



Colonel Bart Johnson of the highly respected New York State Police. Upstate New York Regional Intelligence Center (UNYRIC).

allocation dilemma requires analysis of the benefits that personnel will produce in a fusion center versus the cost of personnel not performing traditional police activity. This analysis must ultimately be transformed

into a concept of operations, which until now has been neglected, to address best practices and operational gaps that need to be bridged before significant new resources are invested.

Chief Stephens underscored the concerns of sustaining fusion centers. Sustainability requires long-term funding strategies guaranteeing maintenance and upgradeability of hardware, methods of adequate staffing and personnel replacement, and ultimately preparation for states to fully fund their operations if Federal sources are inadequate. Plans to address these issues in the long term have not been adequately addressed. However, requirements for each of these factors must be investigated and understood to ensure that they are maintained and fusion centers have the potential to continue operations in the long run.

How these actions are carried out and the benefits for Federal and State and Local contributors are not entirely clear.

—Colonel Bart Johnson

Colonel Johnson also highlighted that fusion centers can benefit from investigating clearer methods of developing their necessary capabilities, particularly in the area of training. In the absence of universal guidelines for operation, an independent analyst should use reconstruction analysis to identify best practices and operational gaps of the centers currently operating. The results of this analysis should be developed into a training program to prepare analysts to observe, collect field and operations data, and to use that data to inform relevant agencies. This common understanding and definition of training and operational content will help to integrate the centers into a national system of terrorism coordination.

The Future of Fusion Centers

As Mr. Riegle related, the DHS program objective is to create partnerships with all State and Local fusion centers and major cities to improve information flow between DHS and the centers. To this end, an ongoing DHS support effort aims to provide people and tools to the fusion centers to create a web of interconnected nodes across the country, thereby creating a National Fusion Center Network. Governmental leaders must also continue to confront the unresolved questions pertaining to capabilities and sustainability to ensure that the national network will develop into a vital national security resource that maximizes the safety of Americans.

Footnotes

- ¹ Harris, Shane, Expansion of local intelligence-sharing centers sparks controversy National Journal Feb 13, 2007
- ² DHS, DOJ. Fusion Center Guidelines. p. 17
- ³ DHS, DOJ. Fusion Center Guidelines. p.18
- ⁴ Masse, Todd. Fusion Centers: "Issues and Options for Congress." CRS Report July 6, 2007 p.10

Fusion Centers: Issues and Challenges

James Stewart • Steve Rickman • Jonathan Dake

Conference Date: April 13, 2007

Introduction

Law enforcement agencies are constantly struggling to obtain situation-critical information in a timely manner to achieve their mission of ensuring public safety. In the past half decade, this priority has motivated Federal agencies to try to cooperate with State and Local agencies by using fusion centers to transmit intelligence across jurisdictional lines. Ideally, the fusion center would seamlessly transmit intelligence dealing with crime, terrorism, and other hazards to the appropriate officials in both Federal and State and Local agencies. However, as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Chief Darrel W. Stephens explained, there are many unanswered questions as to how fusion centers will actually carry out this objective. The level of cooperation required between Federal, State and Local, and private entities is unprecedented. If fusion centers are to become the vital national security resource that they are envisioned to be, these questions must be addressed.

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On April 13, 2007, CNA sponsored a symposium featuring leaders from both State and Local law enforcement agencies and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to discuss the role of fusion centers in ensuring public safety. Most importantly, symposium speakers addressed many of the questions that remain unanswered in the rapid proliferation of fusion centers after the World Trade Center and Pentagon

attacks. Based on their experience, these experts counted the definition of capabilities, the development of capabilities, and sustainability amongst the most challenging questions facing fusion centers. Symposium speakers also contemplated solutions to the ambiguities that impede effective operation of the centers.



Chief Darrel Stephens of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department discusses the challenges of standing up a regional fusion center.

Perhaps the most important observation of the symposium contributors is that universal guidelines on the role, composition, funding, and jurisdiction of centers do not exist. In other words, there is a destination in mind for fusion centers, but there is no clear road map of how to get there, and there are no concrete characteristics that indicate that the destination has been reached. Colonel Bart Johnson of the New York State Police indicated that conceptually, the fusion center en-



Audience of Federal, State, and Local Law Enforcement Officials gather to participate in the CNA sponsored forum.

asures that existing information is transformed into “actionable” intelligence that can be used by law enforcement agencies to prevent, respond to, and manage the consequences of criminal activity, major incidents, and terrorist attacks. How these actions are actually carried out and the benefits for Federal and State and Local contributors are not entirely clear.

The Role and Function of Fusion Centers

Symposium speaker Robert Riegler of the DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis explained that the general goal of a fusion center is to compile, blend, analyze, and disseminate information that maximizes the ability of law enforcement agencies to detect, prevent, apprehend, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity. The cooperation of both Federal and Local agencies is essential because Federal agencies possess classified information of national importance, but they cannot match locals’ knowledge of their home turf.¹

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The DHS program objective is to create partnerships with all State and Local fusion centers.

—Mr. Robert Riegler

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Despite this attempted collaborative approach, much of the composition of fusion centers is made up of State and Local resources, and the Federal government can only influence, not mandate, the creation, organization, and processes of the centers. Universal standards or procedures mandating how a fusion center will operate do not exist. In fact, the actual operation of a fusion center is determined by its component agencies, the experience and capabilities of its personnel, and its unique priorities for public safety. As a result, the potential exists for great disparity in how various fusion centers carry out their goal of relaying critical information. As Chief Stephens indicated, a fusion center may be a large Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), such as the F.B.I.-New York JTTF, or it could be a regional center composed of analysts from two State or Local agencies.



Robert Riegler, Program Manager of the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, Department of Homeland Security.

Despite this variation, Riegler indicated that fusion centers generally appear to be evolving from a strong emphasis on counterterrorism to a focus on an all-hazards, all-crimes, or all-threat approach.

Additionally, law enforcement officials are seeking increased integration

of the private sector in the information shared by fusion centers. The role of the private sector is crucial in fusion centers because approximately 85 percent of the nation’s critical infrastructure is owned by the private sector and is vulnerable to crime or terrorism.² A fusion center focus group (FCFG) established by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and DHS emphasized the need to incorporate private sector subject-matter experts into these centers in order to help identify risks and manage threats pertaining to critical private-sector infrastructure.³

Requirements for Effective Operation

Symposium contributors also highlighted that such a collaborative effort requires creative planning and organization at multiple levels for operational effectiveness. Commissioner Kerry Sleeper of the Vermont Department of Public Safety outlined these requirements. Although striving for a common goal, each center must reflect the characteristics of its location and serve the specific needs of its customers. For instance, the demands for securing the critical infrastructure of major financial centers differ from the requirements of securing a major national port; thus, fusion centers must be



Commissioner Sleeper for Vermont Dept. of Public Safety and Vice Chair of the National Governor’s Association Homeland Security Council.

adaptable to their regional environments.

Commissioner Sleeper outlined requirements for the collection of information. Foremost, collection must be timely

so that law enforcement can maintain the highest level of situational awareness of significant events at all times. Secondly, the information must be linked seamlessly to Federal sources through efficient nodes and maintain compatibility throughout the system by using federally coordinated text.

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It is integral that fusion centers understand their customers.

—Commissioner Kerry Sleeper

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In addition to these technical requirements, he noted that collection of information depends on interpersonal relationships. The efficient transmission of classified or confidential information is subject to trust between individuals, and strong interpersonal relationships may lead to better response in dynamic situations.

Finally, Commissioner Sleeper highlighted the capabilities of analysis and dissemination of information necessary to ensure that the intelligence is actionable. To achieve these high standards, it is integral that fusion centers understand their customers. The centers must identify the most relevant intelligence that indicates the greatest threats to the critical infrastructure sectors

present. Additionally, the centers must be knowledgeable about the available law enforcement and emergency response capabilities that are capable of providing protective and investigative measures for identified threats to this infrastructure. This understanding of both infrastructure at risk and the available response capabilities helps ensure that the most relevant information will be selected and then disseminated to the necessary agencies.

Challenges Facing Fusion Center Operation

Colonel Bart Johnson emphasized that challenges have arisen as Federal and State and Local entities have attempted to cooperate at an unprecedented level. The Congressional Research Service has suggested that these challenges are due to the premature rise of State and regional fusion centers in the absence of a common understanding of the underlying discipline.⁴ The absence of a common understanding of the role of governmental agencies means that the definition of the capabilities of fusion centers is largely undefined. It is therefore unclear how effectively State and Local law enforcement can truly carry out an all-threats or all-hazards approach when these agencies are already straining to carry out their primary all-crime prevention mandate.

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—Colonel Bart Johnson

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For instance, every police officer taken off the street to work for a fusion center leaves neighborhoods unprotected, and perhaps a weaker prevention of all crimes. Any reallocation of resources must ensure that any sacrifices to State and Local agencies are offset by benefits from the fusion center. This resource