

Statement of Ted Koppel

“Assessing the Security of Critical Infrastructure: Threats, Vulnerabilities, and Solutions”

May 18, 2016

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee.

Your late colleague, the distinguished Senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, liked to say that each of us is entitled to his own opinion, we are not, however, entitled to our own facts. That observation, which once seemed both sensible and self-evident, can no longer be taken for granted. In a political climate where even the President’s status as a natural born American citizen remains the object of doubt for more than a quarter of our population as he nears the end of his second term in office, in that climate it will be difficult to settle the far more complex issue before the committee this morning: Is the nation at risk of a crippling cyber attack against elements of our infrastructure in general and against one or more of our electric power grids in particular? After more than a year of research into the question, I believe the answer to be “yes.”

Simply stated, the electric power industry is made up of 3200 separate companies linked in a network that both generates and distributes electricity. For the system to function, a perfect balance has to be maintained between the amount of electricity being generated and the amount being distributed. Only the Internet is capable of maintaining that exquisite balance at all times. The Internet was never designed to be defended. The Internet remains vulnerable to cyber attack. Evidence of that vulnerability is accumulating every single day in private industry, government agencies and in breaches of our personal data. General Keith Alexander, the former head of the National Security Agency, likes to say that there are only two kinds of companies – those that have been hacked and those that don’t yet know it. Members of this committee are certainly familiar with the conclusion of our intelligence agencies that the Chinese and the Russians have already mapped and penetrated the systems that control our electric power grids. Iran is not far behind. Nations like North Korea and Syria are enhancing their cyber warfare capabilities. It is surely only a matter of time before a terrorist group, unrestrained by any geopolitical interests, acquires the capability to attack one of our power grids.

The problem, as Tom Ridge, our first Secretary of Homeland Security, noted is that ours is a reactive, not a pre-emptive society. In the wake of the attacks on 9/11/2001, the United States embarked on actions and expenditures that would have been inconceivable only a week earlier.

My message to this committee this morning is simple: The nation cannot wait for a cyber attack on the grid before making preparations for its consequences. It is my belief (and again, this committee has access to more information on this subject than I) – I believe that while the Department of Homeland Security has plans for dealing with the consequences of hurricanes, blizzards, floods and earthquakes, it has no discreet plan for dealing with the aftermath of a cyber attack on one of the nation’s power grids. The Department’s recommendations for each disaster are essentially the same: a two to three-day supply of food and water for each

person, a plan for families to meet at a pre-arranged point, a supply of essential medicines, flashlights and a battery-powered radio. A cyber attack against one of our electric power grids could deprive tens of millions of Americans of electricity for a period of weeks or even months. I asked Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson what, exactly, he would be telling Americans on their battery powered radios after an attack that he was unwilling or unable to share now. He gestured toward a shelf carrying several white binders: "I'm sure there's a plan up there somewhere," he told me. I don't share the Secretary's confidence.

We have neither the adequate food supplies to take care of those millions who decide to shelter in place, nor the collaborative plans with state governments to house and feed what could amount to millions of internal refugees. If we began tomorrow, Mr. Chairman, implementing such plans would still take a couple of years.

I thank the Committee for its attention to this critical issue.