



A Report by the
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Reporting on Terrorism

A Newsroom Discussion Guide

a report by

david GUEDELUNAS

susan KRUTT

kelli LAMMIE

mary MOSER

mihaela POPESCU

claire WARDLE

kathleen HALL JAMIESON

with

mark HANNAH

charissa MORNINGSTAR

alicia SIMMONS

rina VAZRINI

design

kyle CASSIDY

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Post September 11th challenges

- ◆ What, if anything, restricts the press's right to know?
- ◆ How, if at all, should the press monitor its own coverage?
- ◆ When journalists are the target, are the rules different?
- ◆ Does live coverage pose particular challenges?



Questions

Does this topic warrant further discussion/investigation?

- ◆ Is the reporter knowledgeable enough about the nature, extent, likelihood, and probable impact of this threat to create a credible story?
- ◆ Could the release of information in this story threaten national security?
- ◆ Could the release of any information in this story endanger human life?
- ◆ Does the publication/broadcast of this material jeopardize an ongoing U.S. military operation? If so, do the benefits of disclosure outweigh the risks?

How much detail is too much?

- ◆ Is the detail necessary to the story?
- ◆ How does one determine how much detail the public needs?
- ◆ Does this level of detail help readers/viewers?

Is detail in question necessary for public understanding?

- ◆ Will the information unnecessarily alarm readers/viewers?
- ◆ Should readers/viewers be informed when information is withheld?
- ◆ How, if at all, should press coverage change at a time in which potential terrorists may be part of the viewing/reading public?
- ◆ Can reporters/editors/producers know what terrorists already know? Should reporters try to determine how likely it is that the story contains information useful to terrorists?
- ◆ Even if terrorists may already know information, should the press provide easy access to details by printing/broadcasting?
- ◆ If information is publicly available in books or on the web, does that fact affect the decision about whether or not to broadcast/publish?

When is the use of hypotheticals responsible?

- ◆ How do you raise the level of public awareness of a threat without causing panic?
- ◆ Should hypotheticals be used to inform the public about vulnerabilities?
- ◆ Is accuracy the only standard for judging a hypothetical?
- ◆ Is the story disclosing the presuppositions on which the hypothetical is based?
- ◆ Does the story indicate how likely the hypothetically posited events are to occur?
- ◆ Should the press tell public how to prepare/protect/prevent?
- ◆ Should the hypothetical include preventative measures that could be taken and are being taken by the government or others in authority?

How should visuals be used in conjunction with the story?

- ◆ Are visuals subject to the same editorial scrutiny as the text?
- ◆ Are graphics accurately reflecting the tone of the story?
- ◆ Are the visuals oversimplifying or distorting?

What are the expectations for follow up?

- ◆ When a vulnerability to terrorism is exposed, does the press have an obligation to report governmental response, or lack of governmental response?
- ◆ How long should reporters wait before reporting on changes made to improve security or on the absence of such changes?

How Should Internet sites used to supplement the story?

- ◆ Are the same editorial standards applied to web content as to broadcast or print news?

September 11th and the subsequent events have presented journalists and the country with a complex and unprecedented situation.

- ◆ Threats from both domestic and international sources exist.
- ◆ National security is at issue.
- ◆ Journalists have been the target of attack.
- ◆ The Internet makes it easier for readers and viewers to aggregate bits of information.
- ◆ The Web gives smaller papers and local news station extended reach.
- ◆ Problematic information is available on non-journalistic sites.

Are these details helpful to readers? Are they useful to terrorists?

“First of all, it is true that we have detectors at the borders that can detect so-called gamma emitters, cesium and cobalt, but it’s very difficult to detect things like plutonium, americium – so-called alpha emitters” (The Newshour with Jim Lehrer, PBS, 10 June 2002).

“Less than 2 percent of incoming freight is opened and searched.... In the last 10 years, the number of containers coming into the country has more than doubled, yet the number of inspectors has remained the same” (Kroft, Steve, 60 Minutes, CBS, 24 March 2002)

“At three major airports – in Cincinnati, Jacksonville and Las Vegas – screeners failed to detect potentially dangerous items in at least half

the tests” (Morrison, Blake, “Airport Security Failures Persist,” *USA Today*, 1 July 2002, A1)

““C-4 is very hard to find and X-rays does (sic) – don’t do it and the contraptions that Congress wants to buy to screen luggage doesn’t do it either”” (Chen, Julie, “Colonel Randy Larsen of the ANSER Institute Discusses Increasing Security In The Nation’s Airports,” *The Early Show*, CBS, 26 December 2001)

“In many cases, a person needs only a credit card to charter a plane.... Some charter planes ‘are almost exactly as (sic) the ones that were used on 9/11 and some even larger than that. And they do make long hauls, so they are full of, full of fuel’” (Schneider, Greg, “Private Plane Charters: One Way Around Air Security,” *Washington Post*, 2 June 2002, A1)

““C-4 is **very hard to find** and X-rays does (sic) — don’t do it and the contraptions that Congress wants to buy to screen luggage doesn’t do it either’ ”

When is the use of hypotheticals responsible?

A June 11 article in the San Francisco Chronicle (Davidson, Keay and Edward Epstein, "Bomb's biggest impact could be psychological," 11 June 2002, A1) identifies three ways to contaminate a city with radioactive materials. It says, "Human imagination is the main limit to schemes for spreading radioactive materials over inhabited areas. Wolfstahl [deputy director of the nonproliferation project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington] said the possibilities included:

" - Placing radioactive materials around an ordinary pipe bomb, then setting it off. If it's dropped from a height, such as a building or airplane, winds would carry the radioactivity a greater distance."

" - Pouring radioactive liquid waste into a street sweeper, which would then spray the liquid around the city."

" - Pouring radioactive liquids into a gas tank, then punching small holes in the tank and driving the car around town. The waste would leak into the streets."

How much detail is enough?

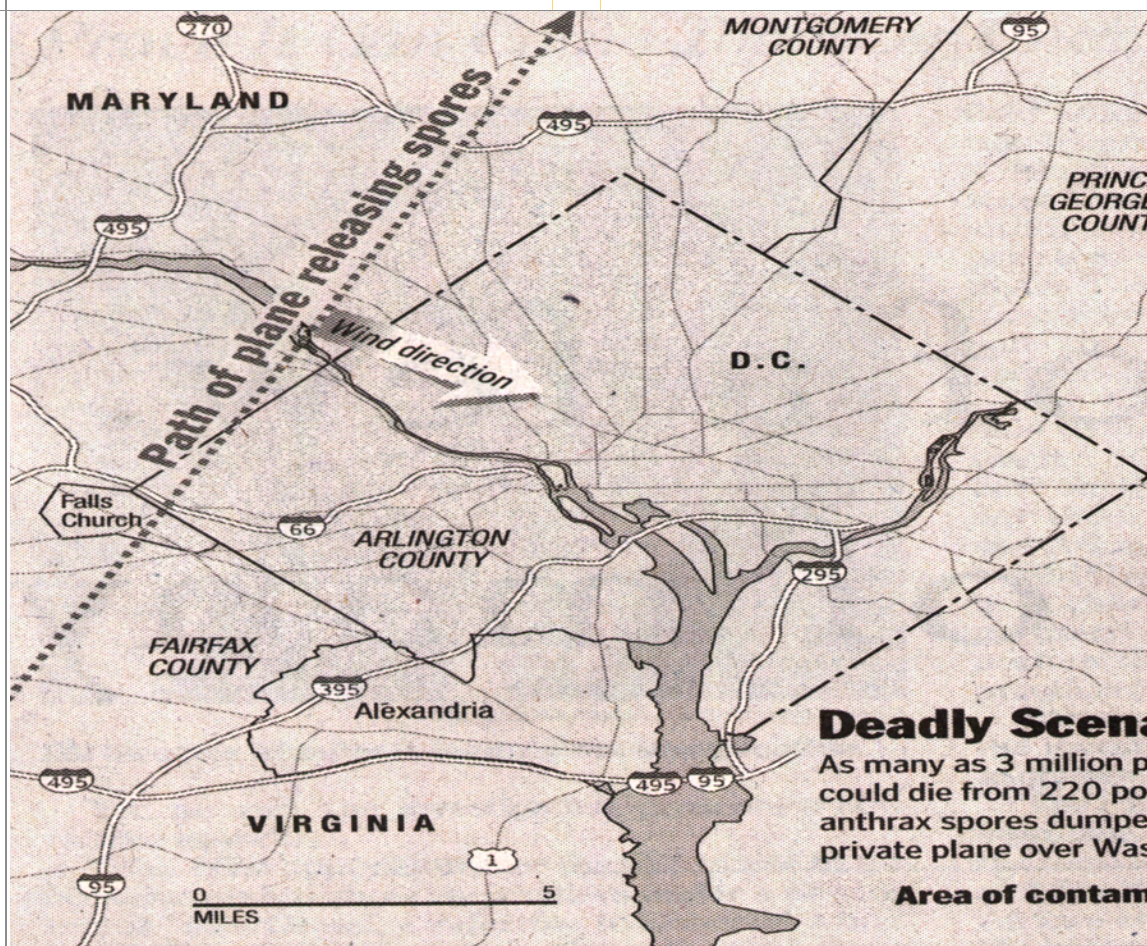
“If you were going to do some kind of damage, you would want a broadcast nozzle,’ he [Ray Newcomb, president of JBI Helicopter Services in Pembroke, N.H.] said, ‘which if placed on a spray boom would spread the material over a 300-foot-wide swath instead of the 70-foot swath achievable with raindrop nozzles.’” (Weiss, Rick and Justin Blum, “Suspect May Have Wanted to Buy Plane; Inquiries Reported on Crop-Duster Loan,” Washington Post, 25 September 2001, A12).



... to do some kind of **damage**
you would want a broadcast nozzle ...



How should hypotheticals be used to inform the public about vulnerabilities?

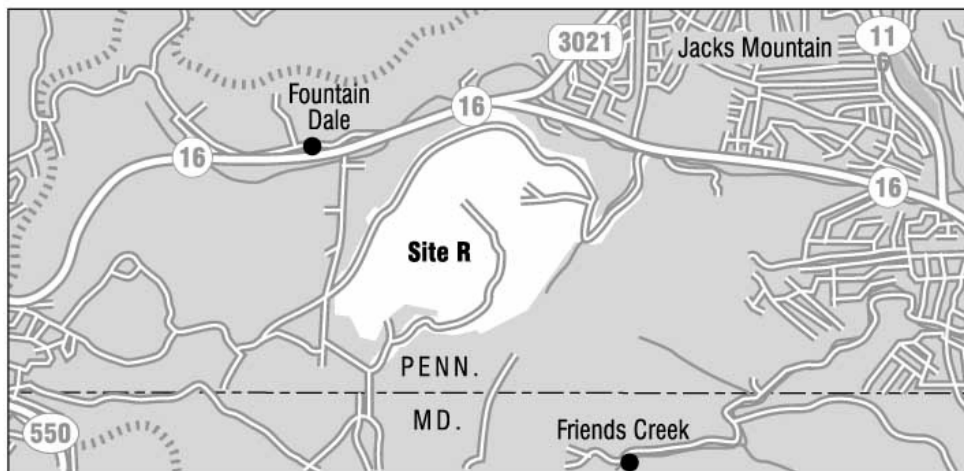
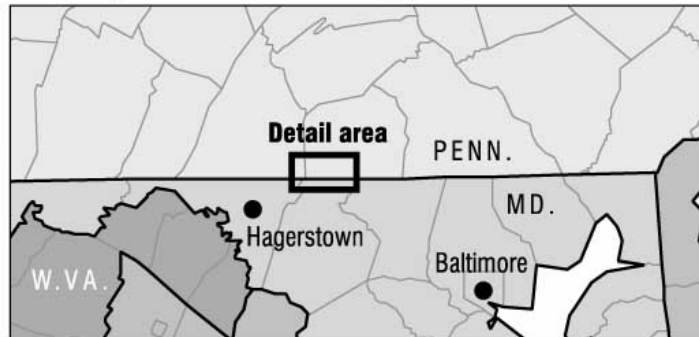


(Weiss, Rick, "Bioterrorism: An even more devastating threat,"
Washington Post, 17 September 2001, A24)

Does this information have the potential to endanger national security?

Underground complex on Pennsylvania border

The mysterious Site R has six-stories of underground offices, subterranean water reservoir, and banks of antennas, dishes and massive, steel doors.



James Hilston/Post-Gazette

("Site R is secure but not undisclosed," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 16 December 2001, A1)

How, if at all, should press coverage change at a time in which potential terrorists may be part of the viewing/reading public?

Van Sant: Under the name of Uncle Fester, Preisler writes books like *Home Workshop Explosives* and *Silent Death* (visual of book), a how-to manual of chemical warfare. Books that some experts fear might be useful for a terrorist. The self-published books contain technical instructions written in a conversational style....Uncle Fester, shows us how easy it is to make your own nitroglycerin, using the recipe from his updated book. So we're at the hardware store and what are we looking for?"

Preisler: "Well, I'm going to look for a bottle of drain opener."

Van Sant: "Everything he needed is on the shelf of his local hardware store."

Preisler: "Liquid Fire. It's always good when it has a warning label like this. Then you know you got the good stuff."

Van Sant: "What else are you going to get here?"

Van Sant: "We're not going to tell you the entire formula..."

Van Sant: "For \$11.54, we bought the ingredients for..."

Preisler: "half a pint of nitro, enough explosive to level a building."

(Van Sant, Peter, "Home Brew," 48 Hours, CBS, 29 January 2002)

... enough **explosive**
to level a building ...



Report on Terrorism

Will this information unnecessarily alarm the public?

“And an area considered most likely for such an attack is Washington, DC, itself; somewhere along Pennsylvania Avenue, perhaps, with the White House at one end and the Capitol at the other. For maximum impact, experts say, the bomb would be placed square in the middle. Right here, at the corner of 10th and Pennsylvania Avenue. That’s the FBI behind me. The Justice Department is over here. Other major institutions that might be contaminated include the Treasury and Commerce departments, depending on the weather that day.”

(Stewart, Jim, “Possible uses of a dirty bomb by terrorists in the US,” CBS Evening News, CBS, 24 April 2002)



How, if at all, would you follow up these stories?

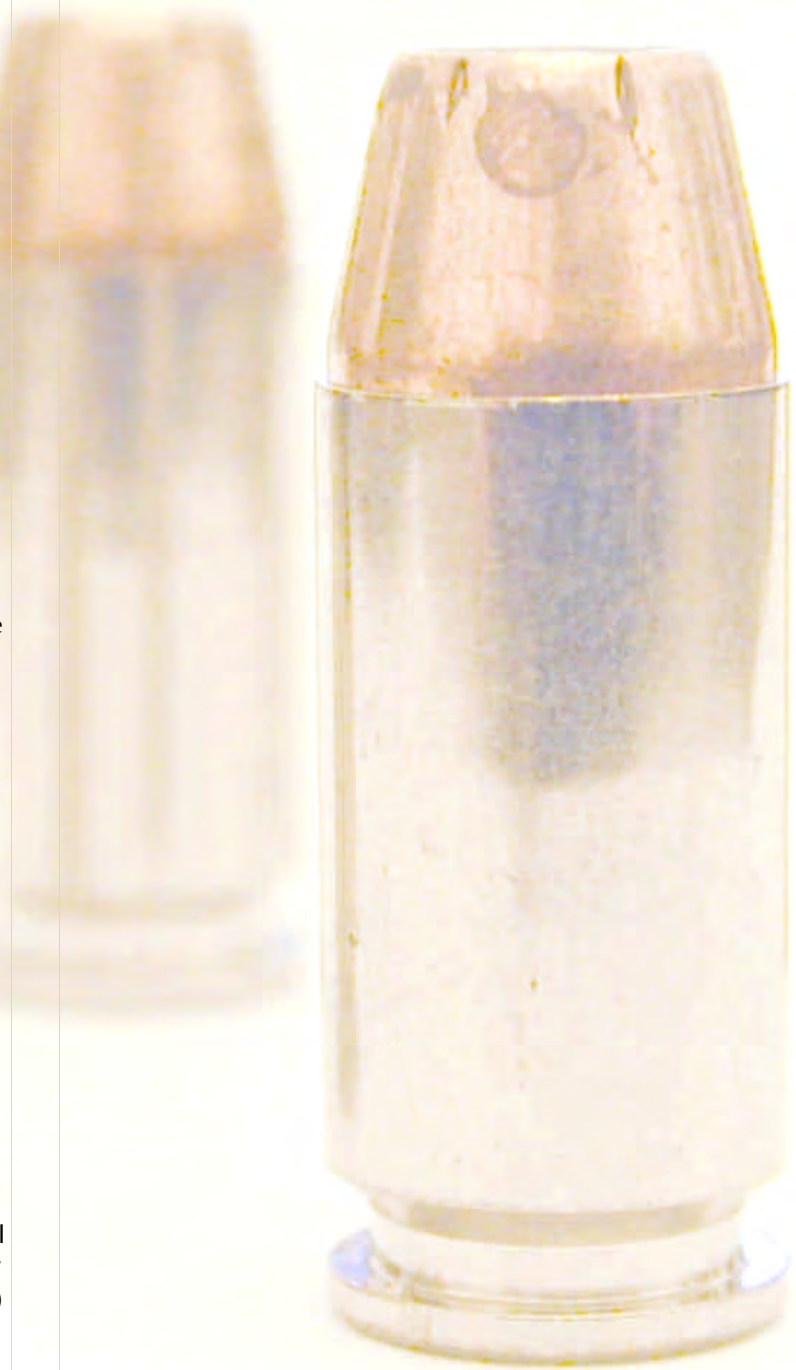
A June 1 2002 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article reports a state legislator's claim that Pennsylvania National Guard troops, charged with patrolling the state's five nuclear power plants, carry unloaded rifles. "House Democratic Whip Mike Veon (D., Beaver) said yesterday that Schweiker and the National Guard leadership should permit the troops to have loaded magazines in their M-16 rifles instead of carrying the ammunition on their belts as they do now.

"If a security breach did occur, the time it would take for soldiers to load their weapons to defend the facilities could prove to be extremely dangerous, if not deadly," said Veon, whose district includes a nuclear-power plant. The unloaded weapons give residents a false sense of security and leave the troops unprotected, he said." (Gelbart, Marcia, "Pennsylvania Legislator Wants Loaded Rifles at Power Plants," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 June 2002, B1)

* An article appearing three weeks later in the *York Daily Record* reveals that National Guard troops are stationed at just two of Pennsylvania's five plants. "On May 30, Veon publicly criticized Schweiker and Adjutant General Maj. Gen. William B. Lynch, adjutant general of the Pennsylvania National Guard, for not providing the guardsmen patrolling the state's five nuclear power plants with loaded weapons. The guardsmen, Veon said in a previous interview, were carrying their ammunition on their belts. "They are not as effective as they could be and should be," Veon said Friday. Guardsmen are currently stationed at Three Mile Island and Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station.

(Smith, Sharon, "Guard may be told to load up. A bill would have the nuclear plant guards load their weapons," *York Daily Record*, 22 June 2002, A3)

... unloaded weapons
give residents a false
sense of security ...



Would you re-edit this piece?

KYW News, a Philadelphia CBS affiliate, carried the story, “Chemical Plant Maps: A Terrorist Blueprint?” in early June. The story starts, “There’s now information online from the environmental group Greenpeace about two chemical plants in our area and critics say that information will give terrorists a blueprint on how to kill millions of Americans.

“The information went online Tuesday morning. The Greenpeace web site shows how a chlorine cloud from either of two chemical plants could threaten thousands of lives right here in the Delaware Valley. The plants mentioned on the site belong to DuPont — one in

mation — maps and details that indicate how a chemical leak could affect people in the area — if everything that could go wrong — did go wrong.

“Greenpeace wants you to have that information too.

“Rick Hind is the director of Greenpeace’s toxic campaign. He says his group isn’t releasing any confidential blueprints or how-to manuals, but information that can already be easily found on-line. ‘Greenpeace is releasing these (maps) to warn people what can happen in an accident or terrorist attack.’

“The maps show DuPont’s Edge Moor and Deepwater plants and how far a potentially deadly chlorine cloud

... give terrorists a blueprint on how to **kill millions** of Americans ...

Edge Moor, Delaware, and another across the river at Deepwater Point in Salem County, New Jersey.

“DuPont is required to give the Environmental Protection Agency absolute ‘worst case scenario’ infor-

could travel.

“In the worst-case scenario at Deepwater up to 25 miles. At Edge Moor, up to 14 miles.”

The news organization then linked to the problematic information it had discussed in the piece.

(“Chemical Plant Maps, A Terrorist Blueprint?” Eyewitness News, KYW-3, 4 June 2002.)



Where do you draw the line?

"[O]ne of two fortified locations along the East Coast... The *Washington Post* agreed to a White House request not to name any of those deployed or identify the two principal locations of the shadow government.... The two sites of the shadow government make use of local geological features to render them highly secure. They are well stocked with food, water, medicine and other consumable supplies, and are capable of generating their own power." (Gellman, Barton and Schmidt, "Shadow Government Is at Work in Secret; After Attacks, Bush Ordered 100 Officials to Bunkers Away

The *Washington Post* agreed to a **White House request** not to name any of those deployed

From Capital to Ensure Federal Survival," *Washington Post*, 1 March 2002, A1)

"Site R, one of these two secure locations on the East Coast just north of Washington, D.C. ... on the Maryland-Pennsylvania border" (Zahn, Paula, "The Big Question: Why Is There a Shadow Government?" *American Morning* with Paula Zahn, CNN, 1 March 2002).

"A bunker in a Pennsylvania mountain, known as 'Site R,' can accommodate 3,000 people....it included a reservoir, medical and dental facilities, dining hall, barber shop and chapel." (Eaton, Sabrina, "Interior Officials Join Cheney in Mountain Hideaways," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 October 2001, A15).

"A few hours after the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, five military helicopters settled onto a hidden landing pad atop Raven Rock Mountain.... The Defense Department calls it Site R, an alternate command center inside a hollowed-out granite mountain 65 miles from Washington.... The

Army says five buildings are located inside separate mountain caverns, separated by walls of hard greenstone granite. The site houses computers, a freshwater reservoir, barber shop, post office and periodic medical and dental services" (*Associated Press State and Local Wire*, 4 October 2001).

"Waynesboro, PA., a speck of a town on the Maryland border a few miles from Camp David. A few miles down the road from Waynesboro ... is something called the Alternate Joint Communications Center at Raven Rock. 'Site R' It is now ... home to one of the two locations of the so-called shadow government – where, since

Sept. 11, senior government officials have been taking turns living underground, waiting to run the nation in case Washington, D.C., 75 miles to the south, is devastated by an attack. [A]bout 10 miles west of Waynesboro, on state Route 16, at the hill on the horizon with all the communications towers that protrude above the trees, sits a mysterious military base that many of the residents here talk about knowingly with a wink and a nod." (Altman, Howard, "Chasing Shadows," *Philadelphia City Paper*, 14-21 March 2002)

"Site R, with its six-stories of underground offices, subterranean water reservoir, and banks of mysterious antennas, dishes and massive, steel doors, has been a designated backup command center since it was hewn out of the mountain in 1951.... After the terrorist attacks of three months ago, Site R's proximity to Camp David, Three Mile Island and the Letterkenny Army Depot has given it an uncomfortably public profile and its neighbors an earful" ("Site R is secure but not undisclosed," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 16 December 2001, A1).

Does the compilation of information of this sort pose a particular problem?

cnn.com's in-depth special report, "How prepared is your city: A look at the preparedness of the country's 30 largest cities and their ability to respond to potential disasters and terrorist attacks," provides a side-by-side comparison of the level of preparedness of the nation's largest cities. By consulting this special section, readers can access data about the 30 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. (Site URL - <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2002/prepared.cities/>). Here they can learn where to launch an attack in order to maximize its impact and minimize the chances of being caught by law enforcement officials.

Among the details included are:

- ◆ The population
- ◆ Number of law enforcement officials
- ◆ Percentage of people traveling freeways and city streets at particular times of the day
- ◆ Number of patients at hospitals and surgical units on a city-by-city basis
- ◆ Number of pharmacists, nurses
- ◆ Medical assistants per 10,000 residents

"How prepared is your city?"





What does the public
need to know?