

Excerpts from ‘America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States’ (2009) – Chaired by William J. Perry, Secretary of Defense for President William J. Clinton.

... the United States has done little to reduce its vulnerability to attack with electromagnetic pulse weapons and recommend that current investments in modernizing the national power grid take account of this risk. [pg 82]

On visions of the future: The Threat from Electromagnetic Pulse Weapons

... the United States should take steps to reduce the vulnerability of the nation and the military to attacks with weapons designed to produce electromagnetic pulse (EMP) effects. We make this recommendation although the Commission is divided over how imminent a threat this is. Some commissioners believe it to be a high priority threat, given foreign activities and terrorist intentions. Others see it as a serious potential threat, given the high level of vulnerability. Those vulnerabilities are of many kinds. U.S. power projection forces might be subjected to an EMP attack by an enemy calculating — mistakenly — that such an attack would not involve risks of U.S. nuclear retaliation. The homeland might be attacked by terrorists or even state actors with an eye to crippling the U.S. economy and American society. From a technical perspective, it is possible that such attacks could have catastrophic consequences. For example, successful attacks could shut down the electrical system, disable the internet and computers and the economic activity on which they depend, incapacitate transportation systems (and thus the delivery of food and other goods), etc.

Prior commissions have investigated U.S. vulnerabilities and found little activity under way to address them. Some limited defensive measures have been ordered by the Department of Defense to give some protection to important operational communications. But EMP vulnerabilities have not yet been addressed effectively by the Department of Homeland Security. Doing so could take several years. The EMP commission has recommended numerous measures that would mitigate the damage that might be wrought by an EMP attack. The Stimulus Bill of February 9, 2009, allocates \$11 billion to DOE for “for smart grid activities, including to modernize the electric grid.” Unless such improvements in the electric grid are focused in part on reducing EMP vulnerabilities, vulnerability might well increase.

Findings

.... The United States is highly vulnerable to attack with weapons designed to produce electromagnetic pulse effects.

Recommendations

.... EMP vulnerabilities should be reduced as the United States modernizes its electric power grid. [pg 90-91]