

Briefing Paper – The Vital Points Program

References:

- A. *Protecting Category II Vital Points During Time of War or Serious Civil Crisis*, R.R. Geddes, Ottawa, 28 March 1988.
- B. *The Vital Points Manual (2nd edition)* EPC 26/91, December 5th, 1991.
- C. *Vital Points Review*, Working Group Report (March 31, 1994)
- D. *Proposal on the Future of the Vital Points Program*, Memo to Members of the ACVP (8800-2-1 dated 07 Apr 95).

Aim

1. To provide a background briefing on the Vital Points Program, with emphasis on how it was organised and functioned during the eighties and early nineties.

Objective of the Program

2. The objective of the Vital Points Program as it was constituted until the latter 90s was to ensure that in the event of peacetime or war emergencies, facilities and services vital to the country, province, territory, region or municipality had been identified and their security requirements determined.

Definition of a Vital Point

3. A Vital Point (VP) was a facility, resource, or service considered essential to the security and continued efficient functioning of the country and/or a province or territory and which therefore warranted extra security precautions to protect it from disruption, destruction, or disclosure.

Background to 1970

4. While a variety of actions (including the deployment of considerable personnel) to protect vital points were taken during the First World War, it wasn't until 1938 when a federal, interdepartmental, war oriented Vulnerable Points Committee was created as a sub-committee of the Defence Co-ordination Committee that really serious planning efforts were made to deal with the problem. At that time it was determined to be necessary to identify and protect facilities, manufacturing plants and services critical to a

national war effort. The effectiveness of the resulting plans and their implementation during the Second World War, while seeming to have been somewhat inconsistent and of limited effectiveness, was virtually on a par with Canada's American and British Allies.

5. In 1948 the federal Cabinet Defence Committee established the Interdepartmental Committee on Vital Points (ICVP) which was charged with maintaining an up-to-date list of VPs, assessment by the armed forces and the RCMP of the vulnerability of such points from attack and sabotage, and making recommendations concerning protective measures. As the program evolved, civil VPs became the responsibility of the ICVP with military VPs coming under the Department of National Defence. The ICVP was dissolved in 1960 and the civil program transferred to the Canada Emergency Measures Organisation (Canada EMO). The Cabinet Defence Committee was replaced by an interdepartmental Advisory Committee on Emergency Plans (ACEP) to which the VPs sub-committee appears to have reported.

Background During the 1970s

6. Following the October Crisis of 1970, the Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence directed that a VPs (peace) program be established under the auspices of Canada EMO's newly created Interdepartmental Committee on Emergency Planning (ICEP). VPs were to be classified into a system of categories reflecting their importance and the effects of denial or destruction and the RCMP was to be responsible for security surveys. In 1978, following a comprehensive review, ICEP approved a paper entitled "The Canadian Government Program for the Protection of Vital Point" which included the following recommendations:

- The (until then) separate VPs programs for war and peace were to be combined into one program,
- Emergency Planning Canada (EPC) was to be responsible for advising ICEP on the identification of specific VPs, for maintaining a list of VPs categorised by their nature and degree of importance and for recommending desirable means of protecting each,
- An Advisory Committee on Vital Points (ACVP) was to be established, under the chairmanship of EPC, consisting of representatives of various departments and agencies including National Defence, Supply and Services, RCMP, National Energy Board and any others that might be required from time to time,
- The RCMP would be responsible for conducting security inspections of the identified VPs,
- EPC was to arrange for the co-operation of provincial authorities in assembling and maintaining a list of VPs (in their jurisdictions),
- The general list was to be incorporated into a database operated by the RCMP to provide the information that might be required of the program in any crisis that might arise.

A Note on the RCMP Security Consultation Reports

7. The RCMP Security Consultation Reports were an extremely important feature of the VP program. Once identified by a sponsoring department (and approved as a vital point by the ACVP) an RCMP consultant, accompanied by the vital point owner's representative, conducted a security consultation and briefed the facility's management on the resulting observations and security recommendations. Following the consultation, the security consultant produced a report that evaluated the vital point security posture and, as required, made recommendations concerning crisis situations. The report was then forwarded to RCMP Headquarters for input into the computer database. Copies of the computer-generated report were forwarded to the sponsoring department, which sent a copy to the owner/manager of the facility as well as to the police agency in whose jurisdiction the VP was located. Implementation of the recommendations of the report was generally the responsibility of the owner/manager who assumed any associated costs. Sponsoring departments were required to confirm the status of their vital points every three years and to follow-up with respect to any changes in status that may have occurred in the interim.

ACVP Concept of Operations – Late 1970s to Circa 1995

8. A few meetings after being established, the EPC ACVP agreed that the following would form the basis of its operations (which they continued to be until the mid nineties):

- That the concept of wartime and peacetime lists be discarded,
- That the VPs program comprise:
 - A federal list of those VPs that are of direct concern to the nation,
 - Provincial lists that are of direct concern to individual provinces but not to the entire nation,
- That the federal list be administered by the federal ACVP,
- That provincial lists be administered by provincial VPs committees co-chaired by EPC RDs and appointed provincial officials and be submitted to the federal ACVP for inclusion on the federal master list, and
- That the RCMP would maintain the VP ledger and do inspections of ACVP agreed VPs.

Background - 1980s to Mid Nineties

9. The *1981 Emergency Planning Order* ensured the continued existence of the Vital Points Program through most of the eighties. Regular meetings of the interdepartmental ACVP (chaired by EPC's Director of Emergency Operations Co-ordination) were held every four to six weeks from the late seventies into the early nineties. An in-house study by the committee presented to the ICEP in 1986;

- made recommendations to encourage non-participating provinces involvement,

- indicated ways and means to simplify and expedite the RCMP inspection process, and
- strongly urged support of a study to examine the protection aspect of category II VPs. (The 50 to 80 Category I VPs were the responsibility of the RCMP who had a mandate to protect them in an emergency, while the between 1200 and 2000 lower category VPs were considered to be the responsibility of their owner's to protect-a dubious assumption).

Some good progress was made in implementing these recommendations. The protection recommendation resulted in the 1988 Geddes Report (see Annex A).

10. The *1988 Emergencies Preparedness Act* did not specifically mention VPs but its provisions were considered by EPC senior management as being sufficiently inclusive of the ACVP's responsibilities to permit its work to continue. Interestingly it appears that in the eighties at least comparatively, other nation's similar programs fell short of Canada's Vital Points Program in terms of consistency and comprehensiveness.

General Comment on ACVP Activities during the Eighties and Early Nineties

11. During the period May 1983 to June 1992 the activities of the ACVP were deliberately "routinized" as much as possible with the following characterising the Program's various activities and accomplishments:

- The committee consistently met every four to eight weeks. At times these meetings were held on the premises of some of the local VPs in order to better the committee members' understanding of the ramifications of their endeavours.
- EPC created a position whose incumbent was permanently assigned the responsibilities of ACVP secretariat. This person did much of the actual research into some of the more involved issues relating to the designation of certain complex VPs as well as performed many secretariat functions.
- A formal manual was created (for the first time) which described all of policy and procedures relating to the functioning of the program. This document included (in some detail) both the departmental assessment processes necessary for a VP to be considered by the committee prior to being designated as a VP and the RCMP inspection, reporting and ledger-keeping responsibilities.
- Assessment forms and supporting administrative procedures were constantly reviewed and modified as necessary to keep them as simple and relevant as possible.
- VPs were deleted from and/or added to the ledger only after rigorous investigation and cross-examination by fellow ACVP members. (In fact many more points were deleted than added in this time period.)

- An internal review was done to confirm the mandate and to find ways and means of persuading some of the non-participating provinces (especially Ontario and Quebec) to get involved.
- The RCMP ledger (database) was “computerised” to quickly facilitate search, retrieval and display of the necessary information in a readily accessible and useable form in a crisis.
- A consultant (Mr. Geddes) was engaged to examine the implications inherent in the problem of protecting vital points once they have been so designated. See Annex A for a description and discussion of this report.

Changes (and Problems) in the Mid to Late Nineties

12. The effects of a number of years of downsizing on federal government departments in the early to mid nineties significantly impacted the emergency preparedness capabilities of those departments (including EPC, which lost the staff member performing the duties of the ACVP secretariat). Many of the Committee’s departmental members who were previously tasked full-time to emergency preparedness activities retired and were not replaced or were moved into other areas of endeavour. VP support activities (even though they were generally not very time consuming) were among the first to be dropped. The ACVP began to meet less and less frequently with fewer and fewer members would showing up for the meetings. Discussions often centred on means of reducing the VP workload. The RCMP representative was particularly concerned with that issue because of the work required to prepare security consultation reports.

13. The VP program’s main concern since its inception had been the threat of sabotage, particularly by a foreign power. This remained valid even when the main threat to Canada and its allies changed from conventional to nuclear war. The end of the Cold War seemed to signal to many that, since the former Soviet Union had disintegrated, the threat of externally sponsored sabotage had disappeared. However to others it appeared that the source of threats to VPs had merely changed from that originating from a large, very visible superpower to one numerous smaller, not so obvious “rogue” states or fanatical cause-oriented organisations instigating terrorist attacks. There was considerable desire to cash-in the “peace dividend” and to reduce, eliminate or redirect war oriented programs such as the VP program.

14. In 1994 the ACVP decided to assemble a working group to examine the Program’s future. Many factors including the effects of downsizing/personnel cuts and the (at least perceived) reduction from the threat of sabotage as a result of the end of the Cold War, reinforced the need for such a review. The VP Review Working Group tabled its report in March 1994 with the following recommendations:

- The VP Program should be re-oriented from the original security consideration to one of emergency preparedness and response.

- A new mandate should be adopted for the VP Program (worded as follows). “The VP Program is an emergency preparedness program established to identify, evaluate, register, and maintain data on facilities which are essential to the federal government’s emergency response.”
- The federal and provincial applications of the VP Program should be realigned, taking into consideration the provincial jurisdiction in this area.
- Following endorsement of the new concept by ACVP and EPAC, a working group should be formed to conduct an in depth study on the administrative requirements of the program.

15. While the report was accepted by the ACVP there was significant disagreement by some members, not only with their recommendations, but also with their “considerations” and the rationale they appeared to use to derive them. As well there was great concern with the practicality of implementing the new concept of operations. For example, the Working Group’s insistence that not only security threats to VPs be an ACVP focus but that all hazards (natural and industrial/accidental) be considered was felt to potentially increase the Program’s work load, not reduce it. As well the suggestion that the ACVP not in any way concern itself with national threat assessments, the protection implications of the VP process or provincial VPs was not acceptable to a number of the ACVP members. When queried on these points, the Working Group’s response was that once the new concept had been approved, the administrative requirements would be determined and other details resolved. This report and the split that it created in the ACVP, along with the lessening general interest in the Program resulted in little very VP non routine activity during the following year.

16. In an effort to get at least a minimum of activity going again, in April 1995 the then ACVP Chairperson, Mr. Mike Martin produced a paper assessing the situation and proposing a “maintenance mode” Program. In summary his rationale was as follows; the 1988 *Emergency Preparedness Act* stipulates that each minister is responsible for identifying the civil emergency requirements that are within or related to their areas of responsibility. As well, in compliance with the *Government Security Policy* of the mid-nineties, each minister is accountable for developing, testing and, when authorised, implementing civil emergency plans. That Policy also required that essential services and associated availability concerns be identified as part of the mandatory business resumption planning of a department. Mr. Martin indicated that VP matters in effect were an integral part of the essential services and availability concerns envisioned by the Security Policy and thus should be the direct concern of departments and agencies. He suggested such an approach would reduce the need for a separate comprehensive VP Program. He went on to propose the following:

- The Program remain federally active with EPC as co-ordinator.
- Each department maintain it own VP list, managed in accordance with its security program.
- The RCMP continue to maintain the national VP database with departments inputting changes directly.

- In an emergency, departments review their VPs and refer to Sol Gen any at risk.
- The status of any VPs at risk be distributed to those with a need-to-know (including the GEOCC) for emergency management purposes.
- The ACVP meet annually or at the call of the chairperson to review the program and report on its status to EPC's Emergency Preparedness Advisory Committee.

17. The intent behind these changes was to maintain a degree of continuity of the VP Program (in an, albeit somewhat dormant state) but to reduce its human resources requirements significantly. The idea was to maintain a VP Program capability at a level sufficient to permit activation reasonably quickly (but not instantly) if needed.

18. The 128th ACVP meeting, chaired (on a somewhat exceptional basis) by Mr. Dave Peters EPC's A/DGRO, made a number of proposals and recommendations concerning the Working Group's report and future activities resulting from that its input to the future of the ACVP. In effect selected parts of both the Working Group's report and Mr. Martin's paper were adopted by the Committee. While there were outstanding actions to take place subsequent to this meeting, the retirement of Mr. Martin and later Mr. Peters along with other personnel turbulence in EPC and ACVP member departments seems to have resulted in the 128th meeting being the last.

19. In preparation for the Y2K event, the Officer-in Charge of the RCMP National Operations Centre (the current holder of the vital points list) attempted to determine the status of the Program in a June 1999 letter to EPC. In that letter he expressed concern that, while resources to manage the Program were short and there was a lack of support by both sponsors and owners which "seriously threatened the integrity of the databank...", that the Program "would be a valuable source of information for agencies involved in the planning and protection of critical infrastructure/key assets". No action appears to have resulted from his requests. A recent phone conversation with him confirms that there has been no VP Program activity with respect to the list since then (1999) and that the relevant information (documentation) has been passed to OCIPPEP.

Some Thoughts about the Operation of the VP Program

20. The following are some observations by the author acquired during his connection with the VP Program from 1993 to 1996:

- **Protection-** How to actually provide for a real level of protection of the Category II VPs (or whatever the equivalent is in any future program of this nature) is a major problem. Just leaving it to the owners of the VPs will always be only a partial response and is fraught with so many uncertainties as to make it a totally inadequate solution. On the other hand even the deployment of various types of sophisticated (and expensive) detection and protection technology is unlikely to

eliminate the requirement to deploy security personnel in significant numbers (even more expensive) in the event of a real or apprehended threat.

- **Threat Assessments-** Those concerned with identifying, recording and otherwise addressing concerns about Vital Points / Critical Infrastructure / Key Assets (including providing for their protection) from whatever might threaten their continued existence and functioning must have a clear understanding as to what actually constitutes the threat. This means that if the problem is one of potential sabotage / terrorist attack / civil insurrection, the co-operation of the appropriately mandated security agencies must enlisted to proactively provide accurate and current information and assessment of the threat to those charged with doing something about protection of the facilities in question. Or if the threat is from a natural hazard (i.e. flood, hurricane, earthquake, sunspots, etc.) or an accident (i.e. chemical spill, structural failure, etc.), those agencies responsible for such hazard identification and analysis must provide this information. While provision of the latter type of information should not be much of a problem, the operation of the VP program was seriously affected by the lack of intelligence regarding potential sabotage threats in the former case.
- **Owner Cooperation-** The VP had to continually deal with how to get the owners of the identified facilities (most of whom are in the private sector with some of those being quite suspicious of the intentions of any government agency) to cooperate during the RCMP inspection process. Offering them a (free) copy of the final report and briefing them before and after the inspection visit was found to be one means of encouraging a positive response by most owners.
- **OGD Participation-** Proactive participation by relevant departments and agencies was vital to the currency and accuracy of the input and thus the list as a whole. Thus each department that had sectoral or functional (i.e. transportation, telecommunications, energy, etc.) responsibilities had a representative on the ACVP. Additionally, to avoid duplication DND had a representative (who was knowledgeable about the military VP list and the Vital Materiel Contractors List) and an RCMP member who ensured that the ACVP remained cognisant of the need for (and resource demands of) of their inspections and mandate to protect Category I VPs.
- **Provincial/Territorial Participation-** The value of having provinces identify VPs within their jurisdictional/functional needs to be examined and evaluated. Provincial participation varied greatly in proactiveness and quality across the nation. Ontario and Quebec were generally not interested. If provincial participation is actually necessary, mechanisms must be developed to properly and consistently integrate provincial participation.
- **Maintaining Usefulness-** To be useful the consolidated list/database must be as up-to-date and complete as practicable. It must be configured and stored in a form that is selectively retrievable quickly and flexibly. The value of having VP

information readily available was demonstrated during the Oka situation and the Gulf War.

Dave Peters (June 2001)

N.B. The author of this paper was Emergency Preparedness Canada's Director of Emergency Operations Co-ordination and the Chairperson of the Interdepartmental ACVP from June 1983 to May 1992. He was Acting DG Operational Readiness June 1992 to June 1997. The paper is based on his recollections, interviews with some of the former participants in the Program, a brief review of the applicable subject files and the referenced documents.

ANNEX A

THE GEDDES REPORT ON PROTECTING CATEGORY II VITAL POINTS

1. Early in 1988 the ACVP decided to try to do something about a dilemma that had been plaguing all of those involved with vital points identification and protection since World War I. The problem concerned what to do about guarding/protecting (especially Category II) civil vital points. Mr. Geddes, a consultant with the appropriate credentials was engaged to study all relevant aspects of the issue and to develop recommendations for an outline plan or plans for protecting vital points during time of war or serious civil crisis. A study group was formed to consider...”such matters as the threat, manning, training, equipping, estimated costs, financial and other resource sharing, draft orders and regulations as well as any emergency measures which may need to be added to the Government Emergency Book”- but Mr. Geddes wrote the final report with very little (if any) input from the group.

2. Mr. Geddes submitted his report late in March of 1988. The following chapter headings provide a sense of the content of the over 70 page report:

- Historical Background
- Today’s Vital points Program
- Intelligence Estimate Essential
- Notes on the Threat
- Protecting Canada’s Vital Points
- Options for Guarding
- Recommendations

3. Mr. Geddes’ report on the historical background the vital points activities since WW I was comprehensive and accurate and forms the basis of the above condensed history of the program. His depiction of the VP Program at that time (1987) provided a useful summary of its mandate and how it was organised and functioned. The report described the main features of the Program including the federal and provincial VP committees, the policy and procedures manual, OGD sponsorship of new VPs, the RCMP maintained ledger/register of identified VPs (listing 1260 federal and provincial points of all categories), the categories and classifications of VPs, the protection responsibilities of various stakeholders (including owners). It noted that Canada’s VP efforts appeared to be in advance and more active than those in the US, the UK and West Germany. For comparison purposes Mr. Geddes summarised the US’s “Key Assets Protection Program” and the UK’s “Key Points” program, including their assessment and protection arrangements.

4. The report also noted that DND maintained a separate Military Vital Points list as well as a Vital Material Contractors list outside the preview of the federal Vital Points Program. (Military vital points are located on property that is under the jurisdiction of DND and their security is the responsibility of the Canadian Forces. Vital Material

Contractors are producers of goods and services essential to DND. These contractors are responsible for the security of their own facilities. Some vital material contractors may also be listed in the federal Vital Points Ledger as federal or provincial vital points and they are marginally noted as such.)

5. After a discussion of the need for some form of official analysis of what potential threats were being faced by Canada's vital points, Mr. Geddes noted that repeated requests to the RCMP, CSIS and the military by the ACVP for such input had been denied. The lack of such information resulted in the Committee having to persuade owners of (particularly Category II) vital points, most of whom were in the private sector, to co-operate in both the identification and inspection-of-their-premises phases of the process without being able to tell them about the necessity and the urgency of their designation as a VP. Furthermore since the primary object of his study was to examine means of protecting (primarily Category II) vital points, a good understanding of the threats facing them was considered to be a basic requirement. This led Mr. Geddes to make an attempt to produce such a threat analysis based on publicly available/open information sources on his own. Although deficient in the credibility that would have come from being prepared by a official intelligence producing organisation, it was useful in that it brought together relevant information from publicly available sources in a form that was condensed, understandable and non-classified (and thus could be used in discussions with VP owners).

6. The study next presented a wide range of factual information, in précis form (and sometimes of dubious relevancy), along with considerable assessment, mixed with not a little of Mr. Geddes' opinions, ideas, arguments and suggestions on various aspects and ramifications of providing protection for Category II VPs. He next developed and evaluated eight potential options for mechanisms that he considered could provide the requisite protection. In effect he concluded that a combination of the use of Canadian Forces, civil police and private contract security guards would be required and that they would need to operate under general contingency plans developed and agreed to in advance. While not a very useful or "recipe-oriented" result, it was probably the best that could be concluded, given the information he had had been able to research and present in the main body of his report.

7. The Geddes Study was a bit of a milestone for the ACVP. While the author was quite critical of certain aspects of the operation of the ACVP, and in particular with the intelligence organisations it was trying to deal with, the report was a very comprehensive overview of the whole VP picture at the time. Most importantly for the first time in at least a decade the problem of protection of VPs had been examined in detail. Unfortunately many ACVP members felt that the outspokenness of the author and tone of some of his comments and observations distracted from the value of many of his conclusions and recommendations (and reduced the Committee's ability to use it to lever additional resources). In any case the report in general (and his conclusions and recommendations in particular) are worth a read as background information by anyone considering the problem of protecting Canada's vital points / critical infrastructure in the future.