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Strategist Highlights How Hurricane Sandy Shows Vulnerability of US Cities to Cyber Threats

Washington, DC — Hurricane Sandy, which ravaged the north-eastern United States on October 29-30, 2012, highlighted the vulnerability of electricity- and computer-dependent urban concentrations to orchestrated, man-made threats to infrastructure, such as cyber warfare, according to strategic philosopher Gregory Copley.

Copley, President of the International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA), noted that the threat of cyber war to complex urban infrastructures was far greater than the threat — or anticipated destructive power — of nuclear weapons.

“Sandy is a kiss on the cheek compared with the surprise impact of a concerted, man-made cyber attack on the urban network of a great region,” Copley said. His new book, *UnCivilization: Urban Geopolitics in a Time of Chaos*, details how the past few decades of compounded migration into urban areas has built great societal wealth, but also extreme vulnerability and fragility.

“We are now totally dependent on sustained electrical power,” Copley said. “We have become ‘energy man’, and all of the tools which we have built over several millennia have now come together in forms which only function with electrification.” He outlined in his new book, *UnCivilization*, how all urban societies have become totally dependent on the constant delivery of energy. “All transportation, even the delivery of gasoline at the pump or water at the faucet, is dependent on electricity and computerization; interfere with that matrix and people cannot even flee from disaster areas.”

“All disaster planners know, but rarely discuss, the reality that sustained interference with the energy matrix can result in millions of deaths,” he said.

He notes that cyber warfare can now do what was impossible even a few decades ago: it can totally reduce a modern society to ruin with far greater effect than nuclear warfare or the forces of nature. “Nuclear threats today are essentially a form of terrorism, and nuclear weapons are rarely able to win wars. Massive interference with electrical infrastructure can bring about chaos of the type we saw in Germany and Russia late in World War I; they determined the collapse of the societies.”

“Modern urban societies are dramatically more vulnerable than the cities of 1917 were,” he said.

His major new book notes that modern, urban-dominated societies have yet to face existential challenges. Earlier, balanced nation-states were able to face what was then “total war” — such as World Wars I and II — and sustain themselves. “What we see today with such events as the Japanese *tsunami* of 2011 and Hurricane Sandy are opportunities to see how societies can mobilize to function when all their sources of electrical power and potable water supply are cut off,” he said. “With a sustained cyber attack, the objective would be to paralyze and distract governance by turning cities into the front line of a war.”

The book also notes how urbanization also changes political attitudes, creating a new “urban logic” which differs substantially from the logic of rural societies or balanced rural-urban societies. “This has polarized thinking in all modern societies, to the point that urban thinking is now literally at war with the non-cyber traditional thinking of rural societies. Urban logic is attached to a concrete terror. In other words, city dwellers are as attached to what it takes to survive in their environment as rural dwellers are to the growing seasons,” Copley said.
