

Statement of Purpose

Providing security for people has always been a central task for human society. We are now in a period of re-evaluating the nature of security threats, what is at stake, and what can be done to cope. The re-evaluation is being undertaken by individuals, groups and communities; in local, state, and national governments; in the United States and internationally. It embraces homeland security and concerns about: terrorism; disaster management; law and human rights; resource availability; and public health. The time is opportune for in-depth studies of security issues and practical applications of their findings.

Risk assessment has provided powerful analytic approaches for coping with threats from natural and technological hazards. It is natural to expand these approaches to address risks from human and social actions including acts of malice. Risk perspectives encourage consideration of whole systems and comparisons over a broad range of alternatives. Effective risk assessment combines technical analysis of threats to humans and what they value with consideration of human responses to the threats. Attempts to protect people can introduce new threats, including threats to societal values; these also require analysis. Democratic social values and institutions are a resource to be drawn upon for enhancing security.

The Center for Risk and Security will build upon work by the George Perkins Marsh Institute, the Center's partner organizations and other institutions. The Center will adapt and develop risk and decision methods for analyzing security issues, will conduct critical reviews of plans for addressing such issues, and will assist private and governmental entities in planning and policy development. The domain of effort includes:

- 1) Expanding the scope of risk assessments to include security issues
- 2) Developing methods to evaluate the trade-offs inherent in decisions about security
- 3) Examining human-response aspects of planning and design of security programs
- 4) Assuring that democratic values and institutions are utilized in security planning

1) Expanding the scope of risk assessments to include security issues

Risk assessments have traditionally given little attention to acts of malice or insanity. If the potential for such acts has been discussed in a risk assessment, this has usually been done in the context of discussing the limitations of risk-assessment methodologies. Only in rare instances have acts of malice or insanity been systematically examined in parallel with other events that could cause harm. However, in the present environment, acts of malice or insanity can not be neglected as potential causes of harm. To meet this need, the Center for Risk and Security will develop, test, refine and apply risk-assessment methodologies that account for acts of malice or insanity. The Center will work with its partner organizations and other institutions to compare approaches and pursue consensus on methodologies and assumptions in this area.

2) Developing methods to evaluate the trade-offs inherent in decisions about security

Security decisions are one form of risk decision. Risk decisions usually involve competing objectives that require implicit or explicit trade-offs; some trade-offs may be technically, socially, or financially challenging or contentious. The range and impact of the trade-offs will vary by the type of security problem. In the context of preventing or mitigating the effects of terrorist events, for example, concerns would include: the cost of preventing or mitigating what might be a low-probability event; the degree of uncertainty associated with the success of prevention or mitigation; and the cost in physical, human and financial dimensions should the event occur. Trade-offs include the restriction of public access and movement as a means of deterring terrorist activity versus the preservation of civil liberties and other constitutionally-granted freedoms. The Center will develop decision frameworks and other methods to help decision makers identify, understand and address the role of trade-offs in decisions about security. One concept that will be explored is that of a Security Impact Statement that requires a comprehensive assessment of the impact of security decisions on policy, people, and infrastructure.

3) Examining human-response aspects of planning and design of security programs

Advances in the field of risk assessment have included technical achievements and new knowledge about human response to risks. Developments in the study of human response include: risk perception; risk communication; the analysis of trust; equity and justice issues in the distribution of risks; and understanding of public participation in planning for risk reduction. Analysis of the social amplification of risks and identification of vulnerable populations have emerged as key tools for understanding risks. These tools, like those used in technical analysis of risks, should be extended to consider threats derived from acts of malice or insanity.

4) Assuring that democratic values and institutions are utilized in security planning

Traditional approaches to homeland security have often involved a high degree of centralization and secrecy, and a tendency to reduce civil liberties. Although well-intentioned, these approaches can disempower citizens, undermine democratic institutions and harm the economy. The Center for Risk and Security will examine homeland-security approaches that have a broader base across the nation. States and localities will play important roles. In such approaches, decision-making will be closer to the locus of action, and engagement of the public will be encouraged. These approaches may be more flexible and resilient, may allow greater learning from experience and, ultimately, may be more effective. To make such approaches workable, important challenges must be faced and overcome. Notable among such challenges are: protecting sensitive information; ensuring quality of responses; and coordinating responses by diverse actors.

Adopted on October 10, 2003, in Worcester, Massachusetts.