

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

h!) Bunker!

but swank, my bunks, noting that rangements ents housed building.

is a soaring Simon Smith ce of the Se- ommission, —not even nd the lobby body else in

There are cans of fruits

and vegetables in the command center, but the Mayor probably would prefer the fare at a third-floor cafeteria.

City Hall shrugged off the critics and, in an indication of the urgency the administration attached to the project, it was finished in less than a year. That's no small accomplishment in a city where the installation of a single public toilet or the repair of a single exit on the F.D.R. Highway takes years.

Despite the quasi-military look of the

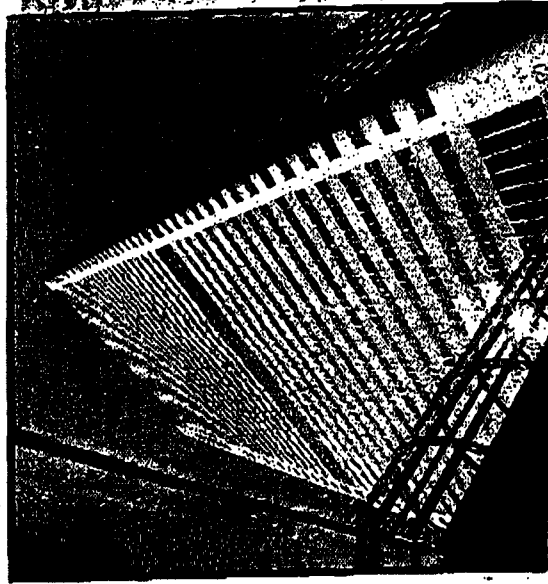
command center's décor, Mr. Hauer has strenuously rejected the suggestion that the facility is, in fact, a bunker. He has pointed out that the center is not a place for the Mayor and his allies and relatives to hunker down through disasters. Rather, he has said, the facility boasts a state-of-the-art communications system, connecting scores of people in government and law enforcement via computers to a mapping system that pinpoints the location of disasters and shows how near they are to sewer lines, water mains and subway tunnels.

"Given the things that have happened in this city," noted Bob Loudon, an expert in emergency management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, it makes sense "to upgrade what they are doing and create a new entity to make sure all agencies work together."

HEADING FOR COVER?

Of course, on a less dramatic note, the opening of the command center coincides with a dip in Mr. Giuliani's popularity and a perceived political vulnerability. The Rev. Al Sharpton has managed to reinvent himself yet again, this time at Mr. Giuliani's expense, with two weeks of well-publicized demonstrations at Times Square. The tactics of his Police Department have come under national scrutiny. And just the other day, a coyote roamed loose in Central Park.

Officials may say the facility is not a bunker, but even so, Mr. Giuliani might be forgiven for taking cover in a quiet place with a foldout couch until his political storms blow over. "He may need it—his poll numbers are dropping," quipped



Giuliani on the 23rd floor of this building, in a high-tech command center with direct telephone access to the White House.

City Council member John Sabini of Queens.

Then again, he may find no relief there, no matter how comfortable the pullout may be. The command center was the

source of plenty of office Hall intrigue, with political insiders whispering that the command center was an attempt by Mayor and Mr. Hauer to exert more control over the emergency operations at the expense of the Police Department. Various city agencies have a piece of disaster and emergency relief, and they zealously protect their turf.

Indeed, it remains to be seen how the two command centers will coordinate when both spring into action to deal with the latest disaster.

Conflict between the centers could exacerbate talk of a feud between Mr. Hauer and Police Commissioner Howard Safir, who reportedly have been at odds since plans for the new center were revealed last year.

nized early on he could better coordinate between various agencies if controlled with him," said former Police Commissioner William Bratton. "So there was a perceived need for a new center, based on watching agencies battle each other. And it also fit into his well-known penchant for absolute control."