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## Early Warning: The Continuing Need for National Defense

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*The following is adapted from a speech delivered on March 4, 2014, at Hillsdale College's Allan P. Kirby, Jr. Center for Constitutional Studies and Citizenship in Washington, D.C.*

**Harold Rood**, a professor of international relations at Claremont McKenna College who died in 2011, was not as well known as he was influential. A soldier in Patton's army in World War II, he taught his students that war is permanent to the human condition, and that in war it is better to win, for no one ever had to accommodate a loser. America will always have enemies, he told them, and those enemies will forever be planning and expending resources to place themselves in a position to defeat us. It would be nice if it was otherwise, he was fond of saying, but it is not otherwise. It is the way the world works.

During the Cold War, Dr. Rood would demonstrate in his classes—often by reading stacks of clippings from newspapers from around the world—that the leaders of the Soviet Union understood the world in these stark terms, and that they acted consistently on that basis. He would also lecture on technology, from German steel production before 1914, to the state of Japanese fighter aircraft before 1941, and even, curiously, to maps of America's electrical transmission lines and power plants. It was important, he

thought, to understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of a nation. His classes served as an antidote for students who had grown up in post-war America—a much needed antidote, because citizens of free nations in peacetime do not historically think in such terms. We today, and our elected leaders—in whose hands we place the responsibility for national defense—are in urgent need of such an antidote, because the U.S. is increasingly and dangerously vulnerable, and our elected leaders appear oblivious.

One would think the attack on September 11, 2001, would have awakened Americans for the foreseeable future to the need to prepare for unexpected dangers. Surprisingly, its effect was short-lived. Two relatively recent attacks show the problem. The first I'll discuss took place on April 16, 2013, on an electric-transmission substation owned by Pacific Gas & Electric in California. One reason it did not get much notice was that the other—the Boston Marathon bombing that killed or injured 260 people—had occurred the day before.

## The San Jose Attack

Last April 16, just outside of San Jose, California, a group of terrorists or soldiers, operating on American soil, attacked the Metcalf transmission substation in a military action aimed at disabling a part of America's electrical infrastructure. The operation began at 1:00 a.m., when the attackers cut underground fiber optic cables, disabling communications and

security systems. Thirty minutes later, using high-powered rifles, they began a 20-minute assault on the substation's extra-large transformer and the cooling system that supports it. Police arrived at 1:50, but the shooters disappeared into the night. To this day there is no trace of them.

John Wellinghoff, then chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, would call this attack “the most significant incident of domestic terrorism involving [America's electrical] grid that has ever occurred.” Obviously it was a professional operation by skilled marksmen—estimates of the number of gunmen range from two to six—with training in reconnaissance, stealth, and evasion. That the plan went undetected, the casings from the spent shells bore no fingerprints, and the perpetrators have not been caught, suggests a high degree of intelligence. Damage to the facility forced electricity to be rerouted to maintain the integrity of power transmission to the Silicon Valley, and repairs took several months.

The political response to the attack ranged from an immediate dismissal by the FBI of the idea that it was a terrorist act—puzzling given its sophistication and its proximity in time to the Boston bombing—to recognition by a bipartisan but small group of U.S. Senators and Representatives that defending America's electrical grid is an urgent priority. Although there are over 100,000 transformers of all sizes throughout the grid, the destruction of less than two dozen key large transformers—which weigh hundreds of tons, are transported on special rail cars, and are mostly

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[Latin]: in the first place

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produced in Korea—would cause a catastrophic failure that would blackout the United States. Such is the vulnerability of the system.

America's electrical grid is vulnerable not only to San Jose-style attacks, but to an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) attack—a nuclear explosion in the high atmosphere, creating an electro-magnetic pulse that destroys electrical wiring and hardware across the affected area. Such an explosion placed over the center of the U.S. could destroy the infrastructure that distributes electricity to consumers and industrial users in every state except Alaska and Hawaii. This phenomenon has been well understood since the 1960s, and Cold War-era nuclear strategy assumed that a nuclear attack on population centers would be accompanied by an EMP attack in order to disable an enemy's command and control system.

As a side note, it has recently been discovered that a massive solar storm could cause similar damage—although probably less extensive. Scientists estimate that such storms, called Coronal Mass Ejections, strike the earth every 150 to 300 years. Since the advent of electricity we have not experienced this type of event, which means we are in the window—indeed, it is believed that such a storm just missed Earth last July. At a 2013 conference to assess such risks, analysts from Lloyds of London concluded that “the total US population at risk of extended power outage from a [Coronal Mass Ejection] is between 20 to 40 million, with durations of 16 days to 1-2 years.”

Why is it important to be thinking about the possibility of terrorists waging coordinated San Jose-style attacks on large transformers—maybe the San Jose attack was a practice run, after all—of an EMP attack, or of a solar storm of the kind just described? What we know from work performed in the 1990s by a Congressionally-mandated EMP Commission is that without electricity, the U.S. has the industrial infrastructure to provide for only 30 million of its over

300 million citizens. If an EMP attack occurred right now, the lights in this room would go off and most of us would be walking home, since many cars and gas pumps would be disabled. Our cell phones and iPads are likely to turn on, but not our computers and laptops—and in any case, cellular networks and the Internet will have likely been destroyed. Those of us able to reach home would have no lights or refrigeration. Most water is pumped electronically as well. So we would have only the food and bottled water we have stored in our houses—normally about three days worth. Our ability to communicate, to travel, to operate hospitals, to provide water and other necessities, would be lacking. The great majority of us would die from lack of food and water, or from diseases associated with lack of sanitation, medicine, and temperature control—not to mention social breakdown and the absence of civil authority. For good measure, there would be no good way to prevent our nuclear power plants from melting down, since as we saw at Fukushima they require electric power to cool their reactors.

Given the potentially devastating consequences of failing to defend our sophisticated but vulnerable electrical grid, citizens might well wonder how it is that our government, which doesn't bat an eye at spending billions of dollars on the most frivolous and wasteful projects, fails year after year to do so. The explanation goes deeper than America's physical vulnerability—it goes to our intellectual vulnerability. Which brings me to the Boston Marathon bombing.

## The Boston Attack

Immigrant brothers Dzhokar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev—the former a student at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the latter a sometime recipient of taxpayer largesse in the form of welfare—appear to have read an Internet publication of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula—likely the creation of the late American-born imam and al Qaeda

commander Anwar Al’Awlaki—called *Inspire*. It was there that they came across an illustrated article on “how to make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom.” Each and every issue of this publication seeks to inspire action against America as Islam’s number one enemy. Last spring it contained a piece by al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Commander Qassim Ar-Reimy, which read in part:

O American nation, indeed, your security is not achieved by despoiling other nations’ security or by attacking and oppressing them . . . Do you dare think that after all this you will be salvaged and feel secure? Nay! Instead, everyday you will be hit by the unexpected and your leaders can repel nothing! Hence, blame none but yourselves. Gulp the bitterness of war, death, destruction and insecurity as other oppressed humans do.

O American nation, did the war end with the killing of Sheikh Usama bin Laden (may Allah accept him) like your leaders lied unto you? The Boston events . . . indicate that . . . operations against you has taken a path which can be controlled not. Because making these bombs has become in everyone’s hand reach. They have this way and a bit of thinking, choosing a location which will damage your economy and terrify your hearts, thence you will pray for woes and destruction.

The automatic response whenever one brings up the Boston bombing, or any domestic attack or attempted attack inspired by Islam, is that there are many patriotic American Muslims who do not read the Koran literally and who abhor such violence. This is true. But here are some facts: We have today between five and ten million Muslims in the United States; and in surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, 21 percent of these Muslims find suicide bombing acceptable and five percent have a

favorable view of al Qaeda. That may be a low percentage, but five percent of five to ten million is a lot of people. Often these Muslims are radicalized by foreign agents such as the publishers of *Inspire*—as well, it must be said, as by the ideological left in our schools and in Hollywood, who tirelessly and tiresomely portray America as an oppressive country with a tradition of exploiting its minorities at home and third world peoples abroad. In any case, such a large and disaffected population presents a real problem in a free society such as ours, which is based on ideas like religious freedom and individual rights. We must hold firm to these ideas, which are the source of our greatness. But we must not be blind to the presence of those who seek to destroy us by taking advantage of our freedom.

Above all, we ought to speak the truth: When Army medical officer Nidal Hasan was charged with killing 13 people in Fort Hood, Texas, while shouting “Allahu Akbar,” for instance, he should have been charged with terrorism or combat-related murder, and not with “workplace violence,” the euphemism preferred by the Army and the Defense Department.

The leaders of Iran—a nation that possesses advanced ballistic missiles and either already has nuclear warheads, as some Soviet defectors believe, or is in the process of building them—do not themselves mince words. Gen. Massoud Jazayeri, deputy chief of staff of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, has recently said: “America’s interests and all of Israel are within the range of the Islamic Republic, and there is not the slightest doubt among Iran’s armed forces to confront the American government and the Zionists.” After 30 years of sponsoring attacks on America with impunity—from the Hezbollah bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Lebanon in 1983 to the 9/11 attack, prior to which some of the hijackers received their final pre-flight training in Iran—Iran’s leaders see no reason to stop now. For America’s part, we say that we will

not let Iran obtain a nuclear weapon, but we engage in negotiations that will let them do so by subterfuge—and we look the other way as China and Russia aid them, cutting our defense budget as we go.

## What Is To Be Done

There are clear practical steps to be taken to address America's physical vulnerabilities. The first step in protecting our electrical grid is simply to build fences around the substations to hide the large transformers. This modestly priced step has been proposed by the former head of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, but has yet to be acted upon.

Second, there are workable proposals to harden the grid against damage from an extreme solar storm. The Secure High-Voltage Infrastructure for Electricity from Lethal Damage (or SHIELD) Act has been introduced by Arizona Congressman Trent Franks. The cost would be less than a billion dollars—a drop in the bucket in an economy of over \$16 trillion. Yet the bill remains in committee.

Third, the threat of an EMP attack—the consequences of which could be even more terrible—requires a ballistic missile defense of a kind well within our capability that could stop not only a ship-launched attack from Iran, but a missile launched by China or Russia as well. The Obama administration opposes missile defense in principle, thinking it destabilizing. As a result, we are purposefully kept vulnerable, by our own government, to nuclear blackmail or attack by Russia and China and by their surrogate Iran. This is reprehensible, and missile defense should become a major political issue until our government acts.

As for the threat of domestic terrorism by Jihadists living in this country as citizens and as legal and illegal aliens, the Muslim Brotherhood—which

has made it their goal, as stated in their main operational documents, to “destroy [America’s] miserable house from within”—should be declared a terrorist organization both here and abroad. Its affiliates such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Islamic Society of North America should be disbanded, and their activities made illegal. Today these groups not only take advantage of the protection of our laws to work toward our destruction, but are officially recognized as representatives of American Muslims by officials in the White House, at the FBI, and elsewhere. At the same time, we should institute an educational program of assimilation, teaching immigrants the virtues of the American creed of equal rights, civil and religious liberty, and the rule of law under the Constitution.

\* \* \*

Here is Abraham Lincoln in a speech in 1838:

All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Bonaparte for a commander, could not by force take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

As a nation of freemen today, we are courting suicide by ignoring clear and present dangers. Our elected representatives have eyes but do not see, and they have ears but do not hear. We must awaken ourselves, and then awaken them, before it is too late. ■



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### DID YOU KNOW?

Hillsdale College's student newspaper, *The Collegian*, is the oldest college newspaper in Michigan, having first published as the *Hillsdale Herald* on October 10, 1878.