



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY AND CONGRESS

CRISIS LEADERSHIP: SECURING SOCIETIES, PROTECTING HOMELANDS

DECEMBER 7, 2006

On the 65th anniversary of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Center for the Study of the Presidency (CSP) hosted the first seminar in a series entitled *Crisis Leadership: Securing Societies, Protecting Homelands*, sponsored by the Swedish Emergency Management Agency (SEMA).¹ Convened with the Reserve Officers' Association at their headquarters, ten leading experts and practitioners discussed concepts of decision-making in crisis, the politics of crisis leadership, lessons-learned in crisis, the differing perspectives and roles between policy-maker and practitioner in times of crisis, and training as a remedy and preparedness measure.

The Swedish Emergency Management Agency has a similar mandate in Sweden to that of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in the U.S., as it works actively with all actors in Sweden to enhance preparedness, including skills in crisis leadership. In 2005, SEMA's Chief Scientist Bengt Sundelius co-authored *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure*, which designates five critical tasks of a leader in a crisis situation. According to Professor Sundelius, a leader must transcend five stages: sense-making (recognizing the presence of a crisis), decision-making, meaning-making (gauging how the situation will develop and determining a response strategy), terminating crisis (shifting back to normalcy as quickly as possible), and lessons-learned.

Mr. Lars Hedstrom, Deputy Director of the Swedish Emergency Management Agency, opened the December 7 event in Washington by relaying his role and experience in the Swedish government response to the Asian Tsunami of 2005. Mr. Hedstrom admitted that the system was unprepared for the crisis that endangered 30,000 Swedish citizens vacationing in Asia thousands of miles away from the Swedish mainland. Mr. Hedstrom outlined how he assessed the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami and set up an organization on the ground very different from the hierarchy that exists in Sweden. This team required the ability to adapt quickly without typical resources. Following the Tsunami response, SEMA began to improve the government's ability to share situational awareness and to coordinate with the public and the media.

Requirements for Leaders in Crisis

Experts on the first panel detailed the characteristics leaders require in crisis, including motivation, inspiration, organization, and the ability to persuade others in a positive way. Most imperative for a leader confronted with a crisis, though, is the ability to manage one's own emotional responses as well as those of the public. Dr. Gene Klann of the Center for Creative Leadership asserted that leaders in crisis may emerge at both the macro and micro levels of government and business by conveying confidence in themselves and in those they lead. Dr. Klann further explained that those who are led must feel informed, concerned for, and perceived as competent by their leader.

¹ Please refer to page 7 for the full program agenda.

Dr. Jack Harrald, Director of the Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management at the George Washington University explained how leadership alone may not be sufficient to overcome extreme events in crisis. Long before a crisis occurs, leaders must create and foster a culture of preparedness by conceptualizing crises as routine, rather than as an anomaly. Dr. Harrald said that the response to Hurricane Katrina demonstrated how “preparedness failures cascade upward.” This crisis struck an area extending across multiple administrative jurisdictions in which a number of leaders became accountable for response to the disaster; few could agree upon a designation of tasks in the response effort. The leaders of these areas experienced technical difficulty in communications across the towns, cities, and counties of the Gulf Coast, further complicating the decisionmaking process. Thus, the local and state government coordination of response and recovery was inconsistent and inefficient, and Federal leadership believed it necessary to assume the mission. The response to Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that at all levels of government, leaders and their support staff must be prepared to facilitate communication and coordination throughout the response network of first responders, volunteer organizations, media, and, most of all, the public.

A new provision in the John Warner Defense Authorization Act of 2007 may help to overcome the friction between federal, state, and local leaders that occurred during Hurricane Katrina as response authority shifted to the Federal level. The Warner Act revises the Insurrection Act of 1807, which was originally intended to empower the President to deploy the U.S. military as a domestic police force during rebellion. Keynote speaker Under Secretary for Preparedness George Foresman interpreted changes in the act as a clarification of an “archaic U.S. crisis response law.” By modernizing the language and adding a new legislative title (changing the title of Chapter 15 of Title 10, U.S. Code from "Insurrection" to “Enforcement of the Laws to Restore Public Order”), Foresman said that the Congress and the President send the right message to the public that the U.S. government wants to remove ambiguity or delay in its response to crisis.

The first panel underscored that once a crisis is underway, information is the best resource for a leader. Dr. Klann stressed that information can stem the emotional impact of a crisis if it is “reviewed, repeated, and reinforced.” Throughout a crisis, it is imperative that a leader deliver updates as soon as new information becomes available. Even if new information is unavailable, a leader must routinely provide status reports to the media and public. By doing so, a leader can maintain better control of the situation by helping the public to make sense and meaning of disaster situations, as described by SEMA’s Sundelius.

Panelist Admiral Susan Blumenthal, a former Assistant Surgeon General (1993-2005) and presently Senior Advisor for Health and Medicine at the Center for the Study of the Presidency, used a recent a public health crisis to highlight several points. She explained that in 2001, the U.S. responded poorly to bioterror attacks involving the distribution of anthrax in the postal system. This crisis revealed failures in imagination and in preparedness: though the public health community acknowledged that a biological terrorist attack could occur, U.S. medical leadership was unprepared to manage the crisis effectively. Confusion over management of the crisis translated into communication failures. Dr. Blumenthal suggested that present leadership must anticipate and prepare for future crises that are now “smoldering,” such as the lack of sufficient healthcare and health insurance and the growing risk of preventable diseases such as

obesity and AIDS. Physicians and other medical experts must be organized and positioned in advance of an emergency, and training may help leaders to better engage and communicate with skilled civilians and first-responders alike.

Alan McCurry, Executive Vice President for Chapter and International Relations of the Red Cross, admitted that Hurricane Katrina proved to be a crisis larger than the organization was capable of handling. Prior to Katrina, the majority of Red Cross volunteers were “retired do-gooders” ill-equipped to staff shelters and kitchens with emotionally-stricken victims in a major crisis environment. Furthermore, as a volunteer organization, the Red Cross constantly rotates volunteers in and out of the crisis zone thereby further exacerbating the stress level of victims to whom the Red Cross assists. Mr. McCurry has since hired “directors” to lead in large disaster-prone urban areas across the nation in order to maintain permanent positions in preparation for and during crises.

Developing U.S. Crisis Response

Participants in the second panel discussed how the slow development of crisis response mechanisms in the U.S. has hindered leaders in crisis. Alan Cohn², Director of Emergency Preparedness and Response in the Policy Directorate at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, suggested that the U.S. Coast Guard missions in response to Hurricane Katrina proved to be among the only success stories due to extensive experience, training, and preparedness doctrine in maritime-based rescue operations. Their separate teams were trained to work together and were comfortable sharing information and communicating rapidly with peers in a catastrophic environment. Although organized, the Coast Guard was also decentralized in its efforts, empowering their teams to act upon their trained intuition.

Cohn explained that U.S. crisis leadership has been highly centralized since its founding. Due to the nature of the U.S. federal system, first responder organizations were developed ad hoc. Since national standards for funding and training do not exist, many first responder organizations remain disjointed. Some organizations have taken the initiative to establish a better process for mobilization. For example, the President of the International Fire Chiefs Association commissioned the National Mutual Aid System Task Force in October 2005 in part to identify and resolve problems encountered by the U.S. Fire Service while responding under the guidance of the National Response Plan during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.³⁴ Its report, published in August 2006, presented strategies for organizing and deploying resources during disasters and for utilizing fire service assets in varying locales.

Panelists agreed that preparedness is the key to harnessing the strengths of the U.S. crisis response structure and improving it. Since leaders must communicate frequently and rapidly during a crisis, preparedness must include deliberate communications. Twenty-first century leaders must embrace the practice of maintaining relationships with the public and media in the

² Mr. Cohn’s comments at the seminar are his own and do not reflect the position of the Department of Homeland Security or the U.S. Government.

³ International Association of Fire Chiefs, “A National Mutual Aid System for the Fire Service: A Strategic Plan.” August 30, 2006 at www.iafc.org/mutualaid (September 9, 2006).

⁴ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “National Response Plan (NRP),” updated May 25, 2006 at http://www.dhs.gov/xprepresp/committees/editorial_0566.shtm (January 24, 2007).

absence of crisis as well as in response to one in order to encourage the public to be proactive and personally prepared. Edward Reiskin, Deputy Mayor of Washington D.C. for Public Safety and Justice, cited traditional difficulties for government communication with the public. Reiskin concluded that the way in which a leader initially frames the conditions of a crisis, by carefully selecting information and arguments to avert confusion, directly affects the outcome of an incident. SEMA panelist Professor Sundelius agreed that a leader must manage the “triangular relationship” between political actors, mass media, and the citizenry.⁵ At any time, “constituents of this triangle send, receive, and perceive information about the crisis at hand,” thereby obscuring the crisis communications process and establishing a battle for credibility.⁶ Since the majority of communication between a government and its citizens is mediated and then further diffused through the press, leaders in crisis must be disciplined, resolute, and professional in the delivery of messages. Also important is the ability to thoroughly coordinate all outgoing information to different agencies and departments of government. Furthermore, the race between political actors – from parties to pressure groups to leaders themselves – to gain the media spotlight becomes intensified in crisis, and a leader must be capable of overcoming this phenomenon.

Alan Cohn detailed a series of initiatives developed to provide command and control at all levels of government in relevant crises. For example, the National Incident Management System (NIMS) standardizes command and management structures with an emphasis on preparedness, mutual aid, and resource management.⁷ Cohn hailed NIMS as simple and cross-jurisdictional, with the ability to allow citizens to interact with public safety organizations. At present, NIMS functions at the federal level, but will eventually include representatives of state and local incident management and responder organizations. Cohn also noted the Citizen Corps initiative, which educates and trains the public for crisis situations. Citizen Corps manages community volunteer resources at the local level in preparation for and response to all ranges of threats.⁸ Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) exist within the Citizen Corps initiative. Cohn noted that CERTs educate the public about disaster preparedness for area-specific hazards and train in basic disaster response skills.

In his keynote address, George Foresman, Homeland Security Under Secretary for Preparedness, suggested that the collective effect of four recent events has changed the way we consider preparedness. Under Secretary Foresman explained that though disaster did not materialize from the Y2K computer threat, leaders still faced a high-impact crisis environment. Across the country, leadership was forced to strategize for a range of possible disasters and then mobilize response capabilities. Though a crisis of business and economics, the Enron scandal fundamentally changed the way business leaders and Wall Street anticipate and manage threats.

⁵ Boin, Arjen, Paul ‘t Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius. 2005 “The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Pressure.” Cambridge University Press, UK. pp.72

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⁷ For more information, see National Incident Management System, http://www.dhs.gov/xprepresp/programs/gc_1166653070655.shtm (January 24, 2007).

⁸ For more information, see Citizen Corps and Community Emergency Response Teams, www.citizencorps.gov and www.ready.gov (January 24, 2007). For more information on citizen involvement in homeland security preparedness and response, please see “With an Overstretched Military, U.S. Should Create ‘Home Guard’” in National Defense, January 2006.

Finally, the attacks of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina overcame local response capabilities and underscored that leaders at all levels must be agile. This cumulative “perfect storm” of events moved the U.S. from a 20th century strategy of “respond and recover,” to one of “prevent, protect, respond, recover.”

Under Secretary Foresman noted that his office is working to establish metrics for preparedness, and that the U.S. can learn from the research of SEMA on leadership in crisis for this task. He reiterated the need for the U.S. to follow SEMA Chief Scientist Bengt Sundelius’ advice for approaching crisis leadership and management within a holistic concept of “societal security.” The U.S. must change its current mindset to a more proactive one of routine training across the agencies and departments of government as well as the private sector. Moreover, local, state, and federal response networks must evolve in order to institutionalize accountability of leadership in crisis. Above all, Under Secretary Foresman emphasized that it is crucial for leaders to communicate to the public that citizens’ are just as accountable for preparedness. Specifically, it is crucial that citizens prepare themselves for a range of crises and their consequences, for instance, the need to evacuate or remain confined in a home or office. These situations require supplies such as food, water, and medicine in the absence of immediate government response.

Training and Education for Leaders in Crisis

SEMA’s Lars Hedstrom identified the most valued lesson from responding to the Tsunami disaster as the need for more training and exercises. Since military personnel are so well trained to work through periods of shock and crisis, panelists suggested that a similar style of training may be adapted for civilians.⁹ Members of the audience posed questions regarding methods of training young people, and panelists agreed that early lessons in communication and dealing with pressure may help avert substandard crisis response in the future. Leaders must be trained to internalize resilience (i.e. flexibility in communications, decision-making, and delegation of duty) and project it upon the organizations they lead to create a culture of awareness. Leaders must expect crises to occur and be trained to anticipate incidents. SEMA’s experts suggested that the best method of preparedness may be to constantly train personnel to search for failures and signs of escalation. Many agreed that a commitment should be made by the federal government to establish a crisis leadership training capacity for homeland security decision-makers at the federal, state, and local levels.

The next seminar in this series will focus on the international perspectives of crisis leadership. It will build upon the conclusions and observations made at the December 7th seminar and will identify components of crisis leadership based on specific cases shared by authorities from the U.S. and other countries such as Canada, Italy, and Sweden. Participation may also include a multinational entity such as the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre. More information will be available soon on the Center for the Study of the Presidency website, at www.thepresidency.org.

⁹ In his 2007 State of the Union speech before Congress, President George W. Bush suggested establishing a “Civilian Reserve Corps” that would “function much like our military reserve. It would ease the burden on the Armed Forces by allowing us to hire civilians with critical skills to serve on missions...when America needs them.”

The Center wishes to thank each panelist for contributing a wide range of expertise to this important event. We also wish to express gratitude to the Swedish Emergency Management Agency for generously supporting the work of CSP, and the Reserve Officers Association for kindly hosting the first seminar at their headquarters. Finally, the Center for the Study of the Presidency thanks those who attended this seminar for their insightful contributions, which were crucial to the production of this review.



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DECEMBER 7, 2006 / 9:00 AM-12:30PM

ONE CONSTITUTION AVENUE, NE (RESERVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION)

Welcome & Introduction:

Dr. David Abshire, President, Center for the Study of the Presidency

Keynote Speaker:

Mr. Lars Hedström, Deputy Director General, Swedish Emergency Management Agency

Panel I: Principles, Cases, and Lessons for Crisis Leadership

Key principles, strategies, and lessons observed for leading in times of crisis, and the differing perspectives and roles between policymaker and practitioner

Dr. Susan Blumenthal, Former U.S. Assistant Surgeon General and Senior Advisor for Science, Health, and Medicine, Center for the Study of the Presidency.

Dr. Jack Harrald, Director, Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management, The George Washington University

Dr. Gene Klann, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Creative Leadership, and author of Crisis Leadership Mr. Alan McCurry, Executive Vice President for Chapter and International Operations, American Red Cross

Moderator: **Jonah J. Czerwinski**, Senior Research Associate and Director of Homeland Security Projects, Center for the Study of the Presidency

Panel II: Embedding Security: "Top-Down" Division of Leadership vs. a "Bottom-Up" Integration of Civil Society

Options for rebalancing how government can better engage civil society and industry in large crises involving significant loss of life.

Ms. Barbara Childs-Pair, Director of the District of Columbia Emergency Management Agency

Mr. Alan D. Cohn, Director, Emergency Preparedness & Response, Policy Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Mr. Edward Reiskin, Deputy Mayor of Washington, DC for Public Safety and Justice

Prof. Bengt Sundelius, Chief Scientist, Swedish Emergency Management Agency

Moderator: **Jonah J. Czerwinski**, Senior Research Associate and Director of Homeland Security Projects, Center for the Study of the Presidency

Luncheon Speaker:

The Honorable George Foresman, Under Secretary for Preparedness, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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