

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY  
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

**Opening Statement of Senator Jon Kyl**

“Government Preparedness and Response  
to a Terrorist Attack Using Weapons of Mass Destruction”

**Introduction**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. Our preparedness for an attack by weapons of mass destruction is an issue of vital importance.

Unfortunately, it receives relatively little attention today. While unfriendly nations have had the ability to inflict great damage on our nation with weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist groups have sought the capability to do so for some time, our government has not sufficiently prepared for such an attack.

**EMP**

One threat to which the government is particularly ill-equipped to respond is the threat posed by an electromagnetic pulse or EMP attack. When a nuclear weapon is detonated hundreds of miles above the earth, the resulting radiation would interact with the Earth's atmosphere to produce an electromagnetic pulse. The resulting EMP waves would cause severe damage to electronic devices and just a single weapon could affect much of the United States. People aboard planes and those on life support systems at hospitals would be the first casualties.

However, without power for medical care, food refrigeration and water purification and delivery, the death toll could climb to staggering proportions.

Unfortunately, a successful EMP attack would not require a high level of military or nuclear sophistication. A relatively crude nuclear weapon, mounted on a SCUD missile, could be launched from a ship in U.S. waters and inflict massive damage on the United States.

In 2001, Congress established a commission, known as the EMP Commission, to assess the threat to the United States from EMP attack.<sup>1</sup> The commission investigated the potential impact of an EMP attack and released its findings in 2004. Shortly thereafter, this subcommittee held a hearing to review the commission's findings and recommendations.<sup>2</sup> Chief among them, the Commission concluded that several classes of potential adversaries, including terrorist groups, have or could acquire the capability to attack the United States with an EMP weapon and potentially inflicted great damage. As the Commission stated in its report, "Depending on the specific characteristics of the attacks, unprecedented cascading failures of our major infrastructures could result. In that event, a regional or national recovery would be long and difficult and would

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<sup>1</sup> *Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack*, <http://www.empcommission.org/> (last visited Aug. 3, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Terrorism and the EMP Threat to Homeland Security*, 109th Cong., 1st Sess. (Mar. 8, 2005) (S. Hrg 109-30, Serial No. J-109-5) [hereinafter "Hearing of March 8, 2005"].

seriously degrade the safety and overall viability of our Nation.”<sup>3</sup> The commission also found that the damage to our vulnerable infrastructure would be catastrophic and the recovery process would be lengthy and challenging.<sup>4</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While there are many important topics that will be discussed today, I look forward to hearing an update from our witnesses on the current risk we face from an EMP attack, as well as the steps we may need to take and have taken to prepare for such an attack. I hope the subcommittee will continue to pursue this matter and do its part to ensure that the federal government can respond to an attack by weapons of mass destruction.

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<sup>3</sup> Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack, *Report of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack, Vol. 1: Executive Report 2004*, 1 (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack, *Report of the Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack, Vol. 1: Executive Report 2004*, 1 (2004).