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May 13, 2009

Secretary Janet Napolitano
Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Re: nuclear plant security compromised

Dear Secretary Napolitano,

There now exists a very serious compromise of security at our nation's nuclear power plants. Due to the very high quality of satellite images, terrorists and saboteurs can see far too much detail, which gives specific advantages to an attacking force. Some of the defensive positions of nuclear plant guards are now revealed due to the elevated level of clarity and resolution. Furthermore, these images reveal pathways, stairways, and potential staging areas giving terrorists the ability to plan the quickest route or the best route to the specific targeted building(s).

The resolution of these images allows one to see individuals, gun turrets, vehicle barriers, open doors and the ability to count the fence posts. There are other features I cannot disclose in this publicly available letter.

Additionally, the newest online software features allows one to view a target from the four compass point angles; i.e. looking north, east, south and west.

These are not merely rotated images, these are additional images shot from different vantage points. It would be easy to fabricate an exceptionally accurate model of a specific nuclear plant from these multiple viewpoints.

I have been observing the improvements of the free satellite images since their prominence on the internet a decade ago. As images improved, I became increasingly concerned. But now, I am alarmed at the level of details previously unavailable to anyone using his home computer and free software and images.

One solution would be to have suppliers of such images agree to significantly reduce the quality and resolution of images for sensitive secured areas. This currently appears to be the circumstances for some military and other sensitive areas which are now blurred.

It is disturbing to me that terrorists can now perform considerable surveillance without visiting the targeted site. Note that the attackers in Mumbai India were assisted by free satellite images available online.

I am also disturbed by the fact that there are no guards posted at nuclear plant entrances. One would think that entrances are one place where guards should be visible to send a message of high security. Instead, entrances are wide open and unguarded. There are guards posted closer to the plant, but having no entrance guards provides some advantages to attackers and poses specific problems for emergency responders at certain nuclear plants.

I have 25 years experience with nuclear plant security issues. In 2004 I was able to cause the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to remove sensitive documents from an online document retrieval system. The documents gave too much detail to terrorists concerning the exact location (even floor plans) for

radioactive material usable for dirty bombs. The NRC took this action only after CNN and NBC reported this problem. (see “Blueprints for terrorists?”

<http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/10/19/terror.nrc/index.html>)

I am able to provide more details in a closed session. In fact, there are additional problems I would like to present. For now, I am adopting the safeguarded method of communication employed by the NRC on such matters – i.e. it’s appropriate to discuss specific vulnerabilities but not name the site; or, it’s appropriate to name the site, but not the specific vulnerability. I am aware of your experiences with security at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station while Governor of Arizona, so I know that you can appreciate the importance of this national security matter.

Cordially,

Scott D. Portzline

Cc:

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