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THE HILL'S Congress Blog

Where lawmakers come to blog

Nuclear storm warnings?

By Peter Vincent Pry - 03/24/11 10:24 AM ET

White House Science Advisor John Holdren and Sir John Beddington, Science Advisor to British Prime Minister David Cameron, in a recent joint article "Celestial Storm Warnings" published in the New York Times, warned that a solar flare from the Sun could cause a great geomagnetic storm, with catastrophic consequences for the United States and the world. A great geomagnetic storm would generate a powerful electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that could destroy electronic systems and collapse all the critical infrastructures--power grids, communications, transportation, banking and finance, food and water--that sustain modern civilization, and the lives of millions. Holdren and Beddington write reassuringly that "work to protect our societies is well underway."

Unfortunately, the truth is that work to protect our societies has not even begun. Those of us who have dedicated careers to protecting the American people from an EMP catastrophe know that no actual technical work is yet underway to physically protect the national power grid from EMP. We are running out of time to make this happen. As Holdren and Beddington note, the solar maximum, and increased possibility of a great geomagnetic storm, is fast approaching, now less than a year away.

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The press remains largely in the dark or indifferent to the EMP threat. For example, on February 15 (the same day as a worrisome solar flare that fortunately missed the Earth) a new Congressional Caucus convened for the first time--the Congressional Caucus on EMP. And the EMP Caucus rolled out a newly minted bill--the SHIELD Act (HR 668). Both the Caucus and the SHIELD Act are intended to protect the U.S. national power grid from an EMP event generated by the Sun or by hostile actors.

EMP is perhaps the only issue in our polarized Congress that has united liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans. Yet this rare consensus has been ignored by the press. The press also ignored the launching of the EMP Caucus and the SHIELD Act.

Strangely, Holdren and Beddington warn only about the natural EMP threat from a great geomagnetic storm, and ignore the manmade EMP threat posed by a nuclear weapon in the hands of terrorists or rogue states. Yet the Holdren-Beddington article is based on data and studies from the Congressional EMP Commission--that warns about both natural and nuclear EMP threats.

The press too has largely ignored that an Iranian nuclear weapons program threatens not only Israel, but the existence of the United States, by means of nuclear EMP attack. Just one short-range nuclear missile, launched from a freighter off our coast, could make an EMP attack that would cause the collapse across the entire United States of all the critical infrastructures. We might never know who attacked us, since a ship-launched EMP could be done under a false flag, and so millions of Americans murdered anonymously.

Iranian military writings openly describe making a nuclear EMP attack to eliminate the United States from the world stage. Iran has conducted missile launches that look suspiciously like training to make an EMP attack--including launching a missile off a vessel in the Caspian Sea. Russia is now marketing to rogue states its Club-K missile system, designed to clandestinely convert any common container ship into a missile launch platform, while preserving the freighter's innocent appearance.

On March 9, the day before the Holdren-Beddington article appeared, North Korea reportedly attacked U.S. and South Korean military communications, and disrupted communications in three South Korean cities, using a non-nuclear EMP jammer purchased from Russia. Moreover, according to South Korean military officials, the North is on the verge of completing a "Super-EMP" nuclear warhead. The Defense Intelligence Agency recently testified to Congress that North Korea may now have nuclear warheads deliverable by missile.

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It seems that, in addition to celestial storm warnings, we should also heed these earthly warnings of an impending nuclear storm.

Dr. Peter Vincent Pry is President of EMPact America, Director of the U.S. Nuclear Strategy Forum, and served on the staffs of the EMP Commission, the Strategic Posture Commission, the House Armed Services Committee and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Comments (11)

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I remember hearing about this in the 1960s. It was considered a serious threat then, though a majority of our electronics was still based on tubes and wire conductors. The threat then was to transistors and the attack would need to be accompanied by a conventional ICBM assault because too much older or shielded tech would survive. In a sane world the launch would be likely to be detected, the ship seized and the perpetrator eventually traced. As a WMD attack the deterrent has always been the sure depopulation of the offending nation as a warning to any who might copy them, but I seem to recall our current leader thinks that would be too harsh and so we have less deterrent.

BY **EDWIN LOFTUS** on 03/24/2011 at 11:09

Its hard to believe half of what is out there . But if you collect all the data you can and through it at the wall you will see that some of this info does stick. I am going to hedge my bet and prepare for the worst,but hope for the best. For those who wish to prepare this site could help.http://www.survivaloutdoorgear.com/product_info.php?products_id=54176372

BY **TIM RALSTON** on 03/24/2011 at 13:00

Start training the kids in school to get under their desks and cover their heads again...

BY **GEORGE** on 03/24/2011 at 13:17

I just listened to an interview with the Chairman of the EMP Commission, Dr. William Graham, yesterday on Dr. Pry's radio program (www.empactradio.com).

Dr. Graham said something that really stuck with me. He said we are great at responding to emergencies, but not great at preparing for them. I hope the SHIELD Act passes before an EMP takes out our electric grid.

BY **MARK WHITING** on 03/24/2011 at 13:45

This is a serious and bi-partisan issue. It's nice to see that someone is at least trying to do something about it. Let's hope that Congress get's the SHIELD Act through. Too bad the Senate dropped the ball on the GRID Act last year after the House passed it unanimously. We have a lot of hot priorities in this country, but this should certainly be one at the top, and it looks lite a pretty light lift with support on both sides. Hopefully, the Congressional EMP Caucus will help too. We really need to do more to protect our infrastructure and plan ahead for major issues — this isn't something we can put off and worry about after it happens. If you haven't read the Congressional EMP Commission Reports and other Blue Ribbon studies on this subject, I highly recommend that you check them out. Very sobering information. Also, the Chair of the EMP Commission, Dr. William Graham, was

on EMPact Radio speaking with Dr. Pry yesterday - an archived version can be streamed/downloaded at www.empactradio.com .

BY **ESQ** on 03/24/2011 at 14:06

When I read that the House UNANIMOUSLY passed the GRID Act last year, I was impressed. And when I found out that a single Senator prevented it from moving forward in the Senate, I was impressed in a completely different way. Sounds like the SHIELD Act has a much better chance of passing.

BY **MICHAEL B.** on 03/24/2011 at 14:30

Well stated! Would Iran do this to us? In a heartbeat! Would North Korea? You bet! In fact, they would probably work together on the "take-down." Not only would they be able to boast about having taken the remaining superpower out of the global political picture for a long period of time (I've heard that recovery could take from 4 – 10 years), but they could save weapons and resources in doing it this way. It's virtually a given that some anti-American nation or nations will see this option as an opportunity they can't pass up.

BY **HOD** on 03/24/2011 at 14:51

12/2/2010—Introduced.Securing Human Intelligence and Enforcing Lawful Dissemination Act or the SHIELD Act - Amends the federal criminal code to expand the prohibition against disclosure of classified information to include: (1) disclosures of classified information that benefit a transnatCloseOfficial Summary

12/2/2010—Introduced.Securing Human Intelligence and Enforcing Lawful Dissemination Act or the SHIELD Act - Amends the federal criminal code to expand the prohibition against disclosure of classified information to include:
 (1) disclosures of classified information that benefit a transnational threat; and
 (2) any classified information concerning the human intelligence activities of the United States or any foreign government or concerning the identity of a classified source or informant of an element of the U.S. intelligence community. Defines "transnational threat" as:

(1) any activity, including international terrorism, narcotics trafficking, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the delivery systems for such weapons, or organized crime, that threatens the national security of the United States; or
 (2) any individual or group that engages such activity.

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BY **DENNIS** on 03/24/2011 at 18:15

Nice article Dr Pry. Keep up the good work.

BY **MARK S** on 03/24/2011 at 19:57

Good riddance to bad rubbish. I'm rooting for such an event. The amish know. The indians knew. It's time.

BY **JB HICCOCK** on 03/25/2011 at 02:56

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