

OPINION

The Threat to Melt the Electric Grid

By Henry F. Cooper
And Peter Vincent Pry

The Pentagon is moving the headquarters for the North American Aerospace Defense Command (Norad) back into Cheyenne Mountain near Colorado Springs, Colo., a decade after having largely vacated the site.

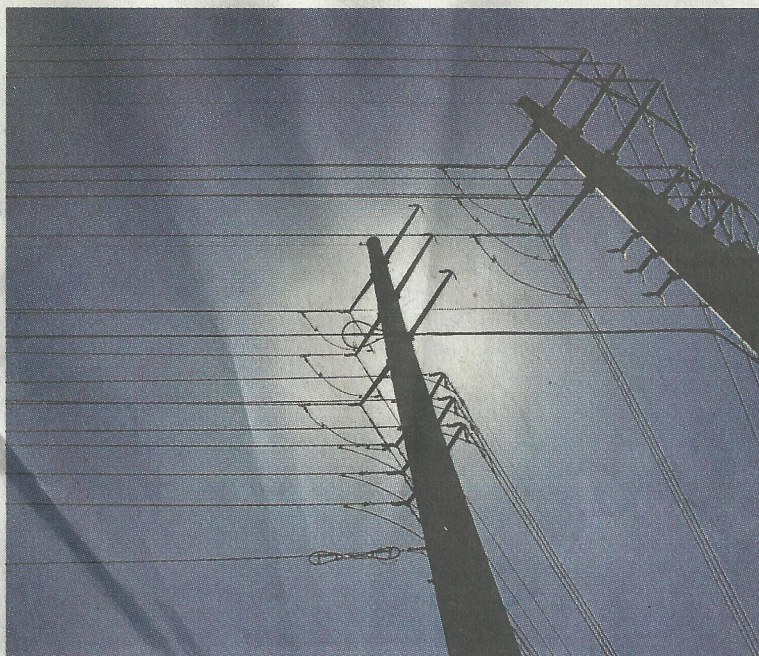
Why the return? Because the enormous bunker in the hollowed-out mountain, built to survive a Cold War-era nuclear conflict, can also resist an electromagnetic-pulse attack, or EMP. America's military planners recognize the growing threat from an EMP attack by bad actors around the world, in particular North Korea and Iran.

An EMP strike, most likely from the detonation of a nuclear weapon in space, would destroy unprotected military and civilian electronics nationwide, blacking out the electric grid and other critical infrastructure for months or years. The staggering human cost of such a catastrophic attack is not difficult to imagine.

The primary headquarters for Norad, which provides early warning and command and control for the defense of the U.S. against nuclear attack, has for a decade been at nearby Peterson Air Force Base. Critical Norad operations are being moved back into Cheyenne Mountain, and the Pentagon recently awarded a \$700 million contract to Raytheon to upgrade electronics through 2020.

At an April 7 Pentagon news conference, Norad Commander Adm. William Gortney noted that Norad is going back underground "because of the very nature of the way that Cheyenne Mountain's built. It's EMP-hardened." He explained that North Korea now has mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles, the KN-08, armed with nuclear warheads, that can strike the U.S. While the KN-08 is inaccurate, it could be used to launch a high-altitude nuclear EMP attack.

Adm. Gortney reassured those at the news conference that the U.S. can defend itself from a nuclear-missile threat from North Korea—or from Iran "if we get our assessment



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wrong," he said, referring to the current nuclear negotiations. U.S. missile defense, he said, is "able to defend the nation against both those particular threats today."

That is true as far as it goes—but only if an attack on the U.S. comes from the northern skies. Former senior Reagan administration officials

An electromagnetic-pulse attack from North Korea or another U.S. enemy would cause staggering devastation.

warn that the U.S. is unprepared to cope with nuclear EMP strikes from North Korea and Iran if their missiles' trajectory takes a southern route.

We are among those former Reagan officials. We joined William Graham (President Reagan's science adviser and subsequent chairman of the Congressional EMP Commission) and Fritz Ermarth (a former chairman of the National Intelligence Council) in warning in Newsmax in February that Iran should be regarded

as already having nuclear missiles capable of making an EMP attack against the U.S. Iran and North Korea have successfully orbited satellites on south-polar trajectories that appear to practice evading U.S. missile defenses, and at optimum altitudes to make a surprise EMP attack.

The U.S. has no ballistic-missile early-warning radars or ground-based interceptors facing south and would be blind to a nuclear warhead orbited as a satellite from a southern trajectory. The missile defense plans were oriented during the Cold War for a northern strike from the Soviet Union, and they have not been adapted for the changing threats.

The Pentagon was wise to move Norad communications back into Cheyenne Mountain and to take measures elsewhere to survive an EMP attack. But how are the American people to survive? In the event of a yearlong nationwide blackout, tens of millions of Americans would perish from starvation and societal chaos, according to members of the Congressional EMP Commission, which published its last unclassified report in 2008.

Yet President Obama has not acted

on the EMP Commission's draft executive order to protect national infrastructure that is essential to provide for the common defense. Hardening the national electric grid would cost a few billion dollars, a trivial amount compared with the loss of electricity and lives following an EMP attack. The U.S. also should deploy one of its existing transportable radars in the Philippines to help the ground-based interceptors at California's Vandenberg Air Force defend the country against an attack from the south.

Congress also has failed to act on the plans of its own EMP commission to protect the electric grid and other civilian infrastructure that depends on a viable electric grid—such as communications, transportation, banking—that are essential to the economy. In recent years, the GRID Act, the Shield Act, and the Critical Infrastructure Protection Act have gained bipartisan and even unanimous support in the House, yet they died in the Senate.

States are not waiting for Washington to act. Maine and Virginia have enacted legislation and undertaken serious studies to consider how to deal with an EMP attack. Florida's governor and emergency manager are considering executive action to harden their portion of the grid. Colorado legislators are holding hearings on legislation to protect their citizens. Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Indiana, Idaho and New York have initiatives in various stages to deal with an EMP attack.

When ancient Rome could no longer protect its empire from barbarians, cities tried to protect themselves by building walls. Now Washington, unable or unwilling to protect its people, is making it necessary for states to build their own defenses against the electromagnetic-pulse barbarians of the 21st century.

Amb. Cooper is the former director of the Strategic Defense Initiative. Mr. Pry is executive director of the EMP Task Force on National and Homeland Security and served in the EMP Commission, the House Armed Services Committee, and the Central Intelligence Agency.