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Comments of Michael Mabee to the Electricity Advisory Committee, October 21, 2021

I commend the Department of Energy for holding this meeting and I commend the members of the Electricity Advisory Committee for your service to this country.

My ask of the Electricity Advisory Committee is simple: In all you do and in all your advice to the U.S. Department of Energy, the security of the electric grid must be the paramount concern. Nothing else will matter if the U.S. suffers a long-term blackout as a result of either a foreign actor, terrorist attack or natural disaster.

On June 6, 2021 Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm confirmed in a CNN interview that U.S. adversaries have the capability to shut down our power grid.¹

As far back as 2001, China attempted to hack the U.S. grid in the Cal-ISO case² and in 2003, Congress expressed concern about China conducting “coordinated cyber reconnaissance” and “probing” U.S. electric utilities.³

According to U.S. Customs data, between 2006 through August of 2021 the U.S. has imported 372 Large transformers from the People’s Republic of China. 297 of these have a power handling capability over 100,000 kVA.⁴

These imports are not limited to large transformers. According to U.S. International Trade Commission data, the U.S. has imported millions of smart meters as well as inverters for PV use from China over the past decade.⁵ Cyber is not just a software problem: It is a hardware problem.⁶

To summarize the problem: We are buying critical equipment from the People’s Republic of China to install into our critical electric infrastructure that China is already hacking.

In addition to the cyber threat, according to Department of Energy OE-417 data, there have been 763 physical attacks against the electric grid since 2010.⁷ If 9/11 taught us anything, it is that we are not safe

¹ CNN. “Energy secretary says adversaries have capability of shutting down US power grid.” June 6, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/06/politics/us-power-grid-jennifer-granholm-cnnty/index.html>

² Morain, Dan. Los Angeles Times. “Hackers Victimize Cal-ISO.” June 9, 2001. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jun-09-mn-8294-story.html>

³ Implications of Power Blackouts for The Nation’s Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure Protection, Before the US House, Joint Hearing of the Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Science, and Research and Development, and the Subcommittee on Infrastructure and Border Security of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, (108th Congress) September 4 & 23, 2003. <http://bit.ly/2qV9La3>

⁴ See: <https://michaelmabee.info/database-of-chinese-transformers/>

⁵ See: <https://dataweb.usitc.gov/>

⁶ Wall Street Journal. “U.S. Seizure of Chinese-Built Transformer Raises Specter of Closer Scrutiny.” May 27, 2020 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-seizure-of-chinese-built-transformer-raises-specter-of-closer-scrutiny-11590598710>

⁷ See: <https://michaelmabee.info/oe-417-database/>

from a physical attack in the United States. A coordinated physical attack against our electric grid would be much easier to pull off than hijacking 4 planes. The 9/11 Commission said: "the most important failure was one of imagination."⁸

We cannot repeat this failure of imagination with our Achilles' heel: the electric grid.

Imagine what a long-term blackout would do to the U.S. Everything we need to support our human population would stop. Food, water, fuel, communications, transportation, the medical system just to name a few of the 16 critical infrastructures – all of which are dependent on the electric grid. Any threat to the electric grid is an existential threat to the United States.

This is a true emergency. Right now, our lights are on at the discretion of our adversaries. Tomorrow, somebody may decide to turn them off.

I implore the Electricity Advisory Committee to make grid security its number one priority in all of its work and to act with a sense of urgency befitting this national security threat.

The threats are here. They are real and we are out of time.

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Also Included for the record:

Complaint of Michael Mabee in FERC Docket EL21-99-000. Copy available at:

<https://michaelmabee.info/chinese-transformer-complaint-filed-with-u-s-government/>

⁸ The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. "The 9/11 Commission Report." July 22, 2004. <http://bit.ly/3bjibKW>