

## **Ground Truth: Linchpin**

### **Infrastructure Categories Affected:**

- Communications
- Information Technologies
- Commercial Facilities
- Emergency Services
- Healthcare and Public Health
- Transportation Systems
- Financial Systems
- ... and potentially more

### **Origin of the Threat:**

A disillusioned veteran masterminds a plot to cripple the US. He accomplishes this by sending out a false Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) to hundreds of millions of Americans during the Super Bowl, claiming that the water supply has been contaminated and that their odds of exposure are likely — that they need to go to the hospital immediately for treatment. He adds that the government has lied to the public in an attempt to cover it up, therefore furthering confusion and making it more difficult to resolve. This is effective due to the political and social climate that pervades America as of today: one of both general distrust of the government, and of doubts as to the competencies of our aging representatives who hold office. Conspiracy theories regarding the government are no longer the exception in today's world: they are the norm.

**Threat Details:**

The first and most visceral effect of the message will come from the panic within the stadium. Mass hysteria is a well documented phenomenon, and it will spread like wildfire through the crowd, resulting in thousands getting trampled.

While the broadcast will likely be cut before too much chaos is seen, this panic will still compound upon the viewers at home. 911 calls start overwhelming the cell towers and dispatch centers almost immediately. People are unable to get into contact with friends and family. Most people will be at Super Bowl parties, some having left their children elsewhere. Roads will become congested within minutes of the alert, as people rush to pick up their children or families, or directly to the nearest hospital. Excess traffic will render roads effectively impassable. Police and EMS will be mobilized but unable to effectively respond to calls, assuming dispatch can even contact them in the first place.

Excess web traffic will overload the sites most capable of disseminating a corrected message, thereby taking them offline. It's hard to determine what websites would be affected, but social media, government websites, and hospital webpages would likely be victims of the excess traffic.

Bank runs become increasingly likely the further things spiral out of control. People may decide that, given the general uncertainty, withdrawing their money from the bank is the safest course of action. This could lead to either one of two things: the banks completely freeze, not allowing anyone to draw or spend money. Or enough money is withdrawn that large banks begin

to fail. And that's not to mention the billions of dollars of revenue left unrealized from one of the biggest sporting events of the world.

There is no way to determine how quickly the government would be able to respond to such a message or send out a correction. And even at their quickest, there's no way to determine how effective it would be. Best case scenario, only a small number of people disregard the corrected alert. Worst case scenario, the new alert only worsens the fear, solidifying the idea that the government is in fact trying to hide something. The activation of the national guard will be inevitable either way, and martial law would likely be imposed until everything is once again under control.

This is not an end-of-the-world scenario. In all likelihood, the majority of chaos will be subdued within a week's time. The aftershocks, however, will be felt significantly longer. International trade will suffer indefinitely. Other countries may begin to view America as unstable, turning to alternatives that are perceived as more reliable to facilitate things such as trades, ally relationships, and tourism.

In essence, all it would take is a single text message to undermine the United State's position as a stable, global superpower.

### **In Addressing the Threat:**

Both veterans and those currently serving have the unique ability to carry out plots of mass terror. Those who are or were in the military should be monitored with extra scrutiny to ensure there are no signs of radicalization, especially those who might have reason to hold a

grudge against the United States. The type of treatment some veterans are subject to is no secret. In order to decrease the risk of these veterans becoming extremists, the treatment of veterans should be improved.

While it is understandable that the President should have the capability of sending out an emergency message to the entire nation at once, the risk of said capability being misused is too great to ignore. There should be an excess of safeguards in place for both the WEA system and the EAS (Emergency Alert System). Perhaps one possible solution is to require a national alert to be independently verified at the state or regional level before being sent to the public en masse. Of course this lessens the speed in which the public will be alerted in the case of a real national emergency, but the trade-off is arguably worth it.

Holidays and special events have long been known to be targets of terror attacks. Since 2002, the Super Bowl has received a Special Event Assessment Rating - 1 — the highest on the scale. Because of this, the US spares no expense in guarding the stadium. Thousands of officers and dozens of agencies all coordinate to make sure no attack is carried out upon the crowds present. What this plan fails to consider, however, are any attacks that aren't carried out physically. Going forward, these agencies should be open to the possibility of threats from all realms, not just physical. A coordinated cyber attack could cause just as much damage — if not more — than a well placed bomb.