agents began jailing asylum seekers from 33 countries, including Iraq, until they are deemed legit. The agencies are also questioning nearly 11,000 Iraqi-born U.S. residents. “Let me close by saying, your federal government is ready,” said Ridge. “And because of this very comprehensive and coordinated effort, America is ready.”

Maybe. Much has been done to prevent another major attack. But John Cohen, a former counterterrorism agent and

lice, firefighters, and emergency-response workers to coordinate top the list of challenges. Then there’s the cash crunch. Mayors and governors have been fuming about the mere \$3.5 billion granted to first responders in Ridge’s current budget. “There is a high degree of discontent,” says Dennis Burke, chief of staff to Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, a Democrat, “that the money isn’t forthcoming.”

“Soldiers.” Such complaints are only likely to increase. Mike Rock, a lobbyist for the American Hospital Association, predicts that it will take the nation’s 5,000 hospitals \$11 billion to prepare for the first 48 hours after a biological or chemical attack. “Now they are asking us to do much, much more, and they are giving us much, much less,” says Rock, re-

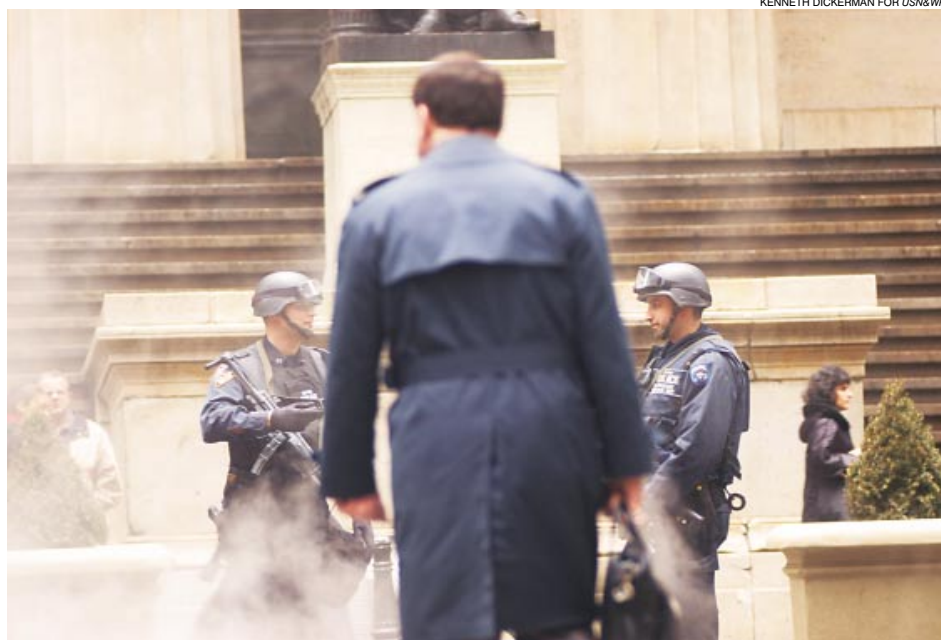
than others. Many of those that are attribute the difference to leadership. “Our mayor believes,” says Detroit Police Chief Jerry Oliver Sr., “that homeland defense is really hometown defense.” When the first shots were fired Wednesday over Baghdad, Oliver put “field force” teams on round-the-clock patrols. At the Ambassador Bridge, where more than 15,000 trucks cross from Canada each day, security checks backed up big rigs for hours, all the way into the streets of Windsor, Ontario.

Then there’s Los Angeles. Only last Tuesday, the city agreed to provide first responders with basic protective gear. “It was a \$5 million hit on the city treasury,” City Councilman Jack Weiss says, “and the council had to be dragged kicking and screaming.”

In New York, residents are under few illusions that they are safe. Securing the Big Apple is so daunting that city officials have given mythic names to their new security apparatus, the \$5 million-a-week “Operation Atlas.” Among other things, the plan involves deploying “Hercules teams,” consisting of heavily armed, body-armored SWAT team officers. But the training to cope with an attack involving chemical and biological weapons, says Walter Liddy, a trustee for the New York City Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association, is abysmal. “Our emergency services, yeah, we’re the most prepared in the world,” says Liddy. “But with the street cops, it’s, ‘Do your job first, answer your radio calls, fill out your complaint reports . . . and, by the way, if there’s another terrorist attack, you better be ready for that, too.’”

One of the biggest challenges is persuading operators of nuclear power plants as well as water, chemical, and energy facilities to step up to the plate. New York Assemblyman Michael Gianaris says that after 9/11, police made eight security recommendations for a major Con Edison power plant; seven were ignored. “I actually had one of their representatives tell me,” says Gianaris, “that they don’t think they’re targets so they’re not really concerned with these measures.”

Responding to any attack involving a “dirty bomb,” an explosive device containing radioactive material, would pose unprecedented challenges. The physical harm done by such an attack might be negligible. But it would create widespread fear and panic. In the past year



KENNETH DICKERMAN FOR USN&WR

HERD ON THE STREET. A small army of NYPD officers patrols the city’s financial district.

homeland security consultant, says, “There’s a lot of window dressing going on.” A year and a half after the attacks on New York and Washington, Cohen points out, the Bush administration has yet to create a system for assessing threats to the nation’s infrastructure. In the absence of such a system, many state and local police don’t know where to allocate resources. “We can’t just do all, be all, for all,” says Richmond, Calif., Police Chief Joseph Samuels Jr., who heads the International Association of Chiefs of Police. “But that which we choose to do, we want to do it well.”

That’s not easy. Turf wars and the lack of a unified radio network allowing po-

lating to proposed cuts of more than \$100 billion in federal Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals.

Police chiefs, however, insist *they* must come first in any allocation of resources. “There’s a lot of people with their hands out who say they need the money,” says Col. J. Thomas Manger, the police chief in Fairfax County, Va. “But it’s the local police who will be the first responders, and that’s where the priority is.” Capt. John Dunne of the New York City Uniformed Fire Officers Association says *his* men need training and equipment, too. “We may not be federal troops,” Dunne says, “but we’re soldiers in this war.”

Some cities and states are doing better

dozens of radioactive sources, including medical isotopes and industrial tools, have been lost or stolen, including nine shipments of radioactive materials sent from the PerkinElmer Life Sciences office in Boston. In March alone, there were several known instances of these "orphaned" medical, pharmaceutical, or industrial gauge radioactive isotopes. None has been accounted for.

"Not pleased." Communication between the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Ridge's department has also been problematic. Before raising the terror alert level to orange last week, Ridge's office contacted the NRC for a list of vulnerable nuclear plants. When they didn't hear back, Ridge's people compiled their own list. By the time the NRC did reply, Ridge had urged 12 governors

to deploy National Guard units to protect sensitive nuclear sites. "The good news is that the lists were very similar," says Dave Lochbaum, a nuclear-safety engineer at the Union of Concerned Scientists. Lochbaum told *U.S. News* that Ridge's office E-mailed NRC official Michael Weber about the orange alert at 6:30 Monday evening. Weber had left for the day and found out about it on CNN. "The NRC," Lochbaum says, "was not pleased."

Some incidents having nothing to do with terrorism highlight the extraordinary difficulty of defending the nation. In Miami last week, a hijacked Cuban airliner approached U.S. airspace without permission and made no voice contact. Navy jets scrambled and escorted the plane to Key West, but not before

several very anxious minutes had passed. In perhaps the most bizarre incident, a distressed North Carolina tobacco farmer named Dwight Watson pulled his shiny green tractor into a pond near the Washington Monument last week and threatened to blow himself up. For two full days, hundreds of police officers and Secret Service and FBI agents were consumed in the effort to get Watson to surrender as rush-hour traffic backed up for miles and government buildings shut down. "We're going to war," said one Washington resident, "and we can't pull one man in a tractor out of a pond?" ●

With Betsy Streisand in Los Angeles, Stephen Sawicki in New York, Michael Betzold in Detroit, and David E. Kaplan in Washington

LAS VEGAS

Securing America's playground

LAS VEGAS—Last December, a month before taking office, Las Vegas Sheriff-elect Bill Young committed a faux pas at a conference of security officials: He gave an *honest* assessment of the terror risk. "Being America's playground," said Young, "we have to be a prime target for fundamentalists whose beliefs are radically different from ours." Young's remarks enraged the hospitality industry. "Everybody knows that Las Vegas is . . . a soft target," says a source at the city's Convention and Visitors Authority. "But you don't go saying it when you're about to become sheriff."

At least not in a metropolitan area that boasts 125,000 hotel rooms and attracts more than 30 million visitors a year. Young got the message. Since those impolitic remarks, he and other police, casino, and tourism officials have pub-



ROGER WILLIAMS—ZUMA

Suspected terrorists had a video image of the MGM Grand hotel.

licly expressed nothing but confidence in the safety of Sin City. Famous hotel-casinos such as New York-New York are "like fortresses," claims Lt. Gov. Lorraine Hunt, who oversees tourism promotion for Nevada. Indeed, when a Russian museum lent three famous Fabergé eggs last year to the Bellagio Museum of Fine Art, a Russian official said that "there is no place safer in America than the inside of a casino."

Warning. Perhaps. But there have been a couple of disturbing signals. Five of the 9/11 hijackers, includ-

ing Mohamed Atta, visited Las Vegas the previous June. And the MGM Grand hotel was one image on a video seized from alleged terrorists last year, along with Disneyland.

So security has been ramping up here for a while. Alan Feldman, spokesman for MGM Mirage Inc., says that each of his firm's six local properties has about 200 private security officers and that their presence has been more obvious lately to reassure visitors. Since 9/11, all deliveries must go to the delivery docks. "It used to be

that a florist truck could park by the front entrance . . . but not anymore," he says. The hotel security directors association has gotten a lot more serious. Out at Hoover Dam, "we've always had a law enforcement presence," says Bob Walsh, spokesman for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, "but now it's more prominent." With the terrorism alert on orange, each vehicle is being stopped as it crosses the dam and many trunks are being searched.

For Hunt, one of her first priorities as war began last week was to lock in committed business. Attendees expected at upcoming conferences are likely to receive calls and E-mails from tour operators reassuring them that Vegas is open for business, Hunt says. That's just fine with tourists like Joan Jermaine, 44, of Brooklyn; she likes her odds better here than at home. "We're extending our trip for a few days," says Jermaine. "I was in New York on September 11, and I'd rather be anywhere else if something like that happens again. I feel safe here, that's for sure." —*Steve Friess*