

“Defending the Homeland”, Major Counterterrorism Exercises: What Is NorthCom Up To?

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This week and into next, NorthCom and NORAD are conducting a joint exercise called “Vigilant Shield ’09.”

The focus will be on “homeland defense and civil support,” [a NorthCom press release states](#).

From November 12-18, it will be testing a “synchronized response of federal, state, local and international partners in preparation for homeland defense, homeland security, and civil support missions in the United States and abroad.”

NorthCom is short for the Pentagon’s Northern Command. President Bush created it in October 2002. (The Southern Command, or SouthCom, covers Latin America. Central Command, or CentCom, covers Iraq and Afghanistan. And the new AfriCom covers, well, you get the picture.)

Vigilant Shield ’09 “will include scenarios to achieve exercise objectives within the maritime, aerospace, ballistic missile defense, cyber, consequence management, strategic communications, and counter terrorism domains,” the press release states.

[NorthCom’s press release also says](#) that other participants in the exercise include the U.S. Strategic Command’s “Global Lightning 09,” which is a plan to use nuclear weapons in a surprise attack.

The Pentagon’s “Bulwark Defender 09” is also involved in the exercise, and it is a cyberspace protection outfit of the Pentagon.

Something called the “Canada Command DETERMINED DRAGON” also is participating, as is the California National Guard and California’s “Golden Guardian.”

California’s involvement appears to center around planning for a catastrophic earthquake.

“Under the leadership of Governor Schwarzenegger and direction of his Office of Homeland Security, the nation’s largest state sponsored emergency exercise will take place November 13-18,” [a press release from the governor’s office](#) states.

“Golden Guardian 2008 tests California’s capability to respond and recover during a major catastrophic earthquake. The Golden Guardian 2008 full-scale exercise scenario focuses on a simulated, catastrophic 7.8 magnitude earthquake along the southern portion of the San Andreas Fault.”

NorthCom is being shy about giving out additional information about Vigilant Shield '09. When I called for a fact sheet on it, I was told there was none.

But the Pentagon did issue such [a fact sheet for Vigilant Shield '08](#).

Last year's exercise included "the simulated detonation of three nuclear dispersal devices." The fact sheet stressed the need to support a "civilian-led response" and to "exercise defense support of civil authorities," including involvement in "critical infrastructure protection events" and coordinating "Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection activities."

That fact sheet ended by saying: "There will be minimal deployment of active duty forces and no crossborder deployments. We anticipate little to no direct impact on local communities."

NorthCom has been in the news lately, after the Pentagon designated to it a battle-tested fighting unit from the war on Iraq. This appears to be against the law, [according to the ACLU](#), since the army isn't supposed to be patrolling our own country.

On top of that, NorthCom was up to its eyeballs in getting peace groups spied upon.

"The security people at USNORTHCOM . . . had begun noticing some trouble at a few military recruiting events in 2005," Eric Lichtblau recounts in *Bush's Law: The Remaking of American Justice*. "Military officials at NORTHCOM asked their counterparts at CIFA [the Pentagon's Counterintelligence Field Activity] to ping their powerful new database—do a broader study and find out how many episodes of violence and disruption were actually imperiling their recruiters."

And NorthCom even was in the loop at the Republican Convention in St. Paul.

Is it too much to ask Congress to look into NorthCom?

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