

Lost Missiles and Lost Messages:
How the Air Force Misplaced Six Nuclear Weapons
Without Anyone Knowing

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ABSTRACT

CHRIS HIGGINBOTHAM: Lost Missiles and Lost Messages: How the Air Force
Misplaced Six Nuclear Weapons Without Anyone Knowing
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When the Air Force accidentally shipped six nuclear weapons across the country, it led to a breakdown in the confidence of the American public in the service. As the Air Force took action to repair its procedures, a series of dated regulations and communication errors kept the service from repairing its reputation. The conflict between the need to inform and the need to protect national security led to an inconsistent communication strategy that hamstrung the service and left its credibility crippled in an extended and multifaceted crisis. This case study examines the Air Force's mistakes and provides suggestions for how the military can better communicate with its stakeholders.

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Introduction

It was a typical Wednesday morning at Montana's Minot Air Force Base in August 2007. The mission: transfer 12 unarmed AGM-129 Advanced Cruise Missiles to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana. It was one day of a multi-week operation to move the aging missiles into storage for retirement. Personnel began the day by removing 12 steel cylinders from the base's secure weapons storage facility and had them loaded under the wings of an aging B-52 bomber by that evening. When the airmen went home for the day, the missiles hung under the wings of an aircraft protected by the base's standard security measures – an exterior fence and roving guards. They sat there until the plane took off the next morning.

This is standard operating procedure for shipping unarmed missiles. It was a mission the airmen at Minot had been performing for weeks, having already shipped more than 200 of the decommissioned missiles to Barksdale (Warrick & Pincus, 2007). The problem on this day – a problem which was not identified until 36 hours after those missiles were removed from storage – is that six of the missiles had been misidentified by Minot personnel.

The AGM-126 was designed to carry the W80-1 warhead, a nuclear warhead with the destructive capacity of up to 10 of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima (Warrick & Pincus, 2007). When the missile is disarmed, a dummy warhead is inserted to maintain the missile's proportions for flight purposes, leaving it with the same weight and basic visual profile. It was Thursday night before anyone realized that six of these bombs still carried live nuclear warheads. By that time, they had already been flown more than 1,000 miles over American soil. The Air Force had flown six nuclear weapons over the heads of millions of Americans, unbeknownst to anyone in the world.

Upon arriving at Barksdale on Thursday, the B-52 sat for another nine hours on a runway without the special guards required for nuclear weapons. While offloading the missiles that evening, an airman noticed something suspicious and notified a senior officer. Upon realizing there were nuclear weapons on the aircraft's wings, Barksdale commanders contacted the Pentagon (Warrick & Pincus, 2007). On Friday, Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael Moseley called Defense Secretary Robert Gates to notify him about the incident (Hoffman, 2007).

Bent Spear

A Bent Spear incident was declared on Thursday night by the Pentagon's National Military Command Center (Warrick & Pincus, 2007). A Bent Spear involves the damage or temporary misplacement of a nuclear weapon. It is the second most serious nuclear mishap. A Broken Arrow – the loss, theft or accidental detonation of such a weapon – is the only more serious event (Warrick & Pincus, 2007). As Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) pointed out in subsequent testimony regarding the Minot incident, “No breach of nuclear procedures of this magnitude had ever occurred previously,” (Schanz and Chapman, 2008).

Breakdown

The Air Force has several measures in place to prevent such an incident from happening. Regulations require several redundant steps to ensure that an oversight at one step will be caught at a subsequent step. It was clear from the start that not just one mistake led to this, rather a pattern of errors among a large team of airmen at two separate bases ensured that these security procedures failed (Hoffman, 2007).

The eventual investigation of the event found five mistakes compounded on each other. First, the airman who had to move the weapons, which are stored in groups of six mounted to a pylon, failed to inspect the warheads before removing them from storage. The crews that operate the trailers that move weapons to the flightline began hooking the pylons onto the trailers while the pylon inspection was still going on. These two mistakes fed into the third mistake, when airmen didn't verify they were in possession of the correct weapons when they attached the pylons to the aircraft. The munitions control center also failed to check the serial numbers of the missiles being transported against the inventory database to make sure the right munitions were being moved.

After the weapons spent the night on the flightline, there was one more chance for the mistake to be noticed. The flight crew is required to do an inspection of its payload before any flight operation. The airmen who conducted the inspection only checked the weapons under one wing – the weapons that did belong on the flight. No one checked the weapons on the other wing.

This series of errors led to the Bent Spear and were included in the report the Air Force delivered to Congress regarding the investigation.

Public Knowledge

These errors were made in August, but it was September before the Air Force released any information about it. Further, it was because of a leak that the information even got out. An anonymous leak from Air Force officers to a *Military Times* reporter led to the first story about the incident appearing in the *Military Times* on Sept. 4. Articles in the mainstream media followed on Sept. 5.

A policy that forbade personnel from commenting on the location of nuclear warheads meant that the Air Force could confirm that there was an incident, but could not confirm that nuclear weapons were involved.

The events led to a breakdown in the confidence civilian military leadership had in Air Force staff. In a time of uncertainty about nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea and nuclear security in Pakistan, it compromised the world's confidence in the United States as a secure and responsible nuclear power. Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) said after the event, "The complete breakdown of the Air Force command and control over enough nuclear weapons to destroy several cities has frightening implications not only for the Air Force, but for the security of our entire nuclear weapons stockpile." (White, 2007)

This is a situation in which the Air Force found itself in crisis. To make matters worse, Air Force leadership learned the following March that the service had mistakenly shipped nosecone assemblies for Minuteman missiles to Taiwan in 2006. These pieces of classified equipment had been mislabeled as helicopter batteries and quarterly inventory inspections failed to show that the items were missing. Taiwanese officials alerted American authorities to the mistake in early 2007, but it wasn't until March 2008 that Air Force authorities realized the gravity of the error. The Air Force again found itself in a situation in which it had mistakenly and unknowingly mishandled sensitive national security equipment.

There was already existing tension between civilian military leadership – namely, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates – and the Air Force, and these were obvious and serious errors that did not help alleviate that tension. The Air Force confounded the errors

with mistakes in its communication strategy, especially with early communication failures after the Bent Spear incident. Leaders allowed dated policies to direct the organization's early response to the situation and vastly underestimated the level of interest that the situation would generate.

This paper will analyze the Air Force's crisis communication strategy from the day the Bent Spear story broke until Air Force Chief of Staff Michael Moseley and Secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynne were asked to resign in June 2008. Using established communication strategies for high-reliability organizations (HROs) and crisis communication theory, this paper will examine the Air Force's initial reaction to the event, its prediction of media coverage and its reaction to media and internal government queries. The paper will conclude with a discussion of best practices for HRO's communicating in crises, recommendations about how the Air Force could have better communicated in this crisis, and recommendations about how the military in general can improve its ability to communicate rapidly in a crisis.

The United States Air Force

The Air Force has played a constant role in the United States' nuclear capabilities. It is the only military organization in the world to have used nuclear weapons in combat, having launched nuclear strikes in Japan in 1945. During the Cold War, the Air Force operated the Strategic Air Command, or SAC, which stood on constant alert in case of a Russian strike ("U.S. Air Force"). SAC's collection of nuclear-armed B-52s stayed armed and airborne as a constant deterrent and SAC also controlled the Trident and Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that comprised the U.S.'s counterstrike capability.

Accidents involving nuclear weapons had happened before 2007 in the U.S. Air Force. Two important accidents happened in the 1960s that led to major changes in the way the Air Force operated with nuclear weapons. In 1966, a B-52 bomber collided with a KC-135 refueling aircraft while airborne over the Mediterranean, off the Spanish coast. The KC-135 exploded in air, killing all crew members. The B-52, which was loaded with four Mk28 hydrogen bombs, broke apart in the air, spilling its payload. One bomb fell into the sea and had to be recovered; the other three found land and leaked radioactive plutonium, contaminating a sizable portion of Spanish land.

In 1968, another B-52, also carrying four hydrogen bombs, declared an in-flight emergency when part of the aircraft caught fire over Greenland. The crew had to abandon the aircraft without performing an emergency landing. The plane crashed on sea ice and the nuclear payload again ruptured and spread radioactive contamination. After this accident, the Air Force initiated a review of its safety procedures and major changes were made in nuclear-weapon design to increase safety. Both of these missions were part of Cold War operations, when aircraft flew with armed nuclear weapons under their wings to offer both offensive and counter-strike capabilities against Soviet forces.

The Air Force maintains a vital role in the security and drawdown of the nation's nuclear arsenal. The SAC dissolved in 1992 and ultimately left three units under the command of the Air Combat Command to control the branch's nuclear arsenal – the 5th Bomb Wing in Minot, North Dakota; the 2nd Bomb Wing in Barksdale, Louisiana and the 509th Bomb Wing in Whiteman, Missouri. These units are charged with maintaining America's aging ICBMs and nuclear warheads, as well as the missiles and bombers used to deploy said weapons. According to one Air Force officer who spent time in Minot in

the 90's, the aging equipment was constantly coming up for maintenance (Warrick & Pincus, 2007). The mission units of the 5th Bomb Wing were conducting in August of 2007 was part of an extended operation to retire 400 missiles of the 17-year-old AGM-129 design. These were missiles the wing had been maintaining for years and 200 of them had already been shipped to Louisiana for retirement.

Air Force Public Affairs

Like the other three branches of the Department of Defense – and the DoD itself – the Air Force has its own public affairs division, which is charged with handling the Air Force's internal and external communication. In the civilian world, the field would be called public relations.

Air Force public affairs operations are guided by Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-5.3. The directive defines the role of public affairs as to inform the public to gain trust and support to aid in recruitment, training and sustainment of the Air Force. The directive makes clear the Air Force's goal of being a credible source of information to both internal and external audiences, stressing the importance of providing "maximum disclosure of timely and accurate information as rapidly as possible," (AFDD 2-5.3).

Air Force public affairs is further governed by Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 5122.5, which requires all branches of service to make timely and accurate information available to the public.

Truth is the foundation of all public affairs operations, but public affairs operators have to strike a delicate balance between the need to inform the public and the need to maintain operational security (OPSEC). Information that could harm the service's ability

to operate or that could put troops at risk has to be protected. Information cannot, however, be withheld simply because it is unflattering.

Lamb and McKee (2005) point out that public relations is a management function, meaning that the public relations team has the ear of management and can advise and make decisions about an organization's path forward in situations. In the military command structure, public affairs leaders are considered special staff, meaning a public affairs officer answers directly to the commander. This gives public affairs officers the ear of command, but the nature of the military rank system intervenes. While public affairs officers have the ear of command, there is usually a large separation in the level of rank between the two parties. For example, the Air Force chief of staff is a four-star general, while his public affairs officer – the highest ranking public affairs officer in the service – has only one star. And this is a unique situation; the current chief of public affairs is the first public affairs officer to make general in 11 years (Elsasser, 2011).

Commanders have the ability to make decisions counter to the recommendations of their PAOs and even counter to the doctrine put forth in public affairs regulations.

Crisis

Crisis Defined

In evaluating the Air Force's loss of these weapons as a crisis communication study, it is first necessary to establish a definition of a crisis. Fishman (1999) points out that "crisis" is largely an overused term. In common usage, just about anything that is a variance from the norm is called a crisis. It's important to make sure that "crisis" is not used as an overly broad term, or crisis communication would be necessary for organizations on any given day. Coombs (2007) defines a crisis as "the perception of an

unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes." (p. 3)

The term is defined on several levels by various sources and most share the same basic tenets: that crises are unpredictable and can negatively affect an organization's operations (Lee, 2008; Miller & Horsley, 2009; Barton, 1993). Coombs' definition is unique in the inclusion of the word "perception," signifying that it only takes a belief that an organization is in crisis to make an organization be in crisis. "If stakeholders believe an organization is in crisis, a crisis does exist, and stakeholders will react to the organization as if it is in crisis." (p. 3)

It's possible for organizations to have emergencies that do not result in crisis. This paper will discuss several organizations that went through an emergency, but by reacting properly, avoided crisis. Crises are unpredictable (Coombs, 2007; Miller & Horsley, 2009; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007). They are not, however, unforeseeable. As Coombs points out, wise organizations identify vulnerabilities in their operations and continually prepare for emergency situations. These organizations have a crisis management plan that clearly defines the role of every part of the organization during a crisis situation – including communication strategies. These plans are practiced regularly so the organization can identify weaknesses before the plan has to be put into action.

A prepared organization isn't immune to crisis, but it is more able to adequately react to one. Emergency management officials in California constantly prepare for wildfires. Firefighters practice fire prevention measures; emergency management officials plan their roles in communication and containment. Officials conduct annual assessments to plan for the likelihood and extent of the wildfire season. Even with this

level of preparation, fires in San Diego County in 2003 grew beyond the county's level of preparedness. (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007). Before the fire broke out, Fire Chief Jeff Bowman was honest with the public and the media about the effect budget cuts had on his team's ability to prevent and react to a fire. So there was a crisis when a blaze broke free and the fire department had difficulty containing it, but because the organization had worked to maintain an open and honest relationship with the public before the crisis happened, the crisis didn't lead to a complete breakdown between the fire department and its stakeholders.

Crises have the potential to create a great breadth of impact. A crisis in one organization can affect an entire industry (Coombs, 2007). The 1996 crash of ValuJet flight 592 obviously had an immediate effect on ValuJet Airlines, as customers began to question the safety of the airline. That doubt quickly spread to the discount air travel market, as customers began to doubt the ability of low-rate airlines to maintain their fleets. On the day after the crash, the U.S. secretary of transportation made a statement to the American public, reassuring them that "the entire aviation system" was safe (Fishman, 1999). This kind of reassurance would have been wholly unnecessary if officials were not worried about a single accident having an adverse affect on the entire aviation industry. Though it was only ValuJet that experienced the problem, the industry communicated to prevent the situation from affecting the entire industry.

The Life of a Crisis

There are three basic stages in the life of a crisis: precrisis, crisis event and recovery (Coombs, 2007). Each of these macro levels has sub-stages that detail the evolution of a crisis.

In the precrisis phase, organizations seek signs of and prepare for coming crises. As organizations monitor for warning signs, they remain prepared to take action to respond to warning signs in order to prevent incidents and emergencies from becoming crises (Coombs, 2007). Again, an incident does not become a crisis until it has a negative impact on an organization's mission. Typical steps taken in this phase are issues management, preparation of crisis communication plans and practicing crisis response scenarios. When the FDA began investigating phenolphthalein in laxatives in the 90's, Schering-Plough, the maker of a laxative called Correctol, decided to change the formula of its medicine to remove phenolphthalein. When the FDA found a link between phenolphthalein and cancer and pushed for a ban on the ingredient, Correctol was in position to avoid crisis. Schering-Plough publicized that it had removed phenolphthalein from its medicine more than a year earlier. Makers of other laxatives that used phenolphthalein were caught in a tough situation and were forced to recall their products. Because Schering-Plough practiced issues management and took steps to avoid crisis, the phenolphthalein issue never made it past the precrisis stage (Coombs, 2007).

The crisis event begins with some sort of trigger that signifies the beginning of the crisis (Coombs, 2007). In this phase, organizations recognize the onset of a crisis and act to contain it. This is where the training and planning conducted in the precrisis phase pays off. "Crises are unique moments in the history of organizations," (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2009, p. 5). In the above example, the crisis event for companies like Novartis, which still used phenolphthalein in its laxatives, came when the FDA announced a potential link between phenolphthalein and cancer. Novartis hadn't been proactive in the

precrisis stage, forcing it to act to contain, instead of prevent the crisis. Novartis had to recall its products in order to prevent further damage to its operations.

The recovery phase is the end of the crisis. In this phase, organizations review the crisis and analyze how to better their responses for future crisis events (Coombs, 2007). It's important to mention that not all organizations reach this phase, as many organizations fail during a crisis. An organization that handles a crisis well is not only more likely to emerge from crisis, but can even emerge even stronger.

Importantly, AFDD 2-5.3 makes reference to this same notion of the three-stage life of a crisis in its guidance on how to operate public affairs missions. As the directive states, public affairs operations must be well planned (precrisis), executed (crisis event) and assessed (recovery).

Communicating in a Crisis

Organizations rarely can predict when difficult situations will befall them, but they should work to prepare for the eventuality of emergencies. An organization that is cognizant of its vulnerabilities can act upon early signs of an emergency and lessen the chance of the situation escalating to the point of crisis. If a crisis is unavoidable, the prepared organization is more likely to come out of an emergency without going into crisis mode (Coombs, 2007). A prepared organization that does go into crisis is still in a better position than one that is not prepared.

Again, the important part of crisis communication is the preparation. Crisis communication doesn't begin with the crisis event, it begins at the precrisis stage, when organizations prepare for emergencies. Remember the example of how San Diego Fire Chief Jeff Bowman proactively communicated with the media and the public before a fire

got out of control and caused a crisis? Once the crisis event occurs, communicating is a whole new ball game; it's good to have credibility and positive relationships you're your stakeholders from the start.

Communicating in a crisis situation is different from everyday communication because normal rules no longer apply (Lee, 2008; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2009). Crisis situations shorten a communicator's response time and have an impact on an entire organization's operations (Miller & Horsley, 2009; Coombs, 2007; Barton, 1993). When Tylenol capsules caused seven deaths in the Chicago area in 1982, the corporate communication team first heard about the situation from a reporter asking for comment. "As it was the first knowledge we had here in this department, we told him we knew nothing about it. In that first call we learned more from the reporter than he did from us," Assistant Director of Public Relations Robert Andrews said (Harris et al.). Not only was the media on to the story first, but people had already died as a result of using poisoned Tylenol products (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger 2009). Johnson and Johnson had to figure out what was going on, then act quickly not only to communicate effectively, but also to prevent further deaths as a result of its products.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency obviously deals with emergencies and crises on a regular basis. In 2004, FEMA created the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to establish common best-practices for government communication in times of crisis. The crisis communication strategy outlined by NIMS calls for "maximum disclosure with minimum delay," a phrase repeated in AFDD 2-5.3 ("NIMS website"). This fits with Lee's (2008) example of government communication during the time immediately following 9/11. In the aftermath of the attacks in New York, Mayor Rudy

Giuliani had regular meetings with the press and served as the spokesman for the majority of the government's response to the crisis. His reports consisted of all of the information he had at the time, no matter how new it was. This meant he often had to adjust and correct information at later times (Lee, 2008). Even though accuracy was sometimes sacrificed in the name of immediacy, stakeholders believed the authorities weren't holding back information.

NIMS lays a framework for openness in communications and cooperation among relevant agencies when dealing with crisis. It's important for any organization to be able to act quickly and to maintain an open and transparent dialogue with stakeholders in order to communicate successfully during a crisis.

When an organization faces a crisis, Armisted (1996) says that two things that can save the organization are its crisis management plan and its credibility going into the crisis.

Crisis Management

Despite the potentially large and negative impact crises can have on organizations, many organizations fail to plan for crisis management (Coombs, 2007). Some organizations that do prepare will put a plan in place, but will overlook the importance of effective communication in their plan (Coombs, 2007; Miller & Horsley, 2009). This failure puts those organizations at a deficit during phase two of a crisis – the crisis event. While the other parts of the organization are reacting to the crisis in accordance to the crisis management plan, the communication arm is caught flat-footed. While the crisis is being contained, an expectation gap is forming with stakeholders who are left uninformed about the progress that's being made. Even though the organization is containing the

crisis, it's unable to communicate that fact, so as far as the stakeholders are concerned, the crisis is still out of control.

In their study of crisis management in the coal industry, Miller and Horsley (2009) found that even though many coal mining organizations had extensive crisis management plans in place, there was little emphasis on communication or media relations. Their research found two major themes existed in communicative efforts within the industry: First, there was a dearth of public relations personnel in crisis leadership. Second, there was a failure to balance the information needs of stakeholder groups (Miller & Horsley, 2009). An engrained hostility toward the media led the stated goals of crisis management plans to include strict instructions to corral media members, restrict their access to sites and assign ill-prepared organization members to media liaison work (Miller & Horsley, 2009). Some of these same themes have been present in military communication efforts, as will be discussed later.

Credibility

Crises affect corporations with good reputations as well as those with poor ones. Organizations that work to build credibility with stakeholder groups prior to a crisis face a distinct advantage in surviving a crisis. Like most industries, a key stakeholder group for New England-based Malden Mills, a textile factory owned by Aaron Feuerstein, is its workforce. Malden Mills twice faced crises in the 1980's and 90's, and the credibility Feuerstein built with his workforce by treating employees fairly and paying good wages helped the company survive both situations.

The first crisis came in the 1980's, when the company had to file for bankruptcy (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007). Feuerstein approached his labor union and asked

permission to lay off a portion of the workforce, promising to hire back every employee once the company returned to profitability. The union went along with the agreement and Feuerstein stuck to his promise. This situation established the credibility Feuerstein needed in the in 1995, when a fire took down a portion of the operation. Feuerstein again stuck by his workforce and kept paying wages. The credibility he had developed in the past helped him get most of the company back in operation in 60 days (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007).

High-Reliability Organizations

Just like the drug and coal industries, the military faces intense government scrutiny and attention from the media. In these operations, failure at a mission could lead to potential catastrophe. These traits are among those common to what are known as high-reliability organizations (HROs). The HRO concept has been applied to numerous operations meeting the standard of necessary successful operation in unpredictable circumstances, including prisoner transport, airport security, naval flight operations and coal mining (Dougall, Horsley & McLisky, 2008; Miller & Horsley, 2009).

HROs share many of these common traits (Dougall, Horsley & McLisky, 2008; Miller & Horsley, 2009):

- Practice mindfulness
- Have centralized command, with decision-making authority at all levels
- Have tightly coupled operations
- Share common understanding of goals among team members
- Constant training in operations
- Regular assessment of plans and execution
- Redundant operations and safety checks reduce mistakes

- Operations are highly scrutinized by stakeholders and regulators
- Allow autonomy among team members
- Able to decentralize command
- Show evidence of organizational learning

HRO research often focuses on mindfulness, which Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) define as a constant state of active awareness. The characteristics of mindfulness are a preoccupation with the potential for failure, a reluctance to simplify interpretations of potential crisis signs, a sensitivity to internal operations, a commitment to resilience and a deference to expertise.

The military fits into the concept of mindfulness in its operations, and further meets the other criteria of HROs. Specifically focusing on Air Force nuclear operations, units that handle nuclear weapons are preoccupied with the potential for failure. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) puts units through regular nuclear surety inspections, measuring a unit's ability to uphold nuclear security in an attack. Units are graded on the actions of the unit commanders and individual airmen in a variety of roles. The performance is then analyzed to provide a basis for constant improvement. In order for a unit to be authorized to protect, handle or transport nuclear weapons, it must be certified by the DTRA (Hoffman, 2008).

There is also a program in the military called the personnel reliability program (PRP), which is used to vet candidates who wish to work in certain fields. Before a member of the military can work in the storage and security of chemical or nuclear weapons, he/she must be approved in the PRP. This requires an extensive initial background check and continuing evaluations through employment. The focus on certifying units and vetting personnel above and beyond the standards of the majority of

the Air Force shows that the Air Force's nuclear operations are preoccupied with the potential for failure.

Air Force units are reluctant to simplify. Before moving weapons – especially nuclear weapons – a series of checks is required. Weapons are checked against an inventory by their identification numbers and visual inspections are conducted by a series of personnel, including flight crews if weapons are transported. Redundant checks by a series of personnel are designed to prevent accidents. It is a complicated system the Air Force relies on in the name of safety and security.

Air Force units are sensitive to operations, meaning leaders are concerned with the unexpected. Again, redundant security systems are in place to prevent accidents and operations are followed by after-action reports to identify weaknesses, streamline operations and prevent mishaps. The Air Force Office for Lessons Learned exists as a central point for the study of operational mistakes and protocol for avoiding accidents.

The Air Force has a commitment to resilience. There is a hierarchical command structure that makes it easy for individual airmen to know from whom they should accept orders. Each airman does have decision-making authority in the absence of commanders, however, giving them the ability to react to the unexpected. Routines are established through constant training and rehearsals and airmen are expected to have a vast understanding of their respective roles.

Lastly, the Air Force defers to expertise. This is apparent in the specialization in jobs in the Air Force. The airmen put in charge of each facet of the mission are experts in their fields, whether it's security, air traffic control or administration. Decisions are not

always made at the top – sometimes they’re made on the ground by the person with the most knowledge of the situation.

Expanding on the other characteristics of HROs, Air Force units have redundant safety operations, airmen at all levels are charged with decision-making, there is an active search for vulnerabilities, a constant focus on training and an understanding of common goals. Mission failure in Air Force operations leads to deaths, which is why the Air Force exhibits the other characteristics of high-reliability organizations. This paper will analyze the Air Force’s response to the Bent Spear through the HRO lens. The HRO concept is important because of the nature of the mission in this case study – the safety and security of nuclear weapons and classified material.

Military-Stakeholder Relationship

Again, another factor that plays heavily in an organization’s ability to survive a crisis is its prior relationship with its stakeholders – its credibility. There is a lot to consider here, as the United States military was involved in two wars at the time of the Bent Spear. Lee (2008) says the media have a natural negative predisposition when covering institutions of the government, but research exists that shows the media are often more behind the government in times of war than in peacetime, which affects the status of the media-military relationship. The groundswell of the “Support the Troops” movement among the public is another factor to consider, as the media and the citizenry are two of the Air Force’s most important stakeholder groups.

Any history of the relationship between the military and the media has to go back at least to Vietnam. That was the war that the media brought into the living room of every American family that had a television. Many believe that the backlash in public opinion

against the war was caused by the media's unprecedented graphic coverage of Vietnam. Newspaper front pages bore images like those that came from the My Lai massacre and the nightly news brought moving images of the brutality of war to Americans' dinner tables. Some scholars point to this as what led to the backlash that ultimately led to America's defeat (Kumar, 2006).

Many scholars see the two military interventions in the 1980s, Grenada and Panama, as the military's revenge for what it saw as biased Vietnam coverage (Kumar, 2006). Journalists weren't on the ground in Grenada, creating a complete blackout in coverage. In Panama in 1989, the invasion was announced only hours before commencing, preventing journalists from being on the ground for the onset of hostilities. The National Media Pool, born out of protests over the snubbing of the media in Grenada, was full of Washington experts who had little knowledge about the situation in Panama (Kumar, 2006).

The first gulf war was similar, with the military having great influence over where journalists went and what they saw, but more importantly, the military controlled what was released. Walter Cronkite testified before the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs that the censorship being exercised by the military would create a hole in history where the conflict should be (Norris, 1991). Articles were submitted to military authorities for pre-publication approval, then held by military reviewers until the point that the information covered was no longer newsworthy.

In looking at these major conflicts preceding Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, it's clear that there was a strained relationship between the military and the media. In Panama, then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney said that he saw the

information flow from the war as a problem that he didn't trust the press to solve (Kumar, 2006). Many scholars believe the control exerted by the military over the press was simply a way to prevent unflattering consequences of the war – civilian deaths, destruction, body counts – from being highlighted (Kumar, 2006; Norris, 1991).

This relationship with the media affected the military's relationship with numerous stakeholder groups, as the media represent the conduit through which information about the military reaches the public. It's important to understand that what can be perceived as a lack of credibility with the public could affect the way the public would react to bad news about the military.

Strategic Crisis Communication Theory

Attribution theory states that “people assign responsibility for negative, unexpected events,” (Coombs, 2007, p. 138). When something bad happens, people want someone/something to blame. Organizations pay attention to how stakeholders assign responsibility because of the potential affects blame can have on an organization's orientation. The level of responsibility for an incident that stakeholders attribute to an organization helps dictate how that organization should respond. Strategic crisis communication theory (SCCT) sets out communication strategies based on attribution.

There are three main considerations for gauging attribution. The organization's credibility ties in here. Prior reputation and crisis history, two points already discussed, are two of the main factors in estimating the amount of responsibility stakeholders will assign. The third factor is the type of crisis (Coombs, 2007).

According to SCCT, there are three types of crisis: victim, accidental and preventable. A victim crisis is one in which the organization is the victim of some act.

This could be anything from a crime, like the Tylenol poisoning mentioned earlier, to a natural disaster. These are crises that organizations can do little to prevent. There is little to no attribution of crisis responsibility in this type of crisis.

An accidental crisis also has a low crisis responsibility. An accidental crisis could be a plant fire, like the previous example that took place at Malden Mills.

The crisis with the highest level of attribution is a preventable crisis. A typical preventable crisis would be human error, and a good example is the Exxon *Valdez* oil spill (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007). When oil companies began oil exploration in the Prince William Sound, environmental groups were loathe to accept it. When the *Valdez* ran aground in 1989, it proved many of the hesitations environmentalists held. Navigation errors by the ship's captain caused the ship to begin leaking oil into the sound. Then, Exxon's limited initial environmental response made the situation worse, allowing the oil to spread far and fast in a sensitive area. The public attributed the blame squarely on the shoulders of Exxon and the company was forced to deal with the situation for more than 20 years after the spill, spending hundreds of millions of dollars in cleanup (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2007).

The more attribution assigned to an organization, the more aggressive the communication strategy should be.

The Bent Spear as a Crisis

In evaluating the definition of a crisis, we see that the Air Force found itself in a legitimate crisis in the latter part of 2007. The Bent Spear was an unpredictable event; no one knew it was coming. While leaders certainly recognized that nuclear-based operations were a potential vulnerability for the Air Force, few would have predicted,

given the redundant security measures in place, that it would have been possible to ship nuclear weapons across the country by accident. It would have perhaps been considered less likely for no one to even learn about the mistake for 36 hours.

The event certainly had a negative effect on Air Force operations. Once the incident was reported, Air Force nuclear operations halted. The Air Combat Command ordered a stand down of all units for personnel to analyze procedures. Nuclear handling units based at Minot and Barksdale were immediately stood down and the mandatory certifications the units need to handle nuclear weapons were revoked pending inspections of their procedures, an inspection which Minot's 5th Bomb Wing ultimately failed.

The initial investigation of the incident, completed in April 2008, led to the firing of three commanders who had reached the rank of colonel, one of whom was the commander of Minot Air Force Base. Some 65 airman of varying ranks who weren't fired had their status in the personnel reliability program revoked.

All of this was made worse with the later discovery that the Air Force shipped the Minuteman nosecones to Taiwan. This was a mistake that was actually made more than a year before the Bent Spear incident, but the mistake's discovery in 2008 proved to Department of Defense leadership that there was a pervasive problem within the Air Force. In June of 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced the resignations of the chief of staff and secretary of the Air Force, the two highest ranking people in the branch. This was a drastic move, but likely a necessary one in order to communicate to the public that the military genuinely recognized there was a problem.

The Study

So with the knowledge that the Bent Spear incident of 2007 was truly a crisis, it is possible to move forward with a case study analyzing the Air Force's crisis communication strategy. There are two primary questions to ask in this analysis:

RQ1: What steps did the Air Force take as part of its crisis communication strategy?

This question is important as part of any crisis communication case study. This paper will analyze the Air Force's steps at all three phases of the crisis lifespan – the precrisis, crisis event and recovery phases. The paper will analyze the evolution of media coverage from Aug. 29, 2007 – when the weapons in question were first removed from storage – up to June 5, 2008, when Air Force Secretary Michael Wynn and Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael Moseley were forced to retire. Since this is not a content analysis, these articles will be used to analyze the Air Force's key messages, how well those messages were emphasized, and how the Air Force reacted in communicating as the story evolved. Also used for the purpose of analyzing strategy will be transcripts of Air Force/DoD briefings and press conferences gathered from the Federal News Service.

RQ2: How did regulations and the military command structure affect/potentially affect the execution of the Air Force's crisis communication strategy.

It's important to recognize in this analysis that a branch of the military is different than a civilian organization. As discussed before, military command structure can get in the way of some doctrine when it comes to public affairs operations. Did the Air

Force leadership adhere to the doctrine of maximum disclosure with minimum delay? Did existing regulations get in the way of that doctrine? How did barricades to Air Force public affairs doctrine contribute to the situation becoming a crisis? Was the Air Force prepared for a situation like this? Was a crisis communication plan ready?

The timeline of the release of information relevant to the Bent Spear will be a crucial tool in answering these questions.

Gathering Data

Using LexisNexis and the *Military Times* database, articles that covered the event were collected and monitored for the study. For the LexisNexis search, the terms “Air Force,” “nuclear” and “North Dakota” or “Taiwan” were used and the timeframe was set to be between Aug. 29, 2007 and June 7, 2008. To narrow the field of results, sources were limited to the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, domestic outlets with international exposure; the *Bismarck Tribune*, to provide a local perspective from the Minot, ND area; and the Federal News Service, to provide primary quotes from Air Force and DoD leadership from press conferences and briefings. The *Military Times* articles had to be gathered from the publication’s online database. Articles were then combed through to make sure they contained relevant information about the Air Force’s key messages and communication strategy throughout both the Bent Spear and the subsequent crisis regarding the Minuteman nosecones.

The paper will be structured to match the life of a crisis: precrisis, crisis event and recovery. The articles will be used to identify these stages in the Bent Spear incident and information from the articles and the interviews will provide insight into the communication strategy at each phase. These tactics will be compared to accepted

practices based on research literature and Air Force doctrine. Ultimately, this paper will provide insight into some of the weaknesses in military communication strategies and how improvements can be made. Discussion will include points regarding how the Air Force has applied lessons learned from this event to improve its communication practice.

Precrisis

As discussed earlier, the precrisis phase is a preparatory phase in the crisis communication effort. Organizations prepare for potential crises by identifying vulnerabilities, practicing issues management and preparing/practicing crisis management scenarios. Precrisis preparations are primarily internal, so it would be difficult to guess at what actions Minot units or Air Force command took without insight from public affairs officers within the service. Even without first-hand insight to the inner workings of Air Force public affairs, some idea of precrisis preparation can be gleaned by looking at Air Force policy and some other factors.

Crisis Planning

Plausibility.

The Air Force had been in control of an arsenal of nuclear weapons for decades. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) had nuclear-armed B-52s continually flying over friendly soil throughout much of the Cold War, as a deterrent to Soviet nuclear aggression. These missions occurred largely without incident. The American citizenry grew confident in the abilities of the Air Force to secure the nation's most lethal weapons and the Air Force itself was likely similarly confident in its abilities. When mistakes were made, the public was able to accept them as an expected cost of deterrence.

As Rep. Edward Markey (D-Mass.) would point out, government leaders had been promised for decades that the redundant security systems the Air Force had in place would never allow a nuclear mishap to take place. Minot's mission to retire the AGM-129 missiles had been going on for more than three months by August 2007, with more

than 200 missiles shipped without incident. In their 2006 nuclear operations readiness inspection, the Warbirds of Minot's 5th Bomb Wing received an "Excellent" rating. The officer in charge of the inspection team said the inspectors "were truly impressed with the professionalism, devotion and dedication to the mission displayed throughout [the] inspection," (Appendix B).

Crisis planning is contingent on the identification of vulnerabilities in an organization's mission. If the communication team does not recognize a vulnerability, it won't plan for the eventuality of a mistake. Their impressive record may have led 5th Bomb Wing leaders to lose sight of vulnerabilities, overly confident in the unit's ability. It's difficult to plan for an unforeseen situation, so if the Air Force let arrogance get in its way, that not only led to the mistake happening, but also the disjointed communication response to the mistake.

Another possibility is that the Air Force may have recognized the possibility of losing a nuclear weapon. After all, this wasn't the first time the service experienced a Bent Spear. In the past, though, constant nuclear options were a necessary evil in the face of standing up to the Iron Curtain. People were more likely to accept mistakes in recognition of that. In a post-Cold War era, though, the Air Force may have simply underestimated how much public perceptions changed when the threat of a nuclear-armed enemy diminished. A preliminary report regarding the Bent Spear conducted by Air Force officials shows that leaders were at least a little bit guilty of this (more on that later). The Air Force may have relied on an outdated response to handle a crisis in a new era.

Air Force doctrine.

Air Force Doctrine Directive (AFDD) 2-5.3 governs all public affairs actions for the Air Force. In regard to public affairs operations, the directive states that public affairs issues and requirements should be a part of planning in all areas of operation for the Air Force – both for wartime and peacetime.

The directive states that all operations need the integration of public affairs in planning and execution. This was put into practice for the operation to relocate and retire the AGM-129. For the operation to ship all of the aging ballistic missiles to Barksdale Air Force Base for retirement, the Air Force was active in informing the public. A March 2007 Associated Press article explains the operation and its justification (Appendix A). There was not much press coverage, as this was probably expected to be a fairly uneventful mission in the midst of the Air Force's involvement in two wars in the Middle East. But the articles do show that the Air Force was seeking to inform the public about the operation in accordance with AFDD 2-5.3.

While there is an emphasis on strategic communication planning in the directive, there is no mention of the importance of crisis communication planning. The only mention of crisis in the document is in reference to military conflict. In the case of conflict, the directive explains the importance of superior performance in information operations and public affairs as being a weapon against the enemy. The crisis situation in this case study, however, did not have an enemy. There is no discussion of the importance of contingency planning for failure in non-combat operations.

With no onus in the Air Force's public affairs directive on preparing for crises in non-conflict operations, it is likely there was no crisis communication plan in place. Even

if there were a plan in place, why would it cover an area of operations that hasn't been identified as a vulnerability?

Warning Signs?

Despite the overwhelming evidence that Air Force procedures and personnel made the likelihood of a nuclear mishap like what occurred at Minot appear minimal, there were signs that procedures in the nuclear realm were faltering. Joby Warrick and Walter Pincus reported in the *Washington Post* that the Bent Spear event “came on the heels of multiple warnings -- some of which went to the highest levels of the Bush administration, including the National Security Council -- of security problems at Air Force installations where nuclear weapons are kept,” (Appendix C).

The Air Force was involved in two wars in 2007. This put a strain on all of the branches of the military, as service members were in constant rotation in and out of war zones. In 2003, when Operation Iraqi Freedom began, Minot's 5th Bomb Wing actually failed its nuclear surety inspection. Warrick and Pincus report that commanders cited the added stress of the second Middle East conflict as a contributing factor to the unit's failure.

The Air Force personnel situation compounded the stress from constant military operations. The service aimed to cut its size by 6.5 percent in 2007. Some airmen were offered money to leave the service early, others were forced into new jobs within the service. The uncertainty of deployment schedules and of restructuring within the service likely led many airmen to distraction, and may have hurt the morale of some members. On top of that, cutbacks in 2006 had already led to the termination of a unit that was

charged with tracking the inventory and maintenance of the American and NATO nuclear arsenal. So the Air Force was facing a heightened operational tempo, the uncertainty of personnel cutbacks and a decrease in oversight of nuclear operations. Future reports found that personnel issues had a direct impact on the service's ability to manage sensitive nuclear operations.

Identifying hurdles.

The step in the precrisis phase that comes after planning is practicing. Putting the plan into motion allows an organization to identify hurdles and weaknesses, then correct for them in a pattern of continuous improvement. But without a plan in place, there is nothing to practice, meaning that the Air Force had no knowledge of potential hurdles in the way of communicating through a Bent Spear. As AFDD 2-5.3 points out, public affairs plans have to be integrated with the overall strategy in a given mission. This integration prevents conflicts between separate interests in an operation.

While planning is a first step in preventing conflicts between the informational and operational aspects of a mission, further conflicts and weaknesses can be identified by practicing responses to crisis situations. The fact that there was no planning for or rehearsing a crisis such as a Bent Spear proved costly when the situation arose in reality.

The Precrisis Phase

Even without getting deep insight to the Air Force's precrisis planning regarding a domestic, non-combat related nuclear surety incident, it's clear the service failed in the precrisis phase.

The Air Force's public affairs directive put minimal emphasis on crisis communication planning. The emphasis on planning requires that public affairs be included in the strategy and execution of operations, but, again, the disparity in rank between public affairs officers and operational commanders is often wide, which can lead to public affairs priorities being relegated to secondary. Despite mention of the importance of communication in combat and peacetime operations, the emphasis regarding crisis communication focuses solely on operations that include an enemy; the situation that would face the Air Force in 2007/2008 included no enemy.

The Air Force's history is full of successful nuclear-based operations, including the successful storage, movement and maintenance of nuclear weapons. In a different time – the Cold War – nuclear mistakes had less impact on operations for two reasons: First, there were more nuclear operations being conducted in the face of the Soviet nuclear threat. Second, people were more accepting of mistakes in the interest of countering the Soviet threat. Outside the Cold War, the nation isn't quite so accepting. Add to that the preoccupation with nuclear surety in the face of North Korea, Iran and the terrorism threat, and you have a difficult situation. If the U.S. can't secure its own nukes, how can other nations be expected to do so?

High-Reliability Organizations practice mindfulness, an obsession with the possibility of failure. Nuclear-handling units fit into this in that they are constantly going through inspections of their procedures. Training exercises and drills brought the 5th Bomb Wing back into certification after failing its inspection in 2003. It appears that in this case, the Air Force was focused on the possibility of failing its inspections rather than failing at its mission, leading it to be ill-prepared for such a failure.

Crisis Event

The crisis event begins with a trigger that signifies the start of a crisis. It's easy to decide the trigger here; what's interesting is how many times the trigger was pulled. After selecting the incorrect weapons in the storage bunker, Air Force personnel loaded them on to a plane, missed them on an inspection and missed them on an inventory check. Then it took almost two full days to realize that any of these mistakes had happened. Also interesting, it took so long for defense leaders to understand that these mistakes would lead to a crisis. Compounding that, another crisis trigger sat mislabeled in a box in a warehouse in Taiwan, waiting to make the situation worse for Air Force leadership.

It wasn't until almost a week after the 5th Bomb Wing mistakenly shipped six nuclear weapons that information about the mistake got out to the public. For the shipment to Taiwan of other nuclear-related classified material, it took year after the mistake was made before anyone knew about it.

When a crisis is triggered, the expectation is for the organization to react by recognizing the crisis and acting to contain it. Procedurally, yes, Air Force leadership did take swift action to fix the problem within its ranks. Communicatively, though, the service and the Department of Defense repeatedly failed to effectively communicate the problem or the solution to the public. At every level, the operational mistakes that happened were completely preventable. The mistake of being slow and non-transparent in communicating the information to the public compounded the problem. The failure to adhere to the basic principle of disclosing information to the public quickly and accurately turned a bad situation into a worse one – one that threatened the perception stakeholders had of the organization, one that ended the careers of several airmen and one that put the Air Force in crisis.

September

Before We Even Heard About It

An investigation was launched immediately after the incident was reported up the chain of command. Leaders began preparing a report about the incident. The munitions squadron commander, charged with maintaining accountability of all weapons stored on post, was relieved of duty within days of the incident. The Air Force placed a major general in charge of one investigation into the cause of the mistake; the DoD launched an investigation of its own.

Procedurally, the Air Force made all the right initial moves. Leaders looked into how the mistake was made and tried to fix it. The problem is that no one told the public about the mistake or how the Air Force was trying to fix it. The initial internal report about the incident showed that leaders expected the public to have little interest in the fact that the mistake even happened. That expectation, coupled with a longstanding policy of not discussing the location or movement of nuclear weapons, led to the decision by Air Force leaders to not disclose information about the mistaken shipment.

The Leak

But word did get out about the shipment. The night of Sept. 4, the *Military Times*, a small civilian-produced military newspaper, broke the story based on information leaked from three anonymous Air Force officers (Appendix D). The article appeared in print the following morning. The reporter, Michael Hoffman, covered the Bent Spear incident through June 2008. In his first story, he cites the sources as saying that nuclear weapons were involved in the shipment, though the Air Force spokesman for the story,

the Pentagon's Lt. Col. Ed Thomas, would not confirm or deny that information, in observance of Air Force policy.

Thomas stuck to two major themes in his talking points for the *Military Times* article: safety and security. Within those two major themes were five talking points:

- The transfer was conducted safely
- There was never any danger to the American public
- The weapons remained in Air Force hands at all times
- Air Force standards are very exact regarding munitions handling
- We have launched an investigation and are reviewing our procedures

Out of the Bag

The day the story broke, reporters brought up the issue with Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell at the regular Defense Department briefing (Appendix E). Morrell stuck to the same talking points as Thomas in the briefing. He also would not confirm or deny that nuclear weapons were involved, adhering to what was becoming a moot policy; Morrell went on to explain that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and President Bush were informed of the incident and that Gates asked for daily briefings from Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Moseley. The accidental movement of conventional weapons would not garner presidential attention, leading the public to draw its own conclusions.

Morrell did not bring up the topic in his briefing, choosing instead to let it come up during questions. This shows the Pentagon was likely going along with the Air Force's conclusion that there would be little public interest in the event. To this point, there was no evidence to the contrary; the only news source that had reported about it was

a relatively small military newspaper. During the briefing, it was only one reporter who asked questions about it.

Hitting the Big Time

The story first hit the national media the afternoon of Sept. 5. The Lede, a blog for the *New York Times* website, cited the *Military Times* story in reporting the incident to readers. It refers to a series of “shocked headlines around the Web,” and calls the incident “a screw-up in the United States Air Force,” (Appendix F). That certainly isn’t the best press to hope for, but what appeared in actual papers wasn’t initially as damning. In fact, the *New York Times* print edition didn’t even have its own by-line for the story about the incident, printing a story from the Associated Press instead (Appendix G).

The *Washington Post* also put out a story about the incident on Sept. 6. Josh White covered the story, and he would write several additional articles about the incident through the life of the crisis, though the *Post* didn’t dedicate one reporter or team of reporters to the topic (Appendix H). The *Bismarck Tribune*, the largest paper by circulation within 150 miles of Minot, didn’t release a story on the incident until Sept. 7 (Appendix I).

Limited coverage

Initial coverage of the event shows that there wasn’t much initial interest by the press. The *Times* story appeared on pg. 16, the *Post* story on pg. 10. The *Bismarck Tribune*, a paper with a number of readers who probably live in the flight path of the flight in question, didn’t print the story until two days after it broke. Not only that, but the story was just a snippet combined with two other national news stories on page B5.

These stories delivered many of the Air Force's key messages: that the public was not in danger, that the weapons remained in Air Force control and that an investigation had already begun. The *Post* and the *Military Times* (Appendix J) both reported that a munitions squadron commander had been fired as a result of the accident and that several Airmen had been suspended, which is positive reporting showing the Air Force was taking action.

The *Military Times* wrote a piece about Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne visiting Minot to review weapons handling procedures on Sept. 13 (Appendix K). It's only in this article that it comes out that the Pentagon confirmed nuclear weapons were involved in the incident. It's curious that no article in these sources put out a story saying that the Air Force made this admission. We know it took at least one week from the time the incident happened for anyone involved in the Department of Defense to make the confirmation.

There were only two more news articles printed in these publications in the month of September, which is to be expected as the Air Force and DoD investigations were being carried out. Both were published in the *Post*. One was a detailed summary of the incident (Appendix C) and the other a story covering the interim conclusions of the Air Force report into what went wrong (Appendix L).

Problems Out of the Gate

Even though initial media coverage was light, one of the Air Force's major stakeholder groups did not seem to be pleased. The reports also delivered a lot of messages from members of Congress. Both the *Times* and the *Post* quoted Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) who called the event "deeply disturbing." Senators Carl Levin (D-

Mich.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) of the Armed Services Committee called it a “matter of grave concern” in a joint statement.

It wasn’t until Sept. 13 that any articles in these sources state that the Pentagon confirmed nuclear weapons were involved in the incident. Again, a longstanding policy prevented officials from confirming or denying the movement or locations of nuclear weapons. This is a perfect example of the conflict that is brought up in AFDD 2-5.3: A balance has to be struck between the priorities of informing the public and protecting sensitive national security information. Officials from the Air Force and the DoD adhered to this policy in the interest of national security, but this ultimately had a cost.

It was a foregone conclusion that nuclear weapons were involved. Anonymous sources within the service confirmed nukes were involved; the Pentagon told the media that the president and the secretary of defense had been alerted to the incident, which doesn’t happen if a crate of grenades gets misplaced; and several members of congress alluded to the involvement of nuclear weapons in their comments in the early articles. The Air Force directive governing public affairs operations and the guidance from the National Incident Management System both call for organizations to release as much information as possible as quickly as possible. The policy forbidding discussion of the nukes should have been scrapped early in the name of transparency. This would have given the service some credibility and would have made future communication problems less detrimental. As it happened, it only gave the Air Force the wrong first impression.

The failure to communicate effectively compounded perceptions that were being bred in editorial sections of some newspapers – that the Air Force was overburdened by supporting two simultaneous wars, that the service was shirking its commitment to

protecting the country's most powerful but arguably least relevant weapons, and that Air Force leadership was failing at its responsibilities. A *Bismarck Tribune* editorial from Sept. 17 made these accusations when it compared the Bent Spear incident to the Abbott and Costello "Who's on First" act (Appendix M). The paper argues that downsizing within the Air Force played a part in the incident, in that "career military men," who had the experience and professionalism to prevent such a situation, were forced out of the service following the Cold War and Desert Storm. It ultimately calls on the Air Force to make the major changes necessary to prevent further accidents, alluding to the fact that it is possible that similar mistakes have been made before.

Minot Mayor Curt Zimbelman argued against these points in an editorial published in the *Tribune* the same day (Appendix N). He points to a clean safety record for one of the bases that has stored and transported nuclear weapons for decades without incident. One can't say for certain that the mayor's intentions were anything but noble, but when Census 2000 data shows that one in six Minot residents was a part of the air base, it's fair to say the mayor had ulterior motives. Problems affecting bases in military communities can lead to problems for the communities themselves and the mayor had a town to look after.

The Air Force made it clear it was working swiftly and effectively in fixing the problem; articles in the all three sources examined here discussed the firing of the munitions squadron commander over the incident. What the Air Force didn't do was be quick and transparent about what the problem was, and this got the service off to a bad start in this situation.

October

Both the DoD and the Air Force were ordered to conduct investigations immediately following the incident. The Air Force completed its investigation first, and on Oct. 19, there was a special Defense Department briefing with Air Force Secretary Wynne and Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Newton to announce the results of the investigation. Both the *Military Times* and the *Washington Post* pre-empted the briefing with stories on the 18th (Appendix O and P).

Both articles said that five officers involved in the incident would be fired, likely for dereliction of duty. The *Post* had more details, saying that one officer was a colonel, that the punishment would also affect several enlisted members and that the personnel to be reprimanded were located both at Minot and at Barksdale.

The Briefing

Secretary Wynne opened the briefing saying that he had (finally) decided to make an exception to the policy of not confirming or denying the involvement of nuclear weapons (Appendix Q). “We would not be this upset with ourselves nor be striving to restore confidence if this did not involve nuclear weapons,” he said. He acknowledged the fact that both the media and the public had come to the obvious conclusion that nukes were involved, but he specifically noted that this was a “one-time exception.”

He reiterated the initial key messages the Air Force put out when the story first broke – that the Air Force maintained control of the weapons at all times, that the Air Force would continue to investigate what led to the problem and continue to take corrective actions.

There was one additional key message Secretary Wynne put out in his brief remarks: that the Air Force would make everything right. “We know America counts on us,” Wynne said. “And through our steady, unwavering resolve and actions, our Air Force will live up to the expectations of our nation.” This message, that the Air Force would continue to find out details about what happened and ensure that these problems never came up again, was the right message to include. Air Force leaders promised an investigation all along, but to have said that “we will make everything right” at the beginning of September would have been wholly premature and would have conveyed the unspoken message that the Air Force was minimizing the potential depth of the problem. Saying this at this point, after the service had completed a preliminary investigation, was right because leaders had begun to take action. They had earned back at least a little credibility. There was too much confusion in September as to the cause and depth of the incident for this message to have any gained any traction with the public.

Once Maj. Gen. Newton took the floor, one of the first things he made clear was that this was an isolated incident involving a limited number of airmen. This, no doubt, was in response to messages that had been delivered from several sources, including members of congress, the *Washington Post* and the *Bismarck Tribune* editorial that alluded to this being a symptom of a larger problem in the Air Force. Lt. Col. Thomas also said evidence pointed to the incident being an isolated mistake in September, but it was a point that needed to be emphasized based on press coverage.

Newton then detailed the series of consecutive mistakes that allowed the weapons to wind up in Louisiana. It was a series of five mistakes made by a group of different airmen. Several checks were overlooked or ignored, leading to the mistake. He echoed

Wynne's comment that this was an unacceptable error and that the Air Force is accountable to congress and the American people in its commitment to safety and security in weapons handling.

So the Air Force again stuck with consistent messages in its briefing. Messages delivered on Oct. 19 largely resembled those delivered in early September – mainly that the weapons never left Air Force control and that the public was never in danger. General Newton echoed Secretary Wynne in saying that the Air Force made a mistake, but only an isolated one. “We owe the nation nothing less than adherence to the highest standards,” Newton said, with the implied message being that personnel did not deliver that in August of 2007.

During the question and answer portion of the briefing, Newton exhibited the behavior that helped contribute to the sour relationship that existed between the military and the media in the past. The following exchange with reporters, after it was disclosed at the briefing that the nuclear weapons in question were stored with conventional weapons in the bunkers at Minot, is an example:

Q So it is normal procedure, then, to keep nuclear weapons in the same place as conventional --

GEN. NEWTON: These weapons were stored in the proper -- with proper procedures in the proper locations at the weapons storage area.

Yes, ma'am.

Q I have a number of follow-up questions. First of all, on what Peter was saying, did you have to get some sort of waiver? Was a waiver required to store the warheads and the missiles in the same facility, in the same hangar?

GEN. NEWTON: The weapons were stored in the facilities per DOD guidelines and Air Force guidelines as well. There was -- there was --

Q (Off mike) -- but does it require a waiver to store them together?

GEN. NEWTON: The weapons again, as I've mentioned, were stored in the proper facilities and were within DOD guidelines and Air Force guidelines as well.

Q Is there some reason you can't tell me specifically that -- I'm not understanding, because of my lack of knowledge -- is a waiver required to do that, or is a waiver not required to do that?

GEN. NEWTON: There was no waiver required in this instance because they were stored in a facility, in a weapons storage area in this case, under DOD guidelines and Air Force guidelines.

Q So when was it decided that that was an acceptable procedure? And were the missiles at that point, in that storage at that point in that hangar -- were they fully fueled? Were those missiles actually active missiles?

GEN. NEWTON: These -- to consider them being missiles individually -- there were actually part of a pylon that was considered to be a package of six missiles that are attached to one pylon. And so --

Q Were any of those missiles fueled?

GEN. NEWTON: These missiles were packaged in a way that, again, met Air Force as well as DOD guidelines. And so --

Q Were any fueled?

GEN. NEWTON: They were packaged in the manner that is appropriate for them to be packaged for the mission; in this case, the tactical ferry operation for them to be transferred from --

Q Was there any fuel in those --

GEN. NEWTON: -- they were transferred from, again, from Minot down to Barksdale.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. NEWTON: I'd rather not get into those technical details, but just to let you know that they were prepared for the tactical ferry operation, and they were also within the DOD and Air Force guidelines.

Now, perhaps this is another example of when a member of the Air Force has to balance the informational needs of the public with national security, but it should have been obvious at this point that erring on the side of caution wasn't working thus far. Newton came off as confrontational and not transparent, giving off the impression that, again, the Air Force was hiding something. The entire briefing up to this point focused on the Air Force's initiatives in reviewing and changing procedures -- why could this exchange with reporters not have gone back to that point? Regardless of the message, repeating the same phrase over and over to each question is not only not transparent, it's also rude.

It's certain that a public affairs officer provided talking points to both Wynne and Newton, but that direction should have come with instruction to be open and responsive, even if that meant divulging more information than would ordinarily come out.

Attribution Theory.

As discussed earlier with strategic communication theory, there are several different types of crises – victim, accident and preventable. The Bent Spear incident was caused by human error, made in spite of numerous regulations and redundant checks put in place to prevent such an error. This situation is absolutely a preventable crisis. Again, a preventable crisis has the highest level of attribution, meaning that the general public is looking for someone on whom or something on which to assign blame.

In responding to a preventable crisis, two main steps to responding are admitting the mistake and apologizing (Coombs, 2007). Both Wynne and Newton did the right thing in accepting that a mistake was made. They pointed out that there was a failure to follow procedures, that it adversely affected confidence in the Air Force and that personnel were being relieved of duty. These are steps to accepting that the Air Force made mistakes.

These steps were followed by some pretty intense distancing tactics though. The main talking points consistently point out that the public was never in danger and that the weapons never left Air Force control. While it's true that the weapons were always under Air Force protection, they did not have the appropriate level of protection that nuclear weapons should have on a flightline. This was the impetus for another back-and-forth

during the briefing, as a reporter pressed Newton for details about the level of security around the weapons:

Q Can you tell us, to go back to Pauline's question, at what point in all of this were these warheads in a position that was something less secure than they would have been if they had been recognized at the time to be special weapons?

GEN. NEWTON: These weapons were never out of the hands of America's airmen. They were always secure and they were, again, they were again under the security and control of airmen at all times.

Q (Off mike) -- position of less security than they would have been had they been understood to be nuclear war-heads?

GEN. NEWTON: These weapons were always secure at all times.

Again, it had been published that nuclear weapons required added security, and that no one knew that nuclear weapons had been loaded onto the B-52 in question, so it stands to follow that the nuclear weapons did not have the appropriate level of protection while on the flightlines at Minot or Barksdale. Again, Newton's standoffishness in response to questions isn't consistent with the messages an organization should deliver when accepting responsibility for a mistake.

In fact, many of the talking points from this briefing did nothing but try to distance the Air Force as a whole from the mistake. Both Air Force representatives emphasized that this was an isolated incident that was counter to the proven techniques mandated by the Air Force. As Maj. Gen. Newton pointed out, this was "an isolated incident involving a limited number of airmen." While Secretary Wynne said that the incident led to the Air Force doing a strict examination of its procedures, this investigation didn't lead to any procedural changes. When questions about procedures like security and storage came up, Newton reacted defensively. In fact, all that this investigation led to and all that was announced at this briefing was the firing of several servicemembers involved in the incident.

Air Force leadership only partially accepted responsibility for the mistake, so there was no apology to follow. The Air Force admitted that its personnel made the errors that led to the Bent Spear, but it was not taking the proper steps to react. Instead of accepting the blame that comes with a preventable crisis, the Air Force was deflecting responsibility onto the personnel whose dismissals were being announced.

Continuing Coverage

Two news articles in the *Military Times* and *Washington Post* following the briefing were the last two news articles on the incident in 2007 (Appendix R and S). These articles covered the briefing and provided more details about who received disciplinary actions. Both articles also broke down the exact details of what went wrong, demonstrating the curiosity in the public as to how such a highly regulated operation managed to go awry.

The *Military Times* article, released on October 21, announced that the 5th Bomb Wing had been decertified from handling nuclear weapons, Advanced Cruise Missiles or conducting ferry operations on weapons.

The other two pieces released that year were editorials in the *Bismarck Tribune*. The first, published on Oct. 26, accused the Air Force of not being transparent in discussing the Bent Spear (Appendix T). The editorial opened by saying, “We need to be reassured by the U.S. Air Force as plainly and reliably as possible that there shouldn't be a repeat of a chain of events in August involving nuclear weapons.” It makes repeated reference to the military’s history of being “nuanced” in its communication to the public. Coming one week after the press briefing provided by Secretary Wynne and Maj. Gen.

Newton, it's likely that the editorial staff at the *Tribune* was frustrated by the way information was delivered at the briefing. The editorial also points out that more is needed than the changes in personnel announced at the briefing.

Importantly, the editorial asked for a “front row seat” as the Air Force continued to fix the problem. It says that leaders went public from the start about the incident (not entirely accurate), but with its references to nuanced information, it's pretty clear that the editorial staff isn't impressed with the openness of Air Force communication.

The second *Tribune* editorial, published Dec. 14, discusses the fact that both nuclear-handling units at Minot – the 91st Space Wing and the 5th Bomb Wing – were ramping up for recertification in January (Appendix U). It echoes the call for transparency that came from the Oct. 26 editorial. It calls for the base to work to rebuild the trust of the community. It also brought up some non-nuclear fears held in the community – namely that if the base did not regain certification for handling nuclear weapons, it could wind up being closed. Going back to Minot's mayor's letter to the editor from September, this shows that the mistake, and the Air Force's inability to be open with the public about the problem, was leading the community to worry.

“Openness is necessary and will help the Minot installation regain the good reputation it has had in North Dakota,” the piece concluded.

2008

The first two months of 2008 were somewhat quiet in coverage. Both the 91st Space Wing and the 5th Bomb Wing – the two nuclear-handling units at Minot Air Base – were preparing for their nuclear surety inspections. The 91st was due for its regular

inspection, which was mandated every 18 months. The 5th Bomb Wing had to undergo the test as a result of being decertified after the Bent Spear.

Releases

While these preparations were going on, the Air Force was preparing to release a document outlining new procedures governing the handling of nuclear weapons. On Jan. 25, the *Bismarck Tribune* published an AP story announcing the publication of a 153-page document that updated procedures and personnel assignments regarding nuclear operations (Appendix V). The document itself made no mention of the Minot incident, but the article points out that the release of the new directive came just months after what it refers to as the Air Force's "blunder."

Another task force was also wrapping up an investigation over what went wrong in August of 2007. The *Washington Post* reported on Feb. 13 that a task force found that there had been a "'precipitous decrease in attention' to the security and control of the U.S. nuclear arsenal." (Appendix W) The task force, which was led by former Air Force Chief of Staff Larry Welch, and which reported its findings to the Senate Armed Services Committee, echoed concerns that had been voiced by other sources, including the *Bismarck Tribune* (Appendix M) – that the nation and Air Force leadership were downgrading the importance of the nuclear mission.

A *Military Times* article on the report points out that Congressional leaders were still disappointed with Air Force efforts (Appendix X). "The sloppiness and lack of discipline and lack of respect for the process didn't just happen overnight and fixing the problems are going to take awhile," said Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla. The headline of the article captured the spirit of the event: "Generals grilled on Minot nuclear mishap."

Neither the *Post* nor the *Military Times* quoted any members of the active duty Air Force, even though the majority of the task was composed of active Air Force generals. Lt. Gen. Daniel Darnell communicated one of the main Air Force talking points to the Senate members – that even though the weapons went unaccounted for, that they never left Air Force control and were never unsecured. This was the same point Maj. Gen. Newton repeated several times to reporters as they pressed him for details. The Senators did not agree with the Air Force’s logic.

“Absence of [increased] security represents a significant shortfall,” said Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.).

This article, along with the early articles that quoted reactions from congressmen, showed that one of the service’s most important stakeholder groups, elected officials, were disappointed in the Air Force’s actions. Darnell also announced to the group that during the investigations conducted on the incident, 132 recommendations on how to improve nuclear security had been made. Of those, 41 had been implemented.

Take Two... or Part Two

In March, the Air Force learned that it had mistakenly shipped nuclear missile components to Taiwan in August 2006 – a year before the Bent Spear incident. The Air Force announced the mistake on March 25 in a press conference hosted by Secretary Wynne, Air Force Lt. Gen. Carter Ham and Undersecretary of Defense Ryan Henry (Appendix Y). These leaders told the media that the missile components, which were classified material but did not contain nuclear material, were erroneously marked as helicopter batteries by the Air Force and shipped to Taiwan. Taiwanese authorities

noticed the mistake and alerted U.S. authorities, who gained control of the equipment and returned it to the United States.

The Air Force's early reaction to this mistake was much different than during the Bent Spear. This time, it was defense leaders who let the country know about the mistake – high ranking leaders. Though Wynne was quick to point out that the equipment in question in this mistake was not fissile material, there were no minimization strategies this time. There were no messages about how the public was never in danger or that the materials were shipped to a friendly trading partner. The key messages were that there was a mistake, that leadership was concerned, and that an investigation was underway.

Henry told the press that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates ordered “a comprehensive review of all policies, procedures as well as a physical site inventory of all nuclear and nuclear-associated material equipment across their respective programs.” The Air Force and the Defense Logistics Agency already completed an inventory of components related to those that were shipped to Taiwan.

White House Press Secretary Dana Perino was also asked about the issue in her regular press briefing on March 25 (Appendix Z). In response to a question, Perino said the president had been informed of the mistake, that he was pleased that the parts had been returned and that he appreciated that an investigation was underway. She further assured the press that the president still had faith in Air Force leadership despite the most recent nuclear-related mistake.

In looking at the life of the Bent Spear as a crisis, the obvious question is to ask if this Taiwan mistake is part of the same crisis or a new crisis. In analyzing it in this case study, it will be treated as part of the same crisis. The two events are so closely related

and happened in such a close timeframe that it would be tough to consider them separately.

Coverage

The *Washington Post* reported about the press conference and the incident on March 26 (Appendix AA). In the story, it brings up the recent Bent Spear as context for this newly discovered incident. On March 27, the *Post* further reported that Taiwanese authorities notified the U.S. in early 2007 that the package in question did not contain helicopter batteries (Appendix AB). With Air Force leaders unaware of what was shipped instead, the Taiwanese were instructed to dispose of the components. It was much later, when the Taiwanese opened the crates and found packages marked “Secret” that the Air Force began paying more attention and regained control of the material.

This looked really bad for the Air Force. This in itself was a preventable crisis, caused by human error. Even though this mistake happened more than a year earlier, its discovery came right on the coattails of another nuclear-related error. In both cases, something was misplaced, shipped in error and it took a while for anyone to even notice the components were missing. It was no longer possible for Air Force leaders to consider these mistakes as isolated. As had been mentioned in research reports and opinion pieces, it was obvious that there had been a decline in the attention that was being paid to nuclear operations. The secretary of defense agreed, as the *Bismarck Tribune* reported on March 28 (Appendix AC). He ordered a complete military-wide inventory of all nuclear weapons and nuclear-related material. The Air Force’s mistakes led to a break in confidence in nuclear operations throughout the entire military.

Back to Minot

Not to let anyone forget about the first incident, two months after coverage of the Taiwan mistake, the *Military Times* reported that the 5th Bomb Wing, the unit that shipped the nuclear weapons from Minot to Barksdale, failed its nuclear surety inspection (Appendix AD). This meant that the unit was found incapable of adequately performing its primary mission. Following the two nuclear-related incidents, this was a rather unfortunate situation. Not only did the unit fail, it failed after having spent months preparing. Every member of the unit knew when the inspection was coming. Everyone knew how much scrutiny would be on the inspection. Still, not everyone performed their jobs to standard. Inspectors attributed the failure to a lack of supervision and inadequate leadership.

The *Post* also covered the unit's failure (Appendix AE). It included quotes from Air Force spokesman Maj. Thomas Crosson, who said the inspection showed there were inadequacies in the unit's operations. In what is a downright comical twist, Crosson said "that he would neither confirm nor deny the contents of the defense agency's report," according to the article. He said the contents of the inspection report would not be released.

Again, the Air Force failed to be transparent in its communication about a mistake. It took responsibility for the mistake, ordered inspections and investigations, but hid behind the guise of national security instead of transparency. And, again, there was no apology.

Sacked

All of the mistakes the Air Force had made culminated in a press conference hosted by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on June 5 (Appendix AF). In a prepared statement, Gates announced the conclusion of the investigation he ordered after the shipping of the weapons components to Taiwan. He began by highlighting the good news of the report – that no service members' health was put at risk, that there was no sacrifice of America's nuclear deterrence, and the classified components had not been tampered with.

He followed the good news with the actual results. The first and primary point was that there were commonalities between the Taiwan incident and the Bent Spear. Second was that both accidents were preventable, but the oversight and regulating authorities in the Air Force were not doing their jobs. Importantly, Gates pointed out the lack of a culture of self assessment in the service – a trait that should be endemic to a high-reliability organization.

Gates pointed out that two actions were necessary: First, procedural changes needed to be made, as prior investigations and a couple of editorials pointed out already. Second, Gates said accountability was necessary. Several Air Force leaders had lost their jobs already, but in the light of a second mistake, consequences needed to go higher. Gates announced that he had accepted the resignations of Secretary Wynne and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Buzz Moseley.

He closed his statement on a personal note, saying that the Air Force was his branch of service, having served in the past. He affirmed his respect, support and commitment to the service. He admitted his regret that the mistakes that had been made led him to accept the resignations of the service's leaders.

Though he expressed a personal message and regret about the situation, he, like other officials, did not apologize. What he did do, was unequivocally accept responsibility for the mistakes on behalf of the Air Force. By bringing accountability to the highest level of the Air Force and by taking an unprecedented corrective action, Secretary Gates showed that the Defense Department was committed to making sure that another mistake didn't follow the two that were already made. He showed that the department was willing to finally be honest. This move was a necessary attempt to bring closure to the crisis and begin the recovery process.

Discussion

Recovery?

Again, the recovery phase is the end of the crisis, when an organization looks back on its crisis strategy, assesses its successes/failures and addresses weaknesses in the strategy. Not all organizations that experience crisis make it to this phase. The Air Force as an organization survived, but not without injury. Airmen lost their jobs, the 5th Bomb Wing lost its certification to perform its main mission, the Air Force's reputation took a major hit with its stakeholder groups and its two highest ranking officers were sacked. Certainly not a flawless escape from crisis.

But the question needs to be asked – was this the end of the crisis? As of June 5, when Secretary Wynne and Gen. Moseley resigned, the 5th Bomb Wing still had not passed its nuclear surety inspection. It finally passed its re-inspection in August, but then failed another inspection in September 2009, leading to the firing of its new commander. There were other nuclear mishaps to follow, including sleeping staff members, unsecured codes and missing equipment. Nothing was as serious as the incidents mentioned in this

case study, and most of the mainstream media gave up on coverage of these issues after June 2008. So, for the communication strategy, the resignation of the Air Force's top personnel is a logical stopping point for this case study.

Assessment

The mistaken shipment of nuclear weapons across the country was a disaster. The mistaken shipment of nuclear weapons components to Taiwan was another one. As Air Force leaders repeatedly pointed out, these mistakes led to service-wide investigations and massive changes in how the service was to handle nuclear weapons.

These investigations and the majority of the changes that came from them are part of the crisis recovery process. These steps didn't address the crisis response, but they did contribute to the precrisis phase – preparing for the future and looking at ways to prevent future crises. As Lt. Gen. Darnell pointed out in the February defense briefing, there was a bundle of revisions put in place regarding the handling of nuclear weapons. Secretary Gates announced that more procedural changes would be put into place and that they would come under new Air Force leadership. This is an analysis of weaknesses and an attempt to repair them. It's the heart of the recovery process.

It's important to look at weaknesses and procedures in an attempt to prevent crisis; it's the process of identifying and attempting to react to vulnerabilities – something the Air Force didn't do enough of prior to August 2007. But it's impossible to prevent mistakes forever. The reason crisis communication is so important is because an organization needs to be able to respond to accidents and emergencies and prevent them from turning into crises. In order to do that, crisis communication has to be part of an organization's operational strategy.

Air Force Doctrine Directive 2-5.3 calls for communication strategy to be part of operational strategy. The doctrine as it was written in 2007 did not put an emphasis on crisis communication though. Military regulations are constantly updated to adapt to new operations, so part of the recovery process should have been an analysis of the directive to identify and correct weaknesses in communication strategy. But the doctrine has not been updated since 2005, meaning that the same directive and guidance that led to the deficiencies of this crisis response are still governing today's public affairs operations.

That's not to say that the public affairs policy was necessarily the problem though. Other policies in place hampered the communication effort more – namely, the policy of hiding information in the name of national security. The security of the nation is obviously a high priority, but so is the confidence of the nation. It's a priority for the military to make sure the public believes it can protect the nation's security.

Communication is key in that effort. It's hard to miss the irony in the fact that the Air Force chose to err on the side of security in a situation in which Air Force mistakes actually could have sacrificed it. As the *New York Times* pointed out, lax nuclear security represents the same risks that Americans faced during the Cold War. The recovery phase should have been when Air Force leaders looked back at this policy and how it fails to address the importance of crisis communication.

That said, there are some notable differences in the way leadership responded to the shipment of nuclear components to Taiwan and the response to the Bent Spear. First, leaders were proactive with the Taiwan issue; there was a press conference before there was press coverage. As Ryan Henry pointed out, the priority was to be transparent. Proactivity was a great start, and communications did become more transparent during

the Taiwan incident, but there remained a reluctance to accept responsibility within the Air Force until Gates' press conference. There remained an inability to confirm or deny anything regarding the incident at Minot, whether it was the nature of materials being shipped or the results of an inspection. There remained the lack of a sincere apology, but there was improvement in practice, if not necessarily in policy.

Momentum

Communication requires momentum. In this field, momentum is like credibility. San Diego Fire Chief Jeff Bowman's strategy of being open and honest with stakeholders from the start made it easier for his entire organization to survive a crisis that it was operationally ill-prepared for. In a communicative capacity, it could hardly have been more prepared.

Momentum is a strength because of what it represents; it means things are in motion, and objects in motion tend to stay in motion. If you put your car in neutral and try to push it a few feet, the hardest part is getting it started. Once it's going, however, it's easy to keep it moving. That's momentum.

The Air Force – and the military as a whole – went into 2007 with mixed credibility. On the one hand, there was the past strained relationship between the media and the military, which more than likely had an effect on how the military was portrayed to the public. It affected the way individual servicemembers, like Maj. Gen. Newton, interacted with reporters.

On the other hand, individual troops might have had more credibility in 2007 than at any other point in history. As the military fought two wars, Americans had their cars

covered in yellow magnets, they gave up their first-class seats on airplanes for young troops, they sent care packages, they remembered the troops.

Conclusion

The military is a microcosm of the country. Without credibility and support, it doesn't accomplish its mission. It doesn't exist. The military's relationship with the public might be the most important relationship between an organization and a stakeholder group ever. As AFDD 2-5.3 points out, transparent communication efforts aid in public support and recruitment. When the messages the Air Force puts out harm the organization's credibility, it's counter to the goals AFDD seeks to accomplish.

What we saw in the response to this crisis is that policy stood in the way of good communication. The problem with policy is that it's not adaptive. Communicators, on the other hand, have to be adaptive, especially during a crisis. There was probably a number of Air Force communicators advising from the beginning of the Bent Spear that leaders should cop to the fact that nuclear weapons were involved. The problem was that the only person who could grant an exception to that policy was the secretary of the Air Force – the highest ranking person in the service. Having to go that high up the chain hinders adaptation. Reaction time is limited during a crisis because the onus is on communicating rapidly. Policies block the ability to react quickly.

Two important traits of high-reliability organizations are relevant here: decision-making authority at every level of the organization and a deference to expertise. Policy is obviously important, but it stands in the way of these two important abilities of HROs. Were public affairs officers given more authority and more decision-making ability, policies like the one that prevented officials from admitting that nuclear weapons were involved in the Minot incident would not harm Air Force credibility. Public affairs

officers are the ones with the communication expertise, so they should be the ones making decisions about communication efforts.

In order for that to happen, there needs to be a sea change in rank structure. In order for public affairs officers to have more authority, they need more rank. That's happening in the Air Force, as the current chief of public affairs is a general officer for the first time in 11 years. In the Army, it's a two-star general who governs public affairs. It's something to value deference to expertise, but sometimes it can be hard for a commander to defer to the advice of an officer who ranks three or four grades lower than him – especially during a crisis, where it's the commander's career on the line if something goes wrong.

The military has a hill to climb. An ingrained hostility toward the media will always be in the way of transparency. Policy is in the way also. In order for the public to be informed and continue to support the military, there needs to be a constant flow of information out of the Air Force and the other branches of service. The way out of this is for military leaders to be open. Open communication will lead to more favorable coverage. More favorable coverage will cut down on the hostility toward the media, and that will also lead to even more openness. A military that has the support of its stakeholder – all of its stakeholders – is ultimately a stronger fighting force. It's time for leaders to recognize that.

Appendix A

Air Force is scrapping its fleet of nuclear stealth missiles

Robert Burns
March 7, 2007
AP Newswire

The Air Force said Wednesday it will retire the most modern cruise missile in the U.S. nuclear arsenal, a "stealth" weapon developed in the 1980s with the ability to evade detection by Soviet radars.

Known as the Advanced Cruise Missile, the weapon is carried by the B-52 bomber and was designed to attack heavily defended sites. It is the most capable among a variety of air-launched nuclear weapons built during the Cold War that remain in the U.S. inventory even as the Pentagon is reducing its overall nuclear arms stockpile.

The Air Force had said as recently as February 2006 that it expected to keep the missile active until 2030.

If the retirement is carried out as planned, the Advanced Cruise Missile will be the first group of U.S. nuclear weapons to be scrapped since the last of the Air Force's 50 MX Peacekeeper land-based missiles was retired in September 2005.

The decision to retire the Advanced Cruise Missile fleet has not been publicly announced. It was brought to light by Hans M. Kristensen, director of the nuclear information project at the Federation of American Scientists. He noticed that funds for the program were cut in the Air Force budget request for 2008, and that no money is budgeted for it beyond 2008; when he inquired, the Air Force acknowledged the retirement decision.

An Air Force spokeswoman, Maj. Morshe Araujo, confirmed it on Wednesday. She and other Air Force public affairs officials were unable to provide additional details, including the rationale for the decision.

Araujo indicated that the retirement was part of a "balanced force reduction" being carried out to reduce the number of U.S. strategic nuclear weapons to between 1,700 and 2,200 by Dec. 31, 2012, as required under a U.S.-Russia arms reduction deal signed in Moscow in May 2002.

The treaty does not require that any specific group of nuclear weapons be retired, only smarck Tribu1,700-2,200. The Russians still have a nuclear-tipped cruise missile in active service, according to Robert S. Norris, an expert in American, Soviet and Chinese nuclear weapons.

The decision to get rid of the Advanced Cruise Missile comes amid U.S. efforts to modernize what remains of the nuclear arsenal, even as it presses Iran and North Korea to abandon their nuclear programs.

Last week the Bush administration took a major step toward building a new generation of nuclear warheads, selecting a design that is being touted as safer, more secure and more easily maintained than today's arsenal. A team of scientists from Lawrence Livermore

National Laboratory will proceed with the weapons design with an anticipation that the first warheads may be ready by 2012 as a replacement for Trident missiles on submarines.

As a matter of policy the Defense Department does not confirm the location of nuclear weapons, but Kristensen and other private nuclear experts said the fleet of more than 400 Advanced Cruise Missiles is located at the only two B-52 bomber bases: Minot Air Force Base, N.D., and Barksdale Air Force Base, La.

The Air Force originally planned to field 1,500 of the missiles, which were put on the drawing board in 1982 after U.S. officials determined that its predecessor, known as the AGM-86 air-launched cruise missile, which has no stealth capabilities, would soon be too easy to detect by air- and ground-based defenses.

Kristensen said there are about 1,300 of the older air-launched nuclear cruise missiles still in the Air Force inventory.

Norris, a nuclear weapons expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said it appears likely the Air Force will further shrink its inventory of air-launched nuclear weapons in the years ahead. He estimates that there are about 3,000 air-launched gravity bombs in the nuclear arsenal, based mostly in the United States.

The other main element of the U.S. nuclear arsenal is the Navy's fleet of nuclear-armed Trident submarines.

Norris estimates that the United States now has about 5,000 strategic nuclear weapons, including the Advance Cruise Missiles, so it will take further reductions to get down to the 1,700-2,200 level set by the 2002 treaty.

Appendix B

Warbirds receive 'excellent' NORI rating

Danny Monahan

May 5, 2006

Minot Air Force Base Public Affairs

5/5/2006 - MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. -- The 5th Bomb Wing's Nuclear Operational Readiness Inspection rating was announced to a full house at Dock 7 April 28.

After 10 days of around the clock hard work and weeks of preparation, the labor put forth by the Minot's Warbirds finally earned the wing an Excellent rating from the Air Combat Command Inspector General Team.

"We noticed a tremendous sense of pride throughout the 5th Bomb Wing that directly impacted the warfighting capability," said Col. David McFaddin, ACC IG team chief before presenting a slide show highlighting Minot's top performers.

As each name graced the screen, the audience cheered with sirens, whistles and even bullhorns.

After the results were read, the 5th BW Commander, Col. Eldon Woodie took the stage saying he was tickled to be the commander and thanked everyone for their hard work and coming out.

"To the warriors of the ACC IG team I thank you for the tough scrub," said Colonel Woodie. "You are truly are leaving us better than you found us. Sweating during training prevents bleeding on the battle field," Colonel Woodie thanked not only the Airmen and Department of Defense civilians, but the members of the local community, reminding the crowd that none of this would be possible without them as well.

"We were truly impressed with the professionalism, devotion and dedication to the mission displayed throughout this inspection," said Colonel McFaddin. "We'd be proud to go to war and fight side by side with your unit any day. I want to congratulate you on a successful completion of this inspection."

Appendix C

Misssteps in the Bunker

Joby Warrick and Walter Pincus
Sept. 23, 2007
Washington Post

Just after 9 a.m. on Aug. 29, a group of U.S. airmen entered a sod-covered bunker on North Dakota's Minot Air Force Base with orders to collect a set of unarmed cruise missiles bound for a weapons graveyard. They quickly pulled out a dozen cylinders, all of which appeared identical from a cursory glance, and hauled them along Bomber Boulevard to a waiting B-52 bomber.

The airmen attached the gray missiles to the plane's wings, six on each side. After eyeballing the missiles on the right side, a flight officer signed a manifest that listed a dozen unarmed AGM-129 missiles. The officer did not notice that the six on the left contained nuclear warheads, each with the destructive power of up to 10 Hiroshima bombs.

That detail would escape notice for an astounding 36 hours, during which the missiles were flown across the country to a Louisiana air base that had no idea nuclear warheads were coming. It was the first known flight by a nuclear-armed bomber over U.S. airspace, without special high-level authorization, in nearly 40 years.

The episode, serious enough to trigger a rare "Bent Spear" nuclear incident report that raced through the chain of command to Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and President Bush, provoked new questions inside and outside the Pentagon about the adequacy of U.S. nuclear weapons safeguards while the military's attention and resources are devoted to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Three weeks after word of the incident leaked to the public, new details obtained by The Washington Post point to security failures at multiple levels in North Dakota and Louisiana, according to interviews with current and former U.S. officials briefed on the initial results of an Air Force investigation of the incident.

The warheads were attached to the plane in Minot without special guard for more than 15 hours, and they remained on the plane in Louisiana for nearly nine hours more before being discovered. In total, the warheads slipped from the Air Force's nuclear safety net for more than a day without anyone's knowledge.

"I have been in the nuclear business since 1966 and am not aware of any incident more disturbing," retired Air Force Gen. Eugene Habiger, who served as U.S. Strategic Command chief from 1996 to 1998, said in an interview.

A simple error in a missile storage room led to missteps at every turn, as ground crews failed to notice the warheads, and as security teams and flight crew members failed to provide adequate oversight and check the cargo thoroughly. An elaborate nuclear safeguard system, nurtured during the Cold War and infused with rigorous accounting and command procedures, was utterly debased, the investigation's early results show.

The incident came on the heels of multiple warnings -- some of which went to the highest levels of the Bush administration, including the National Security Council -- of security problems at Air Force installations where nuclear weapons are kept. The risks are not that warheads might be accidentally detonated, but that sloppy procedures could leave room for theft or damage to a warhead, disseminating its toxic nuclear materials.

A former National Security Council staff member with detailed knowledge described the event as something that people in the White House "have been assured never could happen." What occurred on Aug. 29-30, the former official said, was "a breakdown at a number of levels involving flight crew, munitions, storage and tracking procedures -- faults that never were to line up on a single day."

Missteps in the Bunker

The air base where the incident took place is one of the most remote and, for much of the year, coldest military posts in the continental United States. Veterans of Minot typically describe their assignments by counting the winters passed in the flat, treeless region where January temperatures sometimes reach 30 below zero. In airman-speak, a three-year assignment becomes "three winters" at Minot.

The daily routine for many of Minot's crews is a cycle of scheduled maintenance for the base's 35 aging B-52H Stratofortress bombers -- mammoth, eight-engine workhorses, the newest of which left the assembly line more than 45 years ago. Workers also tend to 150 intercontinental ballistic missiles kept at the ready in silos scattered across neighboring cornfields, as well as hundreds of smaller nuclear bombs, warheads and vehicles stored in sod-covered bunkers called igloos.

"We had a continuous workload in maintaining" warheads, said Scott Vest, a former Air Force captain who spent time in Minot's bunkers in the 1990s. "We had a stockpile of more than 400 . . . and some of them were always coming due" for service.

Among the many weapons and airframes, the AGM-129 cruise missile was well known at the base as a nuclear warhead delivery system carried by B-52s. With its unique shape and design, it is easily distinguished from the older AGM-86, which can be fitted with either a nuclear or a conventional warhead.

Last fall, after 17 years in the U.S. arsenal, the Air Force's more than 400 AGM-129s were ordered into retirement by then-Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. Minot was told to begin shipping out the unarmed missiles in small groups to Barksdale Air Force Base near Shreveport, La., for storage. By Aug. 29, its crews had already sent more than 200 missiles to Barksdale and knew the drill by heart.

The Air Force's account of what happened that day and the next was provided by multiple sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the government's investigation is continuing and classified.

At 9:12 a.m. local time on Aug. 29, according to the account, ground crews in two trucks entered a gated compound at Minot known as the Weapons Storage Area and drove to an igloo where the cruise missiles were stored. The 21-foot missiles were already mounted on pylons, six apiece in clusters of three, for quick mounting to the wings of a B-52.

The AGM-129 is designed to carry silver W-80-1 nuclear warheads, which have a variable yield of between 5 and 150 kilotons. (A kiloton is equal to the explosive force of 1,000 tons of TNT.) The warheads were meant to have been removed from the missiles before shipment. In their place, crews were supposed to insert metal dummies of the same size and weight, but a different color, so the missiles could still be properly attached under the bomber's wings.

A munitions custodian officer is supposed to keep track of the nuclear warheads. In the case of cruise missiles, a stamp-size window on the missile's frame allows workers to peer inside to check whether the warheads within are silver. In many cases, a red ribbon or marker attached to the missile serves as an additional warning. Finally, before the missiles are moved, two-man teams are supposed to look at check sheets, bar codes and serial numbers denoting whether the missiles are armed.

Why the warheads were not noticed in this case is not publicly known. But once the missiles were certified as unarmed, a requirement for unique security precautions when nuclear warheads are moved -- such as the presence of specially armed security police, the approval of a senior base commander and a special tracking system -- evaporated.

The trucks hauled the missile pylons from the bunker into the bustle of normal air base traffic, onto Bomber Boulevard and M Street, before turning onto a tarmac apron where the missiles were loaded onto the B-52. The loading took eight hours because of unusual trouble attaching the pylon on the right side of the plane -- the one with the dummy warheads.

By 5:12 p.m., the B-52 was fully loaded. The plane then sat on the tarmac overnight without special guards, protected for 15 hours by only the base's exterior chain-link fence and roving security patrols.

Air Force rules required members of the jet's flight crew to examine all of the missiles and warheads before the plane took off. But in this instance, just one person examined only the six unarmed missiles and inexplicably skipped the armed missiles on the left, according to officials familiar with the probe.

"If they're not expecting a live warhead it may be a very casual thing -- there's no need to set up the security system and play the whole nuclear game," said Vest, the former Minot airman. "As for the air crew, they're bus drivers at this point, as far as they know."

The plane, which had flown to Minot for the mission and was not certified to carry nuclear weapons, departed the next morning for Louisiana. When the bomber landed at Barksdale at 11:23 a.m., the air crew signed out and left for lunch, according to the probe.

It would be another nine hours -- until 8:30 p.m. -- before a Barksdale ground crew turned up at the parked aircraft to begin removing the missiles. At 8:45, 15 minutes into the task, a separate missile transport crew arrived in trucks. One of these airmen noticed something unusual about the missiles. Within an hour, a skeptical supervisor had examined them and ordered them secured.

By then it was 10 p.m., more than 36 hours after the warheads left their secure bunker in Minot.

Once the errant warheads were discovered, Air Force officers in Louisiana were alarmed enough to immediately notify the National Military Command Center, a highly secure area of the Pentagon that serves as the nerve center for U.S. nuclear war planning. Such "Bent Spear" events are ranked second in seriousness only to "Broken Arrow" incidents, which involve the loss, destruction or accidental detonation of a nuclear weapon.

The Air Force decided at first to keep the mishap under wraps, in part because of policies that prohibit the confirmation of any details about the storage or movement of nuclear weapons. No public acknowledgment was made until service members leaked the story to the Military Times, which published a brief account Sept. 5.

Officials familiar with the Bent Spear report say Air Force officials apparently did not anticipate that the episode would cause public concern. One passage in the report contains these four words:

"No press interest anticipated."

'What the Hell Happened Here?'

The news, when it did leak, provoked a reaction within the defense and national security communities that bordered on disbelief: How could so many safeguards, drilled into generations of nuclear weapons officers and crews, break down at once?

Military officers, nuclear weapons analysts and lawmakers have expressed concern that it was not just a fluke, but a symptom of deeper problems in the handling of nuclear weapons now that Cold War anxieties have abated.

"It is more significant than people first realized, and the more you look at it, the stranger it is," said Joseph Cirincione, director for nuclear policy at the Center for American Progress think tank and the author of a history of nuclear weapons. "These weapons -- the equivalent of 60 Hiroshimas -- were out of authorized command and control for more than a day."

The Air Force has sought to offer assurances that its security system is working. Within days, the service relieved one Minot officer of his command and disciplined several airmen, while assigning a major general to head an investigation that has already been extended for extra weeks. At the same time, Defense Department officials have announced that a Pentagon-appointed scientific advisory board will study the mishap as part of a larger review of procedures for handling nuclear weapons.

"Clearly this incident was unacceptable on many levels," said an Air Force spokesman, Lt. Col. Edward Thomas. "Our response has been swift and focused -- and it has really just begun. We will spend many months at the air staff and at our commands and bases ensuring that the root causes are addressed."

While Air Force officials see the Minot event as serious, they also note that it was harmless, since the six nuclear warheads never left the military's control. Even if the bomber had crashed, or if someone had stolen the warheads, fail-safe devices would have prevented a nuclear detonation.

But independent experts warn that whenever nuclear weapons are not properly safeguarded, their fissile materials are at risk of theft and diversion. Moreover, if the

plane had crashed and the warheads' casings cracked, these highly toxic materials could have been widely dispersed.

"When what were multiple layers of tight nuclear weapon control internal procedures break down, some bad guy may eventually come along and take advantage of them," said a former senior administration official who had responsibility for nuclear security.

Some Air Force veterans say the base's officers made an egregious mistake in allowing nuclear-warhead-equipped missiles and unarmed missiles to be stored in the same bunker, a practice that a spokesman last week confirmed is routine. Charles Curtis, a former deputy energy secretary in the Clinton administration, said, "We always relied on segregation of nuclear weapons from conventional ones."

Former nuclear weapons officials have noted that the weapons transfer at the heart of the incident coincides with deep cuts in deployed nuclear forces that will bring the total number of warheads to as few as 1,700 by the year 2012 -- a reduction of more than 50 percent from 2001 levels. But the downsizing has created new accounting and logistical challenges, since U.S. policy is to keep thousands more warheads in storage, some as a strategic reserve and others awaiting dismantling.

A secret 1998 history of the Air Combat Command warned of "diminished attention for even 'the minimum standards' of nuclear weapons' maintenance, support and security" once such arms became less vital, according to a declassified copy obtained by Hans Kristensen, director of the Federation of American Scientists' nuclear information project.

The Air Force's inspector general in 2003 found that half of the "nuclear surety" inspections conducted that year resulted in failing grades -- the worst performance since inspections of weapons-handling began. Minot's 5th Bomb Wing was among the units that failed, and the Louisiana-based 2nd Bomb Wing at Barksdale garnered an unsatisfactory rating in 2005.

Both units passed subsequent nuclear inspections, and Minot was given high marks in a 2006 inspection. The 2003 report on the 5th Bomb Wing attributed its poor performance to the demands of supporting combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Wartime stresses had "resulted in a lack of time to focus and practice nuclear operations," the report stated.

Last year, the Air Force eliminated a separate nuclear-operations directorate known informally as the N Staff, which closely tracked the maintenance and security of nuclear weapons in the United States and other NATO countries. Currently, nuclear and space operations are combined in a single directorate. Air Force officials say the change was part of a service-wide reorganization and did not reflect diminished importance of nuclear operations.

"Where nuclear weapons have receded into the background is at the senior policy level, where there are other things people have to worry about," said Linton F. Brooks, who resigned in January as director of the National Nuclear Security Administration. Brooks, who oversaw billions of dollars in U.S. spending to help Russia secure its nuclear stockpile, said the mishandling of U.S. warheads indicates that "something went seriously wrong."

A similar refrain has been voiced hundreds of times in blogs and chat rooms popular with former and current military members. On a Web site run by the Military Times, a former B-52 crew chief who did not give his name wrote: "What the hell happened here?"

A former Air Force senior master sergeant wrote separately that "mistakes were made at the lowest level of supervision and this snowballed into the one of the biggest mistakes in USAF history. I am still scratching my head wondering how this could [have] happened."

Appendix D

B-52 mistakenly flies with nukes aboard

Michael Hoffman
Sept. 4, 2007
Military Times

A B-52 bomber mistakenly loaded with six nuclear warheads flew from Minot Air Force Base, N.D., to Barksdale Air Force Base, La., on Aug. 30, resulting in an Air Force-wide investigation, according to three officers who asked not to be identified because they were not authorized to discuss the incident.

The B-52 was loaded with Advanced Cruise Missiles, part of a Defense Department effort to decommission 400 of the ACMs. But the nuclear warheads should have been removed at Minot before being transported to Barksdale, the officers said. The missiles were mounted onto the pylons of the bomber's wings.

Advanced Cruise Missiles carry a W80-1 warhead with a yield of 5 to 150 kilotons and are specifically designed for delivery by B-52 strategic bombers.

Air Force spokesman Lt. Col. Ed Thomas said the transfer was safely conducted and the weapons were in Air Force custody and control at all times.

However, the mistake was not discovered until the B-52 landed at Barksdale, which left the warheads unaccounted for during the approximately 3 1/2 hour flight between the two bases, the officers said.

An investigation headed by Maj. Gen. Douglas Raaberg, director of Air and Space Operations at Air Combat Command Headquarters, was launched immediately to find the cause of the mistake and figure out how it could have been prevented, Thomas said.

Air Force officials wouldn't officially specify whether nuclear weapons were involved, in accordance with long-standing Defense Department policy regarding nuclear munitions, Thomas said. However, the three officers close to the situation did confirm the warheads were nuclear.

Officials at Minot immediately conducted an inventory of its nuclear weapons after the oversight was discovered, and Thomas said he could confirm that all remaining nuclear weapons at Minot are accounted for.

"Air Force standards are very exacting when it comes to munitions handling," he said. "The weapons were always in our custody and there was never a danger to the American public."

At no time was there a risk for a nuclear detonation, even if the B-52 crashed on its way to Barksdale, said Steve Fetter, a former Defense Department official who worked on nuclear weapons policy in 1993-94. A crash could ignite the high explosives associated with the warhead, and possibly cause a leak of the plutonium, but the warheads' elaborate safeguards would prevent a nuclear detonation from occurring, he said.

"The main risk would have been the way the Air Force responded to any problems with the flight because they would have handled it much differently if they would have known nuclear warheads were onboard," he said.

The risk of the warheads falling into the hands of rogue nations or terrorists was minimal since the weapons never left the United States, according to Fetter and Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, an independent research and policy think tank in Washington, D.C.

The crews involved with the mistaken load at the 5th Bomb Wing at Minot have been temporarily decertified from performing their duties involving munitions pending corrective actions or additional training, Thomas said.

Air Combat Command will have a command-wide mission stand down Sept. 14 to review their procedures in response to this oversight, he said.

"The Air Force takes its mission to safeguard weapons seriously," he said. "No effort will be spared to ensure that the matter is thoroughly and completely investigated."

Appendix E

Defense Department Briefing Regarding Mistaken Shipment of Weapons

Presenter: Geoff Morrell
Sept. 5, 2007
Federal News Service

SECTION: DEPARTMENT DEFENSE BRIEFING (Only relevant part included)

Q This story that we now learned about, the Air Force inadvertently transporting six nuclear warheads from North Dakota to Louisiana -- how is it that these warheads were missing from Minot Air Force Base for some three or four hours and nobody apparently knew about it?

MR. MORRELL: Well, I think as you all know, it's long-standing policy of this department not to talk about nuclear weapons, so I can't confirm or deny that indeed the nuclear weapons were involved in the incident which you relayed to me.

I can, however, tell you that the Air Force is currently investigating an error made last Thursday in the transfer of munitions, as you mentioned, from Minot Air Force Base to Barksdale Air Force Base aboard a B-52 Stratofortress.

I can also tell you furthermore that Secretary Gates was quickly informed of this incident. He was called, I believe, early Friday morning and he has been receiving daily briefings from General Buzz Moseley, the Air Force chief of staff, on actions that the Air Force is taking and the progress of their investigation. Furthermore Secretary Gates has been assured by General Moseley that the munitions were part of a routine transfer between the two bases and at all times, they were in the custody and control of Air Force personnel, and at no time was the public in danger.

Q But I mean, apparently we've had the commander relieved of his command. We've had some airmen who have been suspended. Can you -- I mean, how serious an incident was this? And was there, at any time, any real danger on the ground?

MR. MORRELL: I'm not aware of any disciplinary action that's been taken. I am told however that the Air Force should complete a full report on this matter, including any prospective corrective actions which need to take place, and that should be delivered to the secretary by the end of next week. With regards to how important of how troublesome this is, I forget how you characterize it. Well, it's clearly important enough that the secretary was informed of it and that he has requested daily briefings from General Moseley as to what they are doing to fix the problem and to get to the bottom of the problem. I can also tell you that it's important enough that President Bush was notified of it, so it's clearly important. But I cannot as a matter of policy as I've stated before discuss whether or not nuclear weapons were involved.

Q You said very early in the morning. When? Was he actually awakened to the --

MR. MORRELL: I'm not clued in on the secretary's sleep patterns just yet. But I am told he was told early in the morning that Friday morning.

Appendix F

Loose Nukes: Warheads in the Sky

Mike Nizza

Sept. 5, 2007

The Lede Blog by New York Times

The Military Times [brings word](#) of a screw-up in the United States Air Force that has already cost a squadron leader his command and sent shocked headlines around the Web.

On Aug. 30, a B-52 bomber took off from Minot Air Force base in North Dakota with [between five and six](#) nuclear warheads, the report says. They were supposed to be detached from cruise missiles before the flight.

The good news: the plane did not embark on some rogue mission straight out of TV's "24," instead landing safely and without the intervention of Jack Bauer at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.

The bad news: the weapons were missing from Minot during the three-hour flight, and no alarms sounded. At first glance, that's extremely scary — [loose nukes!](#) — but there was "never a danger to the American public," according to one official quoted by the Military Times. Even if the bomber crashed, there would be [no nuclear detonation](#):

A crash could ignite the high explosives associated with the warhead, and possibly cause a leak of the plutonium, but the warheads' elaborate safeguards would prevent a nuclear detonation from occurring, [Steve Fetter, a former Defense Department official who worked on nuclear weapons policy in 1993-94,] said.

"The main risk would have been the way the Air Force responded to any problems with the flight because they would have handled it much differently if they would have known nuclear warheads were onboard," he said.

The military immediately sent alerts up the chain of command, including President Bush and Gen. Peter Pace, the chairman of the joint chiefs, [Agence France Presse](#) [said](#).

And the Air Force launched an immediate investigation "to find the cause of the mistake and figure out how it could have been prevented," the Military Times said. It evidently faulted the squadron commander, as a fairly damning quote — "the Air Force has lost all confidence in his ability to handle nuclear weapons" — suggests in an [NBC News](#) report.

Friday, 9:03 a.m. Eastern [Arms Control Work](#) notices a news release from Minot Air Force Base with a headline that is extremely funny in hindsight: "[Enjoy a safe Labor Day weekend](#)."

Appendix G

Flight of Nuclear Warheads Over U.S. Is Under Inquiry

AP Newswire
Sept. 6, 2006
New York Times

A B-52 bomber was mistakenly armed with six nuclear warheads and flown for more than three hours across several states last week, prompting an Air Force investigation and the firing of one commander, Pentagon officials said Wednesday.

The incident was so serious that President Bush and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates were quickly informed, and Mr. Gates has asked for daily briefings on the Air Force inquiry, said Geoff Morrell, a press secretary at the Department of Defense.

"At no time was the public in danger," Mr. Morrell said.

The plane was carrying advanced cruise missiles from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana on Aug. 30, said the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of a Defense Department policy not to confirm information on nuclear weapons.

The missiles, which are being decommissioned, were mounted onto pylons on the bomber's wings, and it is unclear why the warheads had not been removed beforehand.

Representative Ike Skelton, Democrat of Missouri and the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, called the mishandling of the weapons "deeply disturbing" and said the committee would press the military for details. Representative Edward J. Markey, Democrat of Massachusetts and a senior member of the Homeland Security Committee, said the incident was "absolutely inexcusable."

"Nothing like this has ever been reported before, and we have been assured for decades that it was impossible," said Mr. Markey, the co-chairman of the House task force on nonproliferation.

The Air Combat Command has ordered a commandwide stand down on Sept. 14 to review procedures, officials said. They said there was minimal risk to crews and the public because of safety features designed into the munitions.

The munitions squadron commander has been relieved of his duties, an official said, and crews involved with the mistaken load, including ground crew workers, have been temporarily decertified for handling munitions.

The investigation is expected to take several weeks.

The incident was first reported by The Military Times newspaper group.

"There is no more serious issue than the security and proper handling of nuclear weapons," Mr. Skelton said in a statement Wednesday. "The American people, our

friends and our potential adversaries must be confident that the highest standards are in place when it comes to our nuclear arsenal."

Appendix H

In Error, B-52 Flew Over U.S. With Nuclear-Armed Missiles

Josh White
Sept. 6, 2006
Washington Post

An Air Force B-52 bomber flew across the central United States last week with six cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads that were mistakenly attached to the airplane's wing, defense officials said yesterday.

The Stratofortress bomber, based at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, was transporting a dozen Advanced Cruise Missiles to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana on Aug. 30. But crews inadvertently loaded half of them with nuclear warheads attached.

Air Force officials said the warheads were not activated and at no time posed a threat to the public. But a timeline of the episode supplied by the Air Force yesterday to House and Senate lawmakers indicated that the missiles in question sat on a runway in Louisiana for nearly 10 hours before workers noticed that the nuclear warheads were inside.

Military officials also said they were concerned that the warheads were unaccounted for several hours while the missiles were in transit. The missiles never left Air Force control, they said.

The cruise missiles -- part of an Air Force fleet of more than 400 of their kind -- are being retired and usually would not carry nuclear warheads while being transported. Defense officials said the B-52's mission last week did not include training runs, so the missiles were never meant to be launched. The cruise missiles have a range of about 2,000 miles and are designed to hit precision targets well behind a potential enemy's lines.

Two defense officials said it is unclear how stringent safeguards for the handling of nuclear weapons were skirted, allowing the missiles with the warheads to be loaded onto a pylon that was then attached to the underside of the B-52's wing. Air Force officials said the mistake was a serious breach of rules and that an investigation began immediately.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl M. Levin (D-Mich.) and Sen. John McCain (Ariz.), the panel's ranking Republican, yesterday jointly called the episode "a matter of grave concern" and, in a letter to Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, requested an investigation of the incident by the Pentagon's inspector general.

The aircraft's pilots and other crew members were unaware that they were carrying nuclear warheads, officials said. "Essentially, this is an issue of a departure from our very exacting standards," said Lt. Col. Edward Thomas, an Air Force spokesman at the Pentagon, who declined to confirm that nuclear warheads were involved. "The Air Force maintains the highest standards of safety and precision, so any deviation from these well-established munitions procedures is very serious, and we are responding swiftly."

The incident, first reported by the Military Times, prompted senior leaders to relieve a munitions squadron commander of his duties. Other airmen have been temporarily suspended from duties.

"Nothing like this has ever been reported before, and we have been assured for decades that it was impossible," said Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), co-chairman of the House Bipartisan Task Force on Nonproliferation. "The complete breakdown of the Air Force command and control over enough nuclear weapons to destroy several cities has frightening implications not only for the Air Force, but for the security of our entire nuclear weapons stockpile."

The Air Force's Air Combat Command has ordered a stand-down for its bases next week to review procedures and prevent a repeat of the mistake. "All evidence seems to point to this being an isolated mistake," Thomas said.

Geoff Morrell, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters at a news conference yesterday that Gates was informed of the incident early last Friday and has been receiving daily progress reports. Morrell said President Bush was also notified.

In a statement yesterday, Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said he found the reports "deeply disturbing."

Appendix I

Bismarck Tribune News Roundup

Staff Report
Sept. 7, 2007
Bismarck Tribune

A lot of Americans unexpectedly learned where Minot Air Force Base is this week when a B-52 bomber accidentally left the base with nuclear weapons aboard. Reports of the nuclear-armed plane, which flew between Minot and a base in Louisiana on Aug. 30, first surfaced Wednesday in the Army Times.

Upon learning that the headline-making flight originated from their state, members of North Dakota's Democratic congressional delegation found themselves doubly involved. Both Sens. Byron Dorgan and Kent Conrad were briefed on the matter Tuesday, a day before it made national headlines.

Dorgan said he was "very concerned" about the flight and immediately called for a full classified briefing to learn more. Conrad said it was "a very serious matter" and Rep. Earl Pomeroy called the incident "very troubling."

After the briefing, which occurred Thursday, Conrad said he was reassured that the Air Force was trying to do the right thing to prevent this from happening again. He said Air Force officials told him that they will be taking a number of steps, including the dismissal of the base's munitions officer, a full review of the incident and a "stand down" day for Air Force personnel to receive more training in the handling of nuclear weapons.

Pomeroy said he was assured during the briefing that the incident will not result in any changes in the role of B-52 bomber operations at Minot Air Force Base.

Hoeven chairs summit

Gov. John Hoeven traveled to Denver Wednesday to host a summit of the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission, a group of governors and other officials who deal with state regulation of the energy industry.

Hoeven is chairman of the group for 2007.

Wednesday's summit specifically dealt with strategies for improving market conditions for domestic oil producers and consumers in the Rocky Mountain and Upper Great Plains regions.

"That means working together to build more pipeline infrastructure to get crude to refineries, as well as increased refinery capacity and finished pipeline to get more fuel to consumers," Hoeven said in a statement.

Jurisdiction meeting

Extraterritorial jurisdiction, a fancy term for cities having a say in the governing of areas at their fringes, is causing some heartburn for a local contractor.

Brian Bitner argued unsuccessfully during the last legislative session that state law governing this issue needed to be changed. Bitner is now looking to schedule a community meeting on the issue to "provide a unified voice" to legislators who are studying it in the interim.

The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Bismarck Rural Fire Department, which is located east of Bismarck on Highway 10.

(Reach reporter Jonathan Rivoli at 223-8482 or jonathan.rivoli@bismarcktribune.com.)
Bomber flight grabs attention

Appendix J

Commander disciplined for nuclear mistake

By Michael Hoffman
Sept. 7, 2007
Military Times

The Air Force continued handing out disciplinary actions in response to the six nuclear warheads mistakenly flown on a B-52 Stratofortress bomber from Minot Air Force Base, N.D., to Barksdale Air Force Base, La., on Aug. 30. The squadron commander in charge of Minot's munitions crews was relieved of all duties pending the investigation.

It was originally reported that five nuclear warheads were transported, but officers who tipped Military Times to the incident who have asked to remain anonymous since they are not authorized to discuss the incident, have since updated that number to six.

Air Force and defense officials would not confirm the missiles were armed with nuclear warheads Wednesday, citing longstanding policy, but they did confirm the Air Force was "investigating an error made last Thursday during the transfer of munitions" from Minot to Barksdale.

The original plan was to transport non-nuclear Advanced Cruise Missiles, mounted on the wings of a B-52, to Barksdale as part of a Defense Department effort to decommission 400 of the ACMs. It was not discovered that the six missiles had nuclear warheads until the plane landed at Barksdale, leaving the warheads unaccounted for during the approximately 3 1/2 hour flight between the two bases, the officers said.

President Bush was immediately alerted to the mistake and the Air Force launched a service-wide investigation headed by Maj. Gen. Douglas Raaberg, director of Air and Space Operations at Air Combat Command Headquarters, said Air Force spokesman Lt. Col. Ed Thomas.

Appendix K

Wynne heads to Minot to review nuke procedure

The Associated Press
Sept. 13, 2007
Military Times

MINOT, N.D. — The secretary of the Air Force, Michael Wynne, is expected to visit Minot Air Force Base on Friday to go over procedures for handling nuclear weapons there.

The visit comes after Pentagon officials confirmed Air Force Times reports that a B-52 bomber from Minot was mistakenly armed with six nuclear warheads and flown across several states last month.

“Secretary Wynne takes the recent breakdown in the munitions system very seriously and is committed to ensuring munitions processes are safe, secure and absolutely reliable,” a statement from the base said.

“I don’t think this can be considered routine,” said Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D. “This is the secretary of the Air Force coming because there has been a very serious matter develop. He is an outstanding person and I think he wants to hear, as he should, what happened here to make certain it never happens again. “

The Air Combat Command has ordered a command-wide stand down Friday to review procedures in response to the Aug. 30 incident. Officials there was minimal risk to crews and the public because of safety features designed into the weapons.

Appendix L

Errors Behind Warheads' Flight Unfold; Nuclear and Nonnuclear Missiles Were Stored in Same Bunker, Lawmaker Says

Walter Pincus
Sept. 28, 2007
Washington Post

An Air Force decision to store nuclear-armed cruise missiles in the same North Dakota bunker as missiles containing dummy warheads played a key role in the unrecognized transport of six nuclear devices from North Dakota to Louisiana last month, according to the head of a congressional oversight committee.

Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Armed Services subcommittee on strategic weapons, said the decision "created a mistake waiting to happen."

Tauscher said she has been briefed on the interim conclusions of two Air Force investigations into the troubled Aug. 30 flight of a B-52 bomber over the country with six nuclear-armed, air-launched AGM-129 cruise missiles under its wing. "We still don't know exactly what happened," she added.

It was the first known flight by a nuclear-armed bomber over U.S. airspace without special authorization in nearly 40 years. As previously reported in The Washington Post, the six nuclear warheads, each with the explosive power of more than 10 Hiroshima atomic bombs, were unnoticed -- and without safeguards -- for 36 hours.

Tauscher said her subcommittee will hold hearings in the next two weeks to examine the results of two Air Force investigations now underway. "We are going to be looking into inventory controls of the weapons," she said. She referred to the elaborate nuclear safeguards, requiring multiple orders and checklists supervised by trained personnel, that have governed any nuclear weapon's movements.

Summing up the briefings to date, Tauscher described as the "antecedent problem" the dismantling of some AGM-129s whose nuclear warheads were replaced with metal dummies of the same size and weight.

"You can't leave them in the same facility [as missiles with nuclear warheads] and expect people to tell the difference, . . . not from five feet away," she said.

One focus of her inquiry will be when and why the Air Force dropped a policy of keeping nuclear weapons separate from nonnuclear ones. Another will be how related security protections "fell apart at two different bases," Tauscher added. "We are going to check the checkers," she said.

She said the committee also plans to look at the process of decommissioning nuclear weapons. In the past, retired nuclear weapons were sent to the Pantex facility in Texas, where the Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) oversees the assembly and the disassembly of warheads.

In this case, the W80 warheads being removed from AGM-129s were stored by the Air Force before they were turned over to the NNSA.

"I want to see NNSA involved in this process," Tauscher said. In addition, she plans to look at why the Air Force turned the delivery of the missiles into a training flight.

The B-52 crew that flew from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana to Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota to pick up the missiles did not include personnel trained in the handling of nuclear weapons. Tauscher confirmed that one of the crew members performed an inadequate check of the missiles after they were loaded onto the plane, looking only at those without the warheads and skipping the nuclear-armed missiles on the other side.

The most important person in the flight crew, she said, was the one assigned to look through a five-eighths-inch hole in each missile to determine whether the warhead inside was a dummy or a nuclear one.

Referring to the series of errors, Tauscher said: "We are lucky it didn't happen before."

Appendix M

Nukes not

Opinion
Sept. 17, 2007
Bismarck Tribune

Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were a legendary comedy duo. They would both be on their feet if they were competing in the television reality show, "Last Comic Standing." Quite a feat, since they've been dead for years.

But one piece of their genius - Who's on First - could arguably be applicable to what happened recently when a B-52 bomber flew from Minot Air Force Base to Louisiana mistakenly armed with six nuclear warheads.

Costello: Well then, who's on first? Abbott: Yes. Costello: I mean the fellow's name. Abbott: Who. Costello: The guy on first. Abbott: Who. Costello: The first baseman. Abbott: Who. Costello: The guy playing... Abbott: Who is on first! Costello: I'm asking YOU who's on first. Abbott: That's the man's name. Costello: That's who's name? Abbott: Yes. Costello: Well go ahead and tell me. Abbott: That's it. Costello: That's who? Abbott: Yes.

The city of Minot, the base and the military might not like that characterization; maybe it isn't even completely fair or perfectly applicable. But here's a fact: There is no room for error when nukes are involved. And here's a question: Who - not the first baseman - was responsible, or even more importantly, "what" was responsible?

Make no mistake. This was a big mistake, big enough to be brought to the attention of the president and the secretary of defense. Big enough to have many high ranking officials and politicians falling all over themselves in efforts to "fix" the problem and/or gain publicity.

Words such as "deeply disturbing," "absolutely inexcusable," "impossible," "serious issue," "full investigation" have been used. That's good.

Certainly, many would like the publicity of the incident to go away. That effort included contextualizing the news by making it known that the public was never in danger and that the weapons were designed with safety features that would not have allowed detonation upon impact. That is not the issue. This is: If a mistake of this magnitude can occur, what other mistakes have - or will - occur in the future, which could - or already did - lead to real safety concerns.

Past policies, especially during the Cold War years, have included strict guidelines to ensure no one person could ever gain access or control of a dangerous weapon. Weapon storage areas, weapon movement and loaded airplanes have long been heavily

guarded by special police. Munitions specialists have followed strict guidelines when working on, moving or loading weapons. And crewmembers have followed two-man and two-officer policy controls when preparing for flights and managing weapons.

The key to safety and consistency always has been constant training and practice, checks and double checks. So, with this huge mistake, the public deserves to know how it happened and how potential mistakes will be avoided in the future. This time, the words "trust me" aren't enough.

This was not something that just happened. The conditions leading to the gaff took some time. Imagine this scenario. Rewind to the end of the Cold War and the return home from Desert Storm when the Air Force began extensive downsizing, based more than likely on political decisions rather than on what was best for the Air Force and its mission to defend the country.

While career military men were being "kicked out" - or to be politically correct, downsized - it would be hard to argue that this hasn't led to an erosion of policy, guidelines and proper training, exacerbated by the demand for ever-increasing missions to support our recent battles abroad.

Any investigation into what happened should not be an individual witch hunt, looking to burn at the stake a few enlisted men or officers responsible. The investigation should, however, uncover the necessary redundancy systems, policies and procedures that have been altered - and by whom - that made it easier for this and future human error to go undetected. Then changes need to be made.

Appendix N

Minot AFB safety record tops

Curt Zimbelman
Sept. 17, 2007
Bismarck Tribune

We all know and have heard that there is an ongoing investigation into the incident involving the transportation of strategic munitions from Minot to Barksdale Air Force Base, La. From what we have read and heard in the media, the focus of the study is on how the incident occurred; in other words, it is an investigation that will result in systemic improvements to the procedures of the Air Force. The focus is not on an accident or on an issue of safety. I have heard nothing but support for Minot Air Force Base from every part of the Minot community.

As our friends from around the country as well as national media outlets make statements that call into question the professionalism of the airmen at the Minot AFB, consider the following facts:

3 The B-52s at Minot AFB were dedicated to strategic deterrence during the Cold War and flew with strategic munitions onboard for more than 30 years until the early '90s.

3 The B-52s have been at Minot AFB since the '60s and have never had an accident with munitions on a plane, either conventional or strategic.

3 Both the 5th Bomb Wing and the 91st Space Wing are evaluated by an exhaustive inspection called the Nuclear Surety Inspection, which is a pass/fail inspection. Both wings have consistently passed that inspection, and individual units within each wing have been recognized with superior accomplishments. Passing the NSI inspection is the national license to work with nuclear devices.

3 The airmen at the Minot AFB are highly trained individuals who have their safety, the safety of their North Dakota neighbors and the defense of our nation in the forefront of their minds.

3 When the B-52 deploys to areas of regional conflict to support the objectives of our country, they deploy loaded with munitions and have done so safely without incident.

3 The B-52s travel to practice ranges to drop live ordnance, and those missions involve flying loaded with the munitions that will be dropped on the range. Those missions have occurred without incident.

3 The munitions, whether strategic or conventional, are all treated the same in the loading process and in the flying mission. Safety is job one, and again, there has never been an accident.

Minot and Minot AFB have been called a team and referred to as one big community. We all know that when a member of a team or our community needs help, we pull together to help our team or neighbor. This is one of those times when the community of Minot will stand with our friends and neighbors at Minot AFB.

Appendix O

5 to be fired for Minot nuclear mistake

Pauline Jelinek -
Oct. 18, 2007
Military Times (Associated Press story)

The Air Force is planning to fire at least five officers for an incident in which nuclear-armed missiles were mistakenly loaded on a B-52 bomber and flown across the U.S. — the worst known violation of nuclear security rules in decades.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates is scheduled to be briefed Friday on the plan to fire the officers and other results of a six-week Air Force probe into the Aug. 30 incident. No one noticed for hours that the weapons were on the bomber, several Defense Department officials said.

One said the investigation found long-established procedures for handling the munitions were not followed and it recommends that five or more officers be relieved of their duties.

All spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the record. Two also said parts of the report were still being reviewed by senior Air Force officials, though it was unclear whether any changes in it were planned.

The Air Force planned a press conference for 3 p.m. Friday to discuss the matter, a spokesman said.

The service said last month that one munitions squadron commander was fired shortly after the August flight and that ground crews and others involved had been temporarily decertified for handling weapons.

In an embarrassing incident that lawmakers called very disturbing, the B-52 mistakenly armed with six nuclear-tipped cruise missiles flew from Minot Air Force Base, N.D., to Barksdale Air Force Base, La., with the missiles mounted under one of the bomber's wings.

The officials declined to say what procedures were not followed. But the mishandling in August would have required not one mistake, but a whole series of lapses by a number of people in order for armed weapons — as opposed to unarmed ones — to be inadvertently taken out of a storage bunker, mounted on the B-52, misidentified on a flight manifest and flown across the country for some three hours without anyone noticing.

The plane also sat on a runway with the missiles for hours after arriving in Louisiana before the breach was known — meaning a total of 36 hours passed before the missiles were properly secured, officials have said.

The Air Combat Command ordered a command-wide stand-down — instituted base by base and completed Sept. 14 — to set aside time for personnel to review procedures, officials said.

The incident was so serious that President Bush and Gates were quickly informed.

The Air Force said there was never any danger to the public because the weapons are designed with multiple safety features that ensure the warheads do not detonate accidentally.

But officials also have asserted over the years that such a mistake could not happen because there were numerous procedures in place to ensure the safe handling of nuclear weapons.

An Air Force spokesman, Lt. Col. Edward Thomas, declined to confirm Thursday morning what punishments were planned or give any details of the probe's findings, saying Gates had not gotten the full report and those to be disciplined were not to be notified until later Thursday.

Three other defense officials said the Air Force planned to formally announce its investigation results and the punishments at Pentagon press conference Friday. But two of them said that could be delayed if, for instance, Gates wants further information after he is briefed or more senior officials in the Air Force, who were still discussing the report, disagree with the decision.

The anticipated disciplinary actions would be the most severe ever brought in the Air Force in connection with the handling of nuclear weapons, The Washington Post said in Thursday editions, quoting an unidentified official who said that was aimed at sending a message about accountability.

The weapons involved were the Advanced Cruise Missile, a "stealth" weapon developed in the 1980s with the ability to evade detection by Soviet radars. The Air Force said in March that it had decided to retire the Advanced Cruise Missile fleet soon, and they said after the breach that the missiles were being flown to Barksdale for decommissioning but were supposed to be unarmed ones.

Three weeks into the Air Force investigation, Gates also asked for an outside inquiry to determine whether the incident indicates a larger security problem on the transfer of weapons. Official said his request for the inquiry, which is still under way, did not reflect any dissatisfaction with how the Air Force was conducting its investigation.

White House press secretary Dana Perino said Thursday that President Bush "appreciates the fact that Secretary Gates [had moved quickly] to find out what went wrong, make sure it doesn't happen again, and hold people to account if anyone did something wrong."

Appendix P

Tough Punishment Expected for Warhead Errors; Officers May Lose Commands After Nuclear Missiles Were Flown on Bomber

Thomas E. Ricks and Joby Warrick
Oct. 18, 2007
Washington Post

The Air Force has decided to relieve at least five of its officers of command and is considering filing criminal charges in connection with the Aug. 29 "Bent Spear" incident in which nuclear-armed cruise missiles were mistakenly flown from North Dakota to Louisiana, two senior Air Force officials said yesterday.

Although senior Defense Department officials have not been fully briefed on the results of an Air Force probe of the incident, the sources said that at least one colonel is expected to lose his position and that several enlisted personnel will also be punished as part disciplinary actions that could be among the toughest meted out by the Air Force in years.

The measures are expected to be formally announced tomorrow along with the detailed findings of an internal, six-week investigation into how a B-52 bomber crew mistakenly flew from one military air base to another with six nuclear warheads strapped to its wings. Air Force veterans have described the Aug. 29 incident as the one of the worst breaches in U.S. nuclear weapons security in decades.

A senior Air Force official familiar with the investigation said officers will be relieved at both installations involved in the incident: Minot Air Force Base, N.D., and Barksdale Air Force Base, La. A colonel commanding one of the Air Force wings is likely to be the highest-ranking officer to be relieved, the official said.

In addition, the official said, letters of reprimand will be issued to several enlisted service members. The personnel actions may be followed by criminal charges against one or more people, but that course of action is still being discussed at the highest levels of the Air Force, he added. The most likely such charge, he said, would be either dereliction of duty or willful disobedience of an order.

The anticipated personnel and disciplinary actions would be the most severe ever brought in the Air Force in connection with the handling of nuclear weapons, one of the officials said. The intention is to send the message that "the Air Force is getting back to the roots of accountability," the other official said. Both officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because the investigation remains active.

The August event triggered a rare "Bent Spear" nuclear incident alert that was sent to Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and President Bush. Although some details are not yet publicly known, officials familiar with the investigation say the problem originated at Minot when a pylon carrying six nuclear-armed cruise missiles was mistaken for one carrying unarmed missiles. Minot had been in the midst of shipping unarmed cruise missiles to Barksdale for decommissioning.

That initial mistake was followed by many other failures, ultimately allowing six nuclear warheads to slip outside the Air Force's normal safeguards for more than 36 hours. The warheads were airborne for more than three hours and sat for long periods on runways at both air bases without a special guard. Air Force officials say there was little risk that the warheads could have been detonated, but the lapses could theoretically have led to warheads being stolen or damaged in a way that could have disseminated toxic nuclear materials.

One official noted yesterday that the service is determined to handle the case better than it did a 1994 incident in which two Air Force F-15C pilots shot down two Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters that were in northern Iraq's "no-fly" zone, killing 26. Few disciplinary actions resulted then, an outcome that some generals said should not be repeated.

Gen. John D.W. Corley, who on Oct. 2 became chief of the Air Combat Command, traveled to Washington this week to discuss his planned actions with senior Air Force officials. Gates is scheduled to be briefed on the Air Force moves tomorrow.

Officials cautioned, however, that an announcement could be delayed because of continuing discussions among top officials over whether the disciplinary action should go even higher up the command chain, perhaps to include some generals.

Both the 5th Bomb Wing, which is based at Minot, and the 2nd Bomb Wing, based at Barksdale, are part of the 8th Air Force, which is also based at Barksdale. The 5th Wing has been commanded since June of this year by Col. Bruce Emig, according to an Air Force Web site. The 2nd Wing is led by Col. Robert Wheeler, who took command in July. They are the Air Force's only two B-52 units.

The 8th Air Force, historically the service's main bomber force, is overseen by Lt. Gen. Robert J. Elder Jr., a veteran B-52 pilot.

Appendix Q

Special Defense Department Briefing Regarding the B-52 Nuclear Weapons Incident

Maj. Gen. Richard Newton, Briefer
Oct 19, 2007
Federal News Service

MICHAEL WYNNE (secretary of the Air Force): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mike Wynne, and I'm the secretary of the United States Air Force. I want to thank you for being here.

Normally it is our policy to neither confirm nor deny as to whether were nuclear weapons involved. In this particular instance, I'm going to make an exception, a one-time exception. You know that it would not -- we would not be this upset with ourselves nor be striving to restore confidence if this did not involve nuclear weapons. And that's where I think the exception to policy has to go.

Thank you for being here this afternoon. The American public has placed great trust and confidence in its Air Force to safeguard our country's strategic weapons. We have for the past 60 years and will continue to execute this important mission of providing security for all weapons.

However, as you know, nearly two months ago, a series of apparent errors led to a breakdown in munitions-handling procedures, and it resulted in our improper and unauthorized transfer of six weapons. This was an unacceptable mistake and a clear deviation from our exacting standards. We hold ourselves accountable to the American people and want to ensure proper corrective action has been taken.

As you know, when the incident occurred, we immediately established that there was never an unsafe condition and reported it our national leadership, including the secretary of Defense as well as the president.

At the same time, we promised the American public we would conduct a thorough investigation and present the findings of the investigation to our leadership, to our elected leaders and to you, the public.

General Ronald Keys, who was then commander of Air Combat Command, directed Major General Doug Raaberg to conduct a commander- directed investigation to find out the facts, to determine the causes and to identify corrective action. The report is complete, and we briefed the findings to the secretary of Defense this afternoon.

Today Major General Richard Newton -- goes by "Dick" -- is here to talk to you about the Minot incident.

But before I turn the podium over to General Newton, I want to assure everyone that additional decisive actions are being taken to aggressively examine and implement corrective measures at all levels of our Air Force.

The Air Force directed unlimited nuclear surety inspections at every nuclear-capable unit in our Air Force. Our major command Inspector General Offices are methodically conducting the investigations now.

Secretary Gates has asked retired Air Force Chief of Staff General Larry Welch to lead an ongoing Defense Science Board standing task force on nuclear weapon surety to review security procedures and look more broadly at DOD policies and procedures to ensure all factors that led to this incident are explored and addressed.

Also, Congress requested a top-to-bottom review of the Department of Defense and Department Energy nuclear procedures. In addition to these, General Moseley and I charted an Air Force Blue Ribbon Review to examine all aspects of our nuclear weapons policy and procedure across all levels of our Air Force. We have asked Major General Polly Peyer to chair this Blue Ribbon Review and make recommendations as to how we can improve the Air Force's capability to safely and securely perform our nuclear weapons responsibility.

In regard to the command-directed investigation report, I received an outbrief two days ago and have had a chance to review the report myself. I personally went to Minot and Barksdale Air Force Bases to see the process and ensure continued safe and disciplined operations. I spoke with Major General Rayberg (sp) en route, and we agreed that his investigation would be paramount. I firmly believe he has conducted a thorough and rigorous investigation. He provided us a solid understanding of what happened at Minot and at Barksdale, and we are making all appropriate changes to ensure that this has a minimal chance of ever happening again, but we would really like to ensure it never happens again.

General Newton is currently the assistant deputy chief of staff for Operations, Plans and Requirements here at headquarters. He's a command pilot with flight time in the B-2, the B-1 and the B-52. Additionally, he was commander of the 5th Bomb Wing at Minot from February of 2000 to December of 2001, so he is very familiar with the mission of our bomb wings and specifically operations at Minot.

He is here today to speak with you about what happened at Minot in late August, to discuss what accountability actions have occurred and to answer your questions.

Before I leave, I must stress that nothing in military procedures is more important than ensuring the control and custody of our weapons. We will determine areas that need to be held to higher account and hold those accountable who fall short of our standards. We're determined to understand exactly what mistakes were made and what changes are needed to ensure that they will not be repeated.

We know America counts on us. And through our steady, unwavering resolve and actions, our Air Force will live up to the expectations of our nation.

Thank you. And now I'll turn it over to General Newton.

GEN. NEWTON: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

This afternoon I will share with you what I can about how the weapons transfer error occurred, our corrective actions and our efforts to ensure accountability. The countless times our dedicated airmen have transferred weapons in our nation's arsenal, nothing like

this has ever occurred. This was a failure to follow procedures, procedures which have proven to be sound. It involved a limited number of airmen at two bases.

Our extensive six-week investigation found that this was an isolated incident and that the weapons never left the custody of airmen, were never unsecured; but clearly, this incident is unacceptable to the people of the United States and to the United States Air Force. We owe the nation nothing less than adherence to the highest standards.

In addition, our investigation found that there has been an erosion of adherence to weapons-handling standards at Minot Air Force Base and at Barksdale Air Force Base. We have acted quickly and decisively to rectify this.

Because of this error, we are aggressively examining and implementing corrective measures to our weapons-handling and transfer process. Corrective actions will ensure our munitions are handled precisely and safely 100 percent of the time.

This week, the commander of Air Combat Command relieved several officers. Minot's Wing commander and Maintenance Group commander and Barksdale's Operation Group commander received administrative action and were relieved of command.

The commander of Air Combat Command also took four other specific actions to date at the group and squadron level, lieutenant colonel and below. But for privacy reasons we will not discuss specific positions, individuals or actions.

As you know, the Munitions Squadron commander at Minot Air Force Base was relieved shortly after this incident. The commander of Air Combat Command carefully considered individuals at all ranks and levels for accountability. In addition, he also took actions to temporarily or permanently decertify specific individuals from the Personnel Reliability Program. The Air Force Personnel Reliability Program ensures the reliability of Air Force personnel who handle, guard and move our most sensitive weapons.

The commander of Air Combat Command also tasked the 12th Air Force commander, Lieutenant General Seip, to review the report and independently assess the culpability of all Air Force members who were involved with the weapons transfer. Should the 12th Air Force commander determine disciplinary or adverse administrative action is appropriate for selected individuals, arrangements will be made to place those individuals under the jurisdiction of the 12th Air Force commander. As the general court-martial convening authority, Lieutenant General Seip has a variety of options at his disposal.

With that said, I'll provide you an explanation of the incident and then I'll take your questions.

First off, a series of procedural breakdowns and human errors led to the loading and transportation of weapons, weapons that should not have been moved, from Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, to Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana. A Barksdale-assigned B-52 was on the ground August 29th at Minot prepared to fly 12 cruise missiles back to Louisiana. In accordance with international treaties, the Air Force was consolidating advanced cruise missiles for eventual elimination.

Let me walk you through the five procedural errors that occurred in conjunction with that mission that facilitated this serious and unprecedented incident.

As you see here, if we'll bring up slide 1, please, on the morning of August 29th, a team of Minot airmen was dispatched to the base weapons storage area to pick up and transport two pylons to a Barksdale B-52 aircraft.

For those of you unfamiliar with the term "pylon," for our purposes today, a pylon is a self-contained package of six cruise missiles that can be quickly mounted to the wing of a B-52.

What set this in motion, our investigation found, is that one of the two pylons for this flight, a tactical ferry mission, had not been properly prepared. Part of Air Combat Command's investigation determined that the reason it was not properly prepared was the fact that a formal scheduling process, for tracking the status of the missiles, had been subverted in favor of an informal process that did not identify this pylon as prepared for the flight.

Okay, so let's talk about what happened on August 29th. On that day, the first procedural error occurred around 8:20 in the morning, when airmen assigned to the weapons storage area failed to examine all the pylons located in the storage area. The second procedural failure occurred when the crew operating the trailer that was moving the pylons to the aircraft began hooking up while the required pylon inspection was still underway. The third failure occurred when the crew failed to verify the payload before hooking it up to the trailer for transport. The crew is required to inspect the munitions before departing. They did not do that.

The fourth failure occurred when the Minot munitions control center failed to verify the status of the pylons being loaded at about 9:25 in the morning. The munitions control center failed to assess a database, as required, that would have alerted them that one of the pylons was not properly prepared for transfer. At this point, the wrong weapons, already in transit to the flightline, and several critical safeguard procedures had been disregarded. The Minot munitions handlers then loaded the pylons onto the B-52, and they remained there overnight on a secure flightline.

A fifth failure occurred the next morning, when the Barksdale- assigned B-52 instructor radar navigator neglected to check all missiles loaded for transport, as required.

The instructor radar navigator performed only a spot check, and only on the right pylon, the one that had been properly prepared for transport. The pylon carrying the wrong weapon was never inspected. Those factors and disregard for procedures collectively contributed to this serious incident.

The B-52 took off at 8:40 on the following day and arrived at Barksdale Air Force Base at 11:23 that very same morning.

At Barksdale, the munitions personnel followed the correct procedures. They unloaded the weapons between 7:20 and 8:30 that evening, inspected them and immediately reported the mistake and established appropriate security. Officials at Barksdale then notified the chain of command.

We want to give you also a visual to help understand the sequence of events. On the screen to my left is a slide that depicts the points of failure. Moving clockwise, and starting in the upper right- hand side, you see a standard hangar. This is where the procedural errors began. The doors opened, our crews entered, and did not perform the

required inspection. The truck then pulls up too soon. At this point, inspections still have not been completed.

At the bottom of the slide are images of the actual pylons leaving the hangar. This shows the pylon that should have been inspected and identified as not prepared for transfer.

Also depicted on the slide is a B-52 loaded and prepared for departure. Again the proper inspections and checklist procedures did not occur. This was the last opportunity for our airmen to identify the error before the aircraft took off.

Now let me address our response. The Air Force acted swiftly when the incident occurred. Our actions have included: We've conducted an Air Force-wide stockpile inventory and verified no additional discrepancies. The commander of Air Combat Command, then General Ron Keys, directed this investigation be led by Major General Raaberg.

As I stated, commanders have been relieved. Air Force Secretary Wynne directed nuclear surety inspections for nuclear-capable units with oversight of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

All units inspected to date have received a satisfactory rating, the highest rating possible.

The commander of Air Combat Command decertified the 5th Bomb Wing from specific missions and suspended tactical ferry operations. We ordered a one day stand-down of appropriate Air Force units, and the commander of Air Combat Command directed a one-day stand-down of his entire command.

The secretary of the Air Force and chief of staff sent messages to all airmen, emphasizing the critical importance of discipline, attention to detail and responsibility. Senior Air Force leadership chartered a blue ribbon review, which is examining policies and procedures across all levels of organization, not just in Air Combat Command, but through the entire force.

To conclude, this was an unacceptable error that resulted in an unprecedented stream of procedural failures. We are accountable to Congress and we are accountable to the American people. I can assure everyone we're taking the corrective actions and continuing to examine our policies and our procedures to ensure the integrity of our mission. From all levels, the Air Force is committed to safely, securely and reliably handling of our nation's weapons.

And with that, I'll take your questions.

Q General, you used the words, I think secured flightline. Does that mean that while the plane sat in Minot overnight, it was secured to the level that it would have been had it been known that nuclear weapons were on it?

GEN. NEWTON: The aircraft when it was at Minot Air Force Base on the 29th and the 30th was in a secure environment because it was on a secure Air Force flightline at Minot Air Force Base. And so it was secure.

Yes?

Q Two-part question. The first -- you mentioned early in your briefing that there's been -- there was an erosion of adherence to the procedures. Were you able to find out

why that had been? Is this something that became so routine that people just sort of flippantly weren't paying attention to the rules?

GEN. NEWTON: This was -- this is a serious error. We've determined through a very thorough and rigorous investigation that it is an isolated incident due to lack of attention to detail, adherence to well-established both Department of Defense and Air Force guidelines, technical orders and procedures. And the fact that this event occurred, we have determined again that it was an isolated incident to a limited number of airmen, both at Barksdale Air Force Base and at Minot Air Force Base.

Q By saying there was an erosion in the adherence to the rules made it seem that there was a gradual decline in attention to these regulations that led to this thing, as opposed to it being sort of a one-off thing.

GEN. NEWTON: Let me couch it this way as well. Again, this being an isolated incident -- but the fact that the lack of attention to detail, the lack of professionalism, the lack of rigor with applying well-founded Air Force checklist procedures and not following those checklist procedures indicate to us from this very thorough and rigorous investigation that it was a -- certainly a lack of application of those checklist procedures, again, for this isolated incident at Minot.

Q Can I ask one (sub ?) question? The -- but to a layman, the issue of having nuclear weapons in the same hangar as conventional weapons seems a bit -- took us, I think -- took me, anyway, a bit aback that they would even be stored in the same place. Is that a common procedure, or are they normally stored in separate places so this kind of mix-up doesn't happen?

GEN. NEWTON: Where the weapons were stored, they were stored in the facilities, as I mentioned, and they were stored within DOD guidelines and Air Force guidelines as well.

Q So it is normal procedure, then, to keep nuclear weapons in the same place as conventional --

GEN. NEWTON: These weapons were stored in the proper -- with proper procedures in the proper locations at the weapons storage area.

Yes, ma'am.

Q I have a number of follow-up questions. First of all, on what Peter was saying, did you have to get some sort of waiver? Was a waiver required to store the warheads and the missiles in the same facility, in the same hangar?

GEN. NEWTON: The weapons were stored in the facilities per DOD guidelines and Air Force guidelines as well. There was -- there was --

Q (Off mike) -- but does it require a waiver to store them together?

GEN. NEWTON: The weapons again, as I've mentioned, were stored in the proper facilities and were within DOD guidelines and Air Force guidelines as well.

Q Is there some reason you can't tell me specifically that -- I'm not understanding, because of my lack of knowledge -- is a waiver required to do that, or is a waiver not required to do that?

GEN. NEWTON: There was no waiver required in this instance because they were stored in a facility, in a weapons storage area in this case, under DOD guidelines and Air Force guidelines.

Q So when was it decided that that was an acceptable procedure? And were the missiles at that point, in that storage at that point in that hangar -- were they fully fueled? Were those missiles actually active missiles?

GEN. NEWTON: These -- to consider them being missiles individually -- there were actually part of a pylon that was considered to be a package of six missiles that are attached to one pylon. And so --

Q Were any of those missiles fueled?

GEN. NEWTON: These missiles were packaged in a way that, again, met Air Force as well as DOD guidelines. And so --

Q Were any fueled?

GEN. NEWTON: They were packaged in the manner that is appropriate for them to be packaged for the mission; in this case, the tactical ferry operation for them to be transferred from --

Q Was there any fuel in those --

GEN. NEWTON: -- they were transferred from, again, from Minot down to Barksdale.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. NEWTON: I'd rather not get into those technical details, but just to let you know that they were prepared for the tactical ferry operation, and they were also within the DOD and Air Force guidelines.

Q Can you tell us, to go back to Pauline's question, at what point in all of this were these warheads in a position that was something less secure than they would have been if they had been recognized at the time to be special weapons?

GEN. NEWTON: These weapons were never out of the hands of America's airmen. They were always secure and they were, again, they were again under the security and control of airmen at all times.

Q (Off mike) -- position of less security than they would have been had they been understood to be nuclear warheads?

GEN. NEWTON: These weapons were always secure at all times.

Yes.

Q Can you say how many individuals have been disciplined so far?

GEN. NEWTON: I referred to it in my earlier remarks, that the commander at Minot Air Force Base -- the 5th Bomb Wing commander and the Maintenance Group commander were relieved of command, along with the 2nd Operations Group commander at Barksdale Air Force Based, were relieved of command. And so there are a number of other individuals who have been relieved of their duties as well, but I'd just like to leave it at that, if I may.

Q Is it possible that -- do you foresee criminal prosecutions?

GEN. NEWTON: I'd rather not go into any type of Uniform Code of Military Justice issues. But as I -- I'll stay in my remarks that the commander of Air Combat Command, General Corley, has provided convening authority to the 12th Air Force commander, General Seip.

Q And one last question if I might, just as you look back on this incident, is it safe, again in lay terms, to characterize it as kind of a trainwreck in the sense that once the initial error was made of loading real weapons instead of dummy weapons, the other errors sort of fell into place behind that? Is that really what happened here?

GEN. NEWTON: How I would characterize it is I would go back to the point that this is an isolated incident, in the fact that there are a number of procedural errors that occurred. There are a number of errors that occurred by airmen who should have been following DOD and Air Force guidelines, technical order procedures and policies and so forth. The fact that they did not follow these procedures, the fact that they did not follow these guidelines for technical order -- simple checklist, for instance, leads us to believe that -- and through this very thorough investigation, we determined that those policies and those guidelines and those tech order procedures and checklists remain sound. It's the fact that our airmen did not follow those checklist procedures.

Q Why didn't they follow it? What have you learned about why they didn't follow it? How did this happen, is what I'm asking you.

GEN. NEWTON: It is a -- again, the investigation will lead you to the point that these airmen again lacked an attention to detail.

It was a lack of effective supervision, a lack of effective leadership, and the fact that they were not following nor did they adhere to these very strict checklist guidelines procedures.

Q Why were they --

Q I'm sorry. Can I just ask you a question? I don't think we're getting to the heart of this. When you asked them, "Why did not you follow these procedures," what was their answer?

GEN. NEWTON: The reason they didn't follow these procedures, as we've discovered, is again to their lack of a attention to detail. It was due to the fact that they -- for a variety of reasons: they were passive in terms of how they should have been following these checklist procedures; the fact that they did not apply the rigor, the same standards that we ask of all our airmen to follow through, with certain tech order procedures and checklists.

It also goes back to not following a formal scheduling process, particularly in the weapons storage area.

Q I understand that, but my question is, I mean, did you ask them were they aware of these procedures? And when you said, "Why did you not follow them," what was their response?

GEN. NEWTON: Yes. They were aware of the checklist procedures. They were aware of the technical order procedures. We have gone back and taken a look at how they were

trained and also the qualifications. And so these airmen had been trained. They had been following at some period of time in their careers these checklist procedures and tech order procedures. And again, through their lack of professionalism and attention to detail -- and again, leadership and supervision played a role in this as well.

Yeah?

Q But again, did they say, "I was too busy, I had too much work, I didn't care, I didn't think those procedures were important"? What did they say?

GEN. NEWTON: They -- again, it was one where they -- based on, again, their lack of attention to detail in the case of following a variety of checklist procedures and -- is where the failure occurred.

Q Did you find substance abuse with any case -- (off mike)?

GEN. NEWTON: The investigation doesn't lead us to any of that -- that issue at all.

Yes, sir?

Q You narrated a series of mistakes by which these various airmen failed to discover that this one pylon had inappropriate weapons. Was there a prior mistake made in preparing this pylon in the first place? In other words, there were two pylons.

GEN. NEWTON: Right.

Q One of them had inappropriate weapons. Through this series of errors, it wasn't noticed. But how did that pylon with inappropriate weapons get placed in there and identified to go on this B-52 in the first place? Didn't somebody make a mistake before all this?

GEN. NEWTON: The -- yes. The root cause of what kicked off this incident was a breakdown in formal scheduling processes or the lack of formal scheduling process within the munitions complex. It became apparent that the fact that there was no formal scheduling process, the fact that the day-to-day mission out in the weapons storage area, under the munitions control, was lackadaisical -- it again lacked the attention to detail. It lacked a formal process to the point where it became an informal process. And again, this is where the breakdown of attention to detail, which then led to the procedural errors, had the event occur.

Q But there were two pylons, six missiles each. Both pylons are supposed to contain missiles without nuclear -- any nuclear warheads. One of them contained six missiles with nuclear warheads. How did that pylon with nuclear warheads get identified in the first place as -- to be transported from --

GEN. NEWTON: In this case, we're talking about the left pylon. The left pylon -- again, why it arrived in the condition that it was, was -- it started with that simple breakdown in -- and the lack of a formal scheduling process within the weapons storage area.

And then it processes over into airmen who are not doing their job, following well-established checklist procedures and (takeover ?) procedures.

Yes. Yes.

Q (Off mike) -- the warheads and --

GEN. NEWTON: I'm sorry?

Q Was some supposed to remove the warheads from those six missiles and failed to do that?

GEN. NEWTON: Airmen did not do their job following (takeover ?) procedures and checklists; that would have prevented this incident from occurring.

Q Is that a yes or --

GEN. NEWTON: That's a yes.

Q (Laughs.)

Q You mentioned the -- what's happening to the top leaders. Can you tell us what has happened to the individual -- the airmen involved? How many were actually involved in this at both bases? Are they still being given -- do they still have these jobs that they did before this nuclear weapons accident?

GEN. NEWTON: Right now the 5th Bomb Wing is decertified from conducting its wartime missions. And so we have gone through -- as I mentioned in my remarks, we have decertified a number of individuals from performing their duties day to day, both at Minot Air Force Base and at Barksdale Air Force Base.

Q Do you have a breakdown of how many individuals that actually is?

GEN. NEWTON: I'd have a rough number for you. It's several many -- it's certainly less than a hundred, but that's a ballpark number. And so --

(Cross talk.)

GEN. NEWTON: I don't have the specific numbers, but it's less than a hundred.

Q (Off mike) -- people that were --

Q Will you take that question, sir?

GEN. NEWTON: Let me do this. Let me take that question, and we'll get back to you as soon as we get more of those details.

Go ahead.

Q (Off mike) -- what's going to happen --

Q (Off mike) -- I mean, the Air Force has to know how many. Can you take that question?

GEN. NEWTON: (Inaudible.)

Q (Off mike) -- as far as the involvement of the DOD Inspector General's Office -- are they conducting their own separate investigation of the incident? And if this was a(n) isolated incident and just kind of a situation where processes were overlooked, why the blue-ribbon, I guess, commission or group to relook at the Air Force procedures overall, if it wasn't a problem of the actual procedures (that ?) took place?

GEN. NEWTON: I don't have any knowledge of the Department of Defense inspector general -- whether or not they have kicked off a formal investigation. I'm sure we can, you know, talk to DOD or we can perhaps get back to you on that.

But I do know that the commander-directed investigation, as thorough and as rigorous as it was -- it lasted over last weeks. When I first met with our chief of staff in the early morning of the 31st of August and we discussed this, the first thing -- one of the first things he mentioned was the fact -- the need to do a very thorough commander-directed investigation led by a two-star general.

Among the many topics we had that morning -- but the second thing he also mentioned was he wanted a very thorough, broader review of this incident, and the fact that -- not only a broader review that would go beyond just Air Combat Command but through the entire United States Air Force. And so he also, at that point, wanted an outside look. And what we have done as part of our blue-ribbon review that Secretary Wynne referred to has asked the chief of Naval Operations to provide Navy personnel to be part of this overarching blue-ribbon review that will look beyond just Air Combat Command but throughout the entire Air Force.

And so that's -- that is -- as we look forward, as the commander- directed investigation report is now complete -- as we look forward, we will have this blue-ribbon review that will be overarching.

Secretary Wynne mentioned that General Peyer is leading that blue- ribbon review. She will report out to our chief of staff by on or about 15 January.

Yes?

Q You said three were relieved of duty, but then several more. Why the reluctance to give us the total number of how many were relieved of duty?

GEN. NEWTON: Well, I wanted to underscore the fact that General Corley, the commander of Air Combat Command, has relieved senior leaders in this case; as I mentioned, the commander of the 5th Bomb Wing and 5th Maintenance Group commander at Minot, as the well as the 2nd Operations Group commander. I also wanted to underscore the fact that not only is it with senior leaders; there are other who are involved that are lieutenant-colonel and below, as I mentioned.

The other fact is that we are -- General Corley has provided convening authority for UCMJ actions to 12th Air Force. And so that aspect of this incident will then move on into the UCMJ (realm ?). And I'd just like to leave it at that, please.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. NEWTON: Three colonels in this case that I mentioned were relieved of duty.

Yes?

Q You said that they were -- the weapons were never left unsecured, and I -- we understand that there was some level of security at all times. But I guess what we need to clarify is, what is the difference between the level of security within the hangar and outside the hangar where the B-52s spent the night?

GEN. NEWTON: Having been the commander at Minot Air Force Base, I, you know, appreciate the fact that it's a very safe, secure environment at Minot on our flightlines. These weapons, as I mentioned, were never out of the hands of America's airmen, the fact that they were never left unsecured. The level of security that they were afforded

kept these weapons safe and secure. Not up to the standards that we would have liked, but the fact that these weapons were never out of the hands of America's airmen and they were secure at all times.

Yes, sir?

Q Minot's got both cruise missiles with and without warheads. Are they stored together? You're talking -- you keep talking about they came out of the hangar. Do you store weapons with nuclear warheads in hangars?

GEN. NEWTON: Our weapons across the Air Force, and specifically at Minot Air Force Base, are stored within DOD standards and policies and guidelines. And so they are safely and securely stored within the -- and the investigation determined that they were stored within all applicable DOD guidelines as Air Force guidelines as well.

Q But nuclear weapons storage areas are different from ammo dumps. Right?

Yes.

Q (Off mike) -- they didn't follow the schedule, the schedule for what? The schedule to have the warhead removed or the schedule to be shipped to Barksdale?

GEN. NEWTON: They did not follow the formal scheduling processes that would allow them to do the proper maintenance and handling of those weapons, not only in preparation for the ferry flight but also to make sure that they were the proper and they were the appropriate weapons to be transferred.

MR. : We have time for one more, please.

Q (Off mike.)

GEN. NEWTON: They did -- not only was the scheduling process broken and not followed -- the fact that they did not follow those checklist guidelines and procedures is -- again this incident occurred because of the number of those errors.

Last question, I'm sorry. Go ahead, I'm sorry. (Cross talk.)

Q Other than removing the nuclear weapons, what needs to be done to properly prepare one of these pylons for transport?

GEN. NEWTON: You go through a number of checklist procedures and -- which will -- if you follow the checklist procedures, it will lead you to the point where you will safely transfer these weapons in an appropriate manner, and the fact that they will be transferred -- again that they were authorized to be transferred in.

Q (Off mike) -- done in hours? Does it take days to do that?

GEN. NEWTON: To process, it goes from weeks to days to hours in this case. And those processes broke down.

Sure.

Q And if I may, if this bomb wing has been decertified from doing these tactical ferry missions, is there another bomb wing that's doing them in the interim? Or have you suspended --

GEN. NEWTON: No, all Air Force tactical ferry missions for these cruise missiles has been suspended. (Cross talk.)

So let me -- can I just leave you with this? This is a serious error that was caused by a breakdown of procedural discipline by airmen. We're accountable and we will assure the American people that the Air Force standards they expect are being met.

Our wings at Barksdale and Minot are units with a proud heritage. They've had a history of excellence. And we've made some tough decisions but now, we need to restore the confidence in these units and move ahead. And I rest assured, we will. Thank you.

Appendix R

4 Colonels Lose Their Air Force Commands; 65 Others Also Pay For Nuclear Error

Walter Pincus
Oct. 20, 2007
The Washington Post

Four Air Force colonels have been relieved of their commands and more than 65 lower-ranking officers and airmen have been disciplined over a series of errors that led to a B-52 flight in August from North Dakota to Louisiana with six nuclear-armed cruise missiles that no one realized were under the plane's wing.

"This was an unacceptable error that resulted in an unprecedented string of procedural failures," Maj. Gen. Richard Y. Newton III, assistant deputy chief of staff for operations, said yesterday in reporting on a six-week Air Force probe. "Our investigation found that there has been an erosion of adherence to weapons handling standards" at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, where the flight began, and at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, Newton said.

Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Armed Services strategic forces subcommittee, said yesterday that she is "satisfied" with the report and impressed that Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has asked the department's science board to take a wider view.

Newton said the problems began with a breakdown in the formal scheduling process used to prepare the AGM-129 cruise missiles in question for decommissioning. The AGM-129 missiles carry nuclear weapons and have stealth capability. But in March, the Pentagon decided to retire it in favor of an older AGM-86, which can carry nuclear or conventional weapons.

Part of the preparation involved removing the W-80 nuclear warhead and replacing it with a steel dummy on missiles to be flown aboard B-52s to Barksdale for destruction. An electronic scheduling system was employed to keep track of the missiles -- using the identification numbers of racks containing six of them -- so that crews knew which missiles had had their nuclear warheads removed and were ready to be shipped out, several sources said.

On the morning of Aug. 29, the loading crew at Minot used a paper schedule that was out of date when they picked up 12 missiles from a guarded weapons storage hangar, six with dummy warheads and six that they did not realize had nuclear warheads.

Newton told reporters the trailer that would carry the pylons to the B-52 arrived early, and its crew did not inspect the missiles as they should have before loading them on the trailer. The driver called the munitions control center to verify the numbers, but the staff there failed to check them.

At the aircraft, the crew that loaded the pylons, one under each wing, failed again to check the missiles, which have a small glass porthole to make clear whether a dummy or nuclear warhead is installed. The next morning, Aug. 30, the plane's navigator failed to

do a complete check of the missiles, as required, looking under only one wing and not the one where the nuclear-armed missiles were.

"We hold ourselves accountable to the American people and want to ensure proper corrective action has been taken," Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne, who made an inspection trip out to Minot, said yesterday.

Newton said that the 5th Bomb Wing commander at Minot, Col. Bruce Emig, was removed from command, along with his chief munitions officer and the operations officer of the B-52 unit at Barksdale. The munitions squadron commander at Minot was relieved of command shortly after the incident. The flight in question was the sixth of 12 planned ferrying missions, but the rest have been suspended.

Air Force Major Gen. Polly A. Peyer has been asked to examine potential individual culpability, Newton said. He did not rule out other disciplinary action, including courts-martial.

Appendix S
Wing decertified, COs sacked for nuke mistake

Michael Hoffman
Oct, 21, 2007
Military Times

The widespread disregard for nuclear weapons safety standards by airmen at Minot and Barksdale Air Force bases led to the unprecedented “Bent Spear” incident in which six nuclear warheads were mistakenly loaded onto a B-52 and flown from North Dakota to Louisiana on Aug. 29-30, Air Force officials said Friday after an intensive six-week investigation.

The Air Force relieved the 5th Munitions Squadron commander at Minot immediately after the incident. On Friday, it announced that three more commanders have been sacked. They are:

** Col. Bruce Emig, wing commander, 5th Bomb Wing, Minot Air Force Base;

** Col. Cynthia M. Lundell, commander, 5th Maintenance Group, Minot Air Force Base;
and

** Col. Todd C. Westhauser, commander, 2nd Operations Group, Barksdale Air Force Base.

Emig is also the installation commander at Minot.

An “erosion of adherence to weapons-handling standards” at the two bases led to five major procedural errors at Minot, which resulted in a weapons loading crew accidentally loading a pylon of nuclear armed air-launched cruise missiles on the wing of a B-52 bomber. The mistake wasn’t discovered for 36 hours, long after the plane had touched down at Barksdale, said Maj. Gen. Richard “Dick” Newton, deputy chief of staff for operations, plans and requirements, and a former 5th Bomb Wing commander, who was tasked to brief the findings.

Since Aug. 30, some 65 airmen of varying ranks — lieutenant colonel and below — have lost their certification in the personnel reliability program, which the Air Force uses to oversee the character of airmen who handle nuclear weapons, said Lt. Col. Ed Thomas, an Air Force spokesman. The large-scale nature of the disciplinary actions points to the widespread nature of the problem.

Lt. Gen Norman Seip, commander of 12th Air Force and Air Forces Southern Command, has been tasked by the head of Air Combat Command to review the investigation and look into whether any airmen involved in the incident should be charged with a crime under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or if other disciplinary actions are warranted.

In addition, the 5th Bomb Wing has been decertified from handling Advanced Cruise Missiles or nuclear warheads and suspended from any tactical ferry operations, Newton said.

“This was a failure to follow procedures, procedures which have proven to be sound,” Newton said.

Five steps to failure

Using the same briefing presented to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates earlier Friday, Newton summarized the five mistakes made by airmen that led to the incident and offered a timeline of events.

The first mistake occurred at the beginning of an operation to transport 12 Advanced Cruise Missiles on a B-52 Stratofortress bomber from Minot to Barksdale, part of a Defense Department program to decommission 400 of these missiles in the U.S. stockpile.

On the morning of Aug. 29, airmen assigned to the Minot weapons storage area were supposed to pick up and transport two pylons to a B-52 assigned to Barksdale. Each pylon is a self-contained package of six cruise missiles that can be quickly mounted to the wing of a Stratofortress. But the pylon had not been properly prepared, and the airmen failed to examine all the warheads on the missiles mounted to the pylons.

Newton confirmed after the briefing that cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads are not stored with cruise missiles armed with conventional warheads. Simply, certain pylons of cruise missiles have nuclear warheads, while others have dummy warheads that are essentially dead weight.

The second error occurred when “crews operating the trailer that was tasked with moving the pylons to the B-52 began hooking up while the required pylon inspection was still underway,” Newton said.

This played a part in mistake No. 3, when the airmen failed to verify the payload of the missiles mounted on the pylon that they hooked up to be transported to the B-52, Newton said.

Then, before the cruise missiles should have been transported to the aircraft, the munitions control center “failed to assess a database, as required, that would have alerted them that one of the pylons was not properly prepared for transfer,” Newton said.

Due to the first four mistakes, the nuclear warheads were unknowingly towed out to the flight line at 9:44 a.m. on Aug. 29 without any of the increased security initiatives used when nuclear warheads leave a storage facility.

The warheads were loaded onto the B-52 and sat on the flight line, which officials said was secure.

Airmen did have one last chance to catch their mistake before the B-52 took off, but “the Barksdale-assigned B-52 instructor radar navigator neglected to check all missiles loaded for transport as required,” Newton said. “The instructor radar navigator performed only a spot check and only on the right pylon, the one that had been properly prepared for transport.” This marked the fifth and final error, according to the Air Force investigation.

At 8:40 a.m. on Aug. 30, the B-52 took off on its 1,100-mile flight to Louisiana, landing there at 11:23 a.m. It sat on the flight line with the nuclear warheads still on its left wing for more than eight hours before munitions personnel, who followed correct procedures, unloaded the weapons and discovered the enormous mistake.

Despite the severity of the problems discovered, Air Force officials continue to reassure the public that the nuclear weapons were never out of airmen’s hands, but they acknowledged that the standard security procedures for handling nuclear weapons did not occur.

The investigation found this to be an isolated incident, and corrective measures are being taken to ensure it doesn’t happen again.

“This was an unacceptable mistake and a clear deviation from our exacting standards,” said Secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynne, who led off the press briefing. “We hold ourselves accountable to the American people and want to ensure proper corrective action is taken.”

Appendix T

The Bismarck Tribune - Opinion

Oct. 26, 2007

Bismarck Tribune

We need to be reassured by the U.S. Air Force as plainly and reliably as possible that there shouldn't be a repeat of a chain of events in August involving nuclear weapons, events that began in North Dakota and ended in Louisiana.

The military has a longstanding institutional custom of giving nuance to the information about itself it communicates to the civilian world.

Hardly anything lately has been more nuanced than information made known about the response of the Department of Defense and the Air Force to the flight of a B-52 bomber from Minot Air Force Base to a base in Louisiana. Through what the Air Force has called lack of attention to detail and failure to conduct a required examination, nuclear-armed missiles made the trip on the B-52.

It's not that the incident was able to be hushed up. The response of the DOD all the way up to Defense Secretary Robert Gates was a public one: Five Minot AFB officers were relieved of their duty, and more than 60 personnel were "decertified." That's military-speak for being taken off the job, the job of transferring munitions. Reportedly they had other duties to keep them busy, but located nowhere close to the advanced cruise missile.

More is needed, even, than the assignment of replacement officers to the Air Force base, where there are new commanders of the bomb wing and the maintenance group.

Secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynne must follow up on an assurance that changes are being made so that there's only a remote chance of a repeat involving nuclear arms.

There was talk when the secretary was in Minot recently of a blue-ribbon review panel to look into Air Force guidelines and procedures on weapons handling.

Fair enough, but the civilian citizenry needs to have a front row seat in the audience. If a panel finds the regs need to be replaced, rather than merely beefed up, we need to know.

It "was a rare mistake," said Col. Paul Bell, who now commands the bomb wing.

Americans aren't inclined to hear the word, mistake, in connection with nuclear weapons. Rare? Make it much more rare than rare.

Reassigning some officers might have been necessary to uphold military discipline. It's hard to penetrate the opaqueness of the investigation to know if there was scapegoating, whether careers, in effect, are ended.

That's a personnel issue. The public interest is safety.

The Air Force may have high regard for its procedures. There probably are duties in the Air Force in which an informal approach toward following procedures is not the end of the world.

We don't want sloppiness when nukes are involved.

Appendix U

The Bismarck Tribune - Opinion

Dec. 14, 2007
Bismarck Tribune

The Air Combat Command of the Air Force has commenced the process that might lead to Minot Air Force Base's bomb wing being recertified for the mission of handling nuclear weapons.

It would be reassuring if a report were released that says what went wrong in August when a B-52 bomber was loaded with nuclear weapons for a flight from Minot to an Air Force base in Louisiana.

The Air Force must know. Shudder the thought if it doesn't.

There was a six-week investigation, and the flight was deemed an "unacceptable mistake." Some officers were relieved of duty and replaced, including the bomb wing commander. More than 60 airmen were disciplined and barred from handling nuclear weapons.

It wouldn't be surprising if the military holds the report on the incident as classified information, even if there is no good reason other than it can. But it could tell us something, even if in generalities.

The 5th Bomb Wing was at fault, and it, along with the 91st Space Wing at the Minot base will undergo a regular Nuclear Surety Inspection in January. The space wing has charge of 150 Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles. The bomb wing is gearing up to satisfy an Initial Nuclear Safety Inspection starting Monday.

There's no precise indication when in 2008 the decision about the base's mission will be made.

The Air Force can talk itself blue in the face to try to make us believe that there was never any possibility of a nuclear event or accident when the bomber flew from Minot to Barksdale AFB in August. But the incident was consequential enough to demand the attention of Pentagon top brass and the secretary of defense, along with every elected official with real or perceived interest or connection.

So, now the Air Force has some work to do to demonstrate a high level of competence in handling nukes at Minot.

If what happened was serious enough to take Minot out of an important aspect of its assigned mission for at least several months, it calls for some trust rebuilding.

Reportedly the bomb wing has been carrying on the majority of its duties. But it won't bode well for Minot AFB during the next Base Realignment and Closure round if it hasn't regained its full wartime mission.

It would not be the best thing if the base were to regain its ability to handle nuclear weapons and the status not be made public. The base command has been good about

keeping the media informed about developments since early September. But it can't be forgotten that for a short time after the incident of the armed flight, an attempt was made to hush it up.

Openness is necessary and will help the Minot installation regain the good reputation it has had in North Dakota.

Appendix V

New procedures issued for nukes

Jan. 25, 2008
Bismarck Tribune

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Air Force has issued detailed new procedures and requirements for the handling of nuclear weapons in the wake of the blunder last August when six nuclear-tipped missiles were flown across the country.

The 153-page instruction requires that a single munitions officer be responsible for custodial duties involving the weapons, and it adds new inspection mandates. It also clarifies storage and labeling requirements on all nuclear and non-nuclear munitions, and details procedures for transportation or changes in custody of the weapons.

The new procedures outlined in the order, dated Jan. 17, will be implemented within 45 days of that date.

The August incident is not mentioned in the new procedures. But they come after months of investigations, reviews, and disciplinary actions for what Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne described as an "unacceptable mistake and a clear deviation from our exacting standards."

During the Aug. 29-30 incident, a B-52 bomber was inadvertently armed with six nuclear-tipped cruise missiles and flown from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana without anyone noticing the mistake for more than a day. Air Force issues new procedures for handling of nuclear weapons after cross-country blunder

Appendix W

Panel Cites Drop in U.S. Attention to Nuclear Arsenal; B-52's 2007 Flight With Warheads Prompted Review

Walter Pincus
Feb. 13, 2008
Washington Post

The Defense Department is displaying a "precipitous decrease in attention" to the security and control of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, according to a Defense Science Board task force that examined the broader causes behind the U.S. flight in August of a B-52 bomber that inadvertently carried six cruise missiles armed with nuclear warheads.

"The decline in DoD focus has been more pronounced than realized and too extreme to be acceptable," the task force said in a report released yesterday by its chairman, retired Air Force Gen. Larry D. Welch, at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing.

Welch, who served in the 1980s as head of the Strategic Air Command and later as Air Force chief of staff, told the senators about his concern that "the nation and its leadership do not value the nuclear mission and the people who perform that mission."

The six cruise missiles, which were mistakenly believed to be carrying dummy warheads, were loaded on an Air Force B-52 and flown 1,400 miles from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.

"No one knew where they were, or even missed them, for over 36 hours," said Sen. Carl M. Levin (D-Mich.), chairman of the Senate committee. "This entire episode really is a wake-up call."

The Welch panel pointed out that Air Force colonels, Navy captains and mid-level civilians are now responsible for managing the Pentagon's nuclear programs -- a task that during the Cold War was handled by senior flag officers or senior civilians. One of the panel's recommendations is the appointment of an assistant secretary of defense for nuclear enterprise reporting directly to the defense secretary, as well as the naming of flag officers in each of the services who would focus solely on nuclear weapons.

The task force's findings were reflected in a statement made before the committee by three senior Air Force officers who had supervised two other inquiries after the B-52 flight. They said the Air Force's once-central focus on its nuclear mission "has diminished since 1991," after the end of the Cold War. At the same time, they said, "the Air Force began 17 years of continuous combat including conventional air power commitments" using aircraft, such as B-52s, once reserved for nuclear operations.

The Defense Science Board is made up of experts from the private sector and from research groups who are assigned by the defense secretary to study complex technology and research problems facing the Pentagon. It found that almost the entire B-52 bomber force is focused on conventional missions "as the accepted permanent or semi-permanent state of affairs." There is a "widespread perception in both the Navy and Air Force that a

nuclear forces career is not the highly promising opportunity of the past era," the panel of experts said.

In the wake of the August incident, seven officers, including the wing commander at Minot and two group commanders, were removed from their positions; 90 airmen were decertified, some temporarily, from working on nuclear-related jobs.

The Air Force is also reviewing its inspection process for units charged with nuclear weapons maintenance; the unit at Minot Air Force base had received a favorable inspection rating shortly before the incident. Air Force Lt. Gen. Daniel J. Darnell, deputy chief of staff for operations, told the Senate committee that the Air Force is considering reducing the advance notice that units receive before inspections.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Polly A. Peyer, director of resource integrations, said that nuclear safeguards were restored after the incident but that more funding will be sought in the fiscal 2010 budget.

Appendix X

Generals grilled on Minot nuclear mishap

Michael Hoffman
Feb. 12, 2008
Military Times

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee grilled Air Force leaders over how six nuclear warheads could mistakenly get loaded onto a B-52 Stratofortress bomber flown across the country.

At a Tuesday hearing, Committee Chair Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., called last August's nuclear accident a "wake up call" saying that "no breach of nuclear procedures of this magnitude has ever occurred."

Three Air Force generals and retired Gen. Larry Welch, Air Force chief of staff from 1986 to 1990, took questions from the senators who expressed concern over how far the service's nuclear program may have eroded.

"The sloppiness and lack of discipline and lack of respect for the process didn't just happen overnight and fixing the problems are going to take awhile," said Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla.

Lt. Gen. Daniel Darnell, deputy chief of staff for air, space and information operations assured the committee the warheads never migrated off the wings of the B-52 and was always under Air Force control. However, Darnell did confirm that appropriate security was not present to protect the nukes while all six sat on the runway for close to 36 hours first at Minot Air Force Base, N.D., and then at Barksdale Air Force Base, La., before a 2nd Bomb Wing airman discovered the mistake at Barksdale.

"Absence of that security represents a significant shortfall," Levin said.

The intent of the late August mission that went awry was to fly a dozen Advanced Cruise Missiles from Minot to Barksdale to be decommissioned. But instead of loading two pylons of six non-nuclear missiles each under the B-52's wings, the 5th Bomb Wing airmen at Minot rolled out one pylon loaded with nuclear warheads and strapped it onto one of the wings.

Maj. Gen. Douglas Raaberg, director of operations of Air Combat Command, testified that airmen failed to comply with five specific procedures designed for handling nuclear weapons, and committed three scheduling errors, which led to the accident.

Immediately after the accident was discovered, 90 airmen lost their certification to handle nuclear weapons and four high ranking officers lost their jobs, including 5th Bomb Wing

Commander Col. Bruce Emig. After further review Raaberg said the Air Force found 25 airmen directly responsible.

The Air Force and Defense Department issued separate reports Tuesday on two of three investigations launched after the accident occurred. One was prepared by the Blue Ribbon Review directed by Maj. Gen. Polly Peyer, director of resource integration in the office of the deputy chief of staff for logistics, installations, and mission support; the other by the Defense Science Board .

Between the two reports and the Command Directed Investigation released earlier, the Air Force has amassed 132 recommendations to improve its nuclear program. So far, Darnell said 41 of those changes have been made.

In an odd exchange, Levin also asked the four Air Force generals whether the nuclear tipped missiles could have leaked plutonium if they had been dropped from the B-52 during its flight from North Dakota to Louisiana.

Not one of the officers could answer the Senator's question confidently before Nelson, and later Levin, pointed out how a B-52 crashed over Spain in 1966 with nukes aboard causing the missile's high explosives to detonate spewing plutonium into the soil.

Appendix Y

Special Defense Department Briefing Regarding Missile Parts Shipment to Taiwan

Michael Wynne, Lieutenant General Carter Ham, Ryan Henry - Briefers

March 25, 2008

Federal News Service

SPECIAL DEFENSE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING SUBJECT: MISSILE PARTS SHIPMENT TO TAIWAN BRIEFERS: MICHAEL WYNNE, SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE; LIEUTENANT GENERAL CARTER HAM, UNITED STATES ARMY, DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF; RYAN HENRY, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY LOCATION: PENTAGON BRIEFING ROOM, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA TIME: 10:30 A.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2008

SEC. WYNNE: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. My name is Michael Wynne, and I'm the secretary of the Air Force.

Last week, the Department of Defense learned that four non- nuclear nose cone assemblies and their associated electrical components for a ballistic missile were mistakenly shipped to Taiwan in the fall of 2006. These items were originally shipped in March 2005 from F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming to the Defense Logistics Agency warehouse at Hill Air Force Base in Utah. There are no nuclear or fissile materials associated with these items.

Upon learning of the error, the U.S. government took immediate action to acquire positive control of the components and arranged for their safe and secure recovery to the United States. These items have now been safely returned to the United States.

(To staff.) Please bring up the slide, so I can offer a visual perspective. Okay. The graphic on the slide indicates approximately the size of the device in the shipping container. It's about 22 inches long. And I brought with me a little plastic model -- this is not to scale -- but to tell you that this is what is on there. And it's a -- fuse assembly is a battery-powered electrical fuse. I'd like to point out that the assembly is classified, when it's real, but it does not contain any nuclear or fissile material.

The DOD has initiated an investigation to determine what happened and how. Preliminary information indicates that a shipment took place in response to a Foreign Military Sales Order from Taiwan for helicopter batteries. The Defense Logistics Agency mistakenly shipped these items instead of the requested batteries. It is our understanding that the shipment was placed in storage upon receipt.

The investigation will determine the integrity of the shipping containers and their contents during the foreign military sales process.

The United States is making all appropriate notifications in the spirit of candor and openness in an effort to avoid any misunderstanding. Lieutenant General Carter Ham will talk you through the procedures followed during recovery.

Carter.

GEN. HAM: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

As the secretary indicated, when we became fully aware of the circumstances of these misshipped items, U.S. personnel took action to first secure and then to regain custody of the items. This was accomplished within a few hours of our becoming aware, fully aware, of the circumstances.

U.S. Pacific Command then initiated actions to recover the items, maintaining U.S. custody, and then to transport the items back to U.S. control. The items are now back under positive control at a U.S. base. I'll be followed by the principal deputy undersecretary of Defense, Mr. Ryan Henry.

MR. HENRY: I'm here on behalf of Secretary Gates, who has made it a personal priority to effectively deal with this matter. The department will determine the facts and take appropriate corrective action regarding this regrettable incident.

When informed this past Friday morning, the secretary directed the immediate return of the equipment to U.S. custody and to its positive control. The president was subsequently notified that day.

Secretary Gates further ordered the equipment to be expeditiously returned to a secure facility in the United States. And as Carter has let you know, that has now been accomplished.

Additionally the department has initiated a complete physical inventory of all of these devices. The secretary is further directing the secretary of the Air Force and the secretary of the Navy to conduct a comprehensive review of all policies, procedures as well as a physical site inventory of all nuclear and nuclear-associated material equipment across their respective programs.

Finally the secretary signed out, this morning, a memorandum directing Admiral Kirkland Donald, director, Navy Nuclear Propulsion, with the support of the undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, to conduct a comprehensive investigation, to determine the facts, into how this error occurred and who is accountable throughout the chain of command.

This tasking memo will be available at the conclusion of this briefing.

Admiral Donald will be assisted by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and elements of the intelligence community. Subject to his statutory obligation, this will be his principal tasking for the duration of the investigation.

The appropriate congressional oversight authorities have been notified, beginning yesterday. The government of China and the authorities in Taiwan have also been notified. This intended shipment to Taiwan of batteries for a utility helicopter was consistent with our one China policy, the three joint U.S.-China communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act. Our security assistance to Taiwan is defensive in character and makes available defensive articles and services as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self- defense capability. Our policy on Taiwan arms sales have not changed. This specific incident was an error in process only, and is not indicative of our policies, which remain unchanged.

Lastly, I cannot emphasize forcefully enough how strong the secretary feels about this matter and how disconcerting it is to him. In an organization as large as DOD, the largest and most complex in the world, there will be mistakes. But they cannot be tolerated in the arena of strategic systems, whether they are nuclear or only associated equipment, as was in this case.

We will now be glad to take your questions.

SEC. WYNNE: Please.

Q Bottom line is that this sounds like a, for lack of a better way to put it, a real screw-up in the nation's nuclear program, of course, coming after the incident with the missiles that flew on the B-52s. How confident should we be in the security of our nuclear-related technology?

SEC. WYNNE: Well, actually, the Air Force shipped this device in March of 2005, well before the other nuclear incident. But as Secretary Ryan Henry indicated, the secretary of Defense is taking this very seriously. We are all taking this very seriously. And it -- and though this was not in -- could not be construed as being nuclear material, it is a component for a -- you know, the fuse in the nose cone for a nuclear system.

And so I would tell you that we are very concerned about it. It was a different supply chain that was involved in that whole procedural analysis. So we are going to conduct now a review of all -- under the guidance of the secretary of Defense, both the secretary of the Air Force and the secretary of the Navy, among all non-nuclear componentry that goes into the nuclear weapons characterization.

Yes, ma'am.

Q Was there anything about this component that is -- that they could glean any information out of? And could they take it and then build one on their own? And how can you be certain it was kept in storage and not at some point analyzed?

SEC. WYNNE: That'll come out, I think, as a part of the investigation. We feel like the authorities inside Taiwan acted very responsibly. I would leave that to Secretary Ryan Henry to dispose of, but right now there's no indication.

Tony?

Q How did they act responsibly? Can you expand on that?

MR. HENRY: Yes. We have no indications from a site inspection of the item that it has in any way been tampered with, but that will be part of the further investigation. That's one of the reasons for bringing the intelligence services in, to be able to determine that. But again, all our dealings with the Taiwan authorities have been up front and they have in no way tried to be uncooperative in any sort of way.

Additionally, these are first indications, but our communication with experts indicate that this is a system that was built and designed in the '60s, and so therefore the technology that is in there is quite dated. But nonetheless, we're taking this extremely seriously and we feel quite confident we'll be able to determine if there has been any tampering or exploitation.

Q Yes, two quick questions. A, why isn't the DLA director here? This doesn't seem like an Air Force issue; it's a DLA shipping issue. And B, why did it take two years to find out that these things were shipped improperly?

MR. HENRY: The purpose of the investigation Admiral Donald will be conducting is to determine where the accountability is. We've had a team of people who since Friday morning have been working very hard on this, worked through the weekend to try to determine things. We are in the process of being able to piece together different elements and trying to gain an understanding of what happened. There are multiple players. There are multiple parties involved.

And we are -- we'll do a thorough investigation, and those who are responsible will be held accountable. The secretary is quite forceful in this.

And the different players involved, the director of DLA and other people that are in the supply chain, both the Air Force and the regular Defense Department, they are working and trying to understand the details. This was not meant to be a detailed brief; it was to give you the facts as we know them for sure today. Everything else, we're trying to gather facts. Many times they don't -- they don't indicate the same outcome. And so we're trying to eliminate that confusion with the investigation.

SEC. WYNNE: Second row.

Q Yeah, thank you very much. A small question, then a bigger question. What missile was this warhead designed for?

SEC. WYNNE: The component was aimed at a Minuteman.

Q And a larger question. Even if this was an error, even if it wasn't intentional, has the United States by this shipment violated international law, treaty obligations or such vehicles as the Missile Technology Control Regime?

MR. HENRY: That's under analysis now. The Missile Technology Control Regime is self-enforcing, as you're aware. We are looking at the different items of that. If there was a violation, we are coming forth with it as soon as we became aware of it. We are being totally transparent. We have corrected the situation. And if there was something that was amiss, it clearly was not intentional. The United States stands up to its treaty obligations. And we're dealing with this in the most straightforward manner we can.

SEC. WYNNE: Yes, ma'am?

Q Can you say what -- how this came to light? How did the United States find out that this happened? Did the Taiwanese government come forward? And can you also say what reaction China has had to this?

SEC. WYNNE: I can tell you that it was very responsible on the part of the Taiwanese that when they realized what they had, they notified the right authorities and started the recovery process.

MR. HENRY: Yeah, I would say -- and these are just initial gathering of information -- it appears from the -- fairly early on the Chinese indicated to us that they did not have in receipt what they had asked for. We still thought --

Q (Off mike.)

MR. HENRY: Excuse me, I apologize. The Taiwan authorities indicated that they didn't have in possession what they anticipated getting. We on our side thought we were talking about different sorts of batteries. There was an effort to resolve and to reimburse them. It wasn't until this past week that we became aware that they had something akin to a nose cone assembly, at which time elements in the field worked that for a couple days to get resolution.

Once we thought we understood what the part number was, the Pentagon became aware of that, on Thursday. And again I've taken you through the sequence of events since then.

So there were early communications, but we thought we were hearing one thing. In reality, they were saying something different.

Q And China's reaction?

MR. HENRY: We have spoken to the Chinese authorities and we will continue to have dialogue with them. Again we've been very clear that we think that this is -- that our policy has not changed, that there was an error. There was a mistake in execution, and we've notified them as soon as we became aware of it.

Q When was that notification from Taiwan, that they had the wrong package?

MR. HENRY: Those dates and specific dates will be part of the investigation. And --

Q Are we talking 2006 or are we talking 2008?

MR. HENRY: Again we have different pieces of information. And as far as when people became aware of them, that will be part of the job of Admiral Donald. Again you'll be able to see his tasking memo when he'll be reporting back to the secretary. And as soon as we have definitive answers on those things, we will make them available.

(Cross talk.)

Q Can I just crawl through that timeline again? I mean, things were shipped in March of 2005. What's the fall 2006?

SEC. WYNNE: In fall 2006 is when DLA picked them out of the warehouse, in fulfillment of the FMS order, and shipped them to the Republic of China, Taiwan.

Q Okay.

So Taiwan was in, well, had these all the way --

SEC. WYNNE: They put them right into storage, right.

Q In storage until Friday.

SEC. WYNNE: Until they came out with it.

And I think the rest of the timeline has to be done by Admiral Donald. But I would say that late last week was when we realized that they were in fact fuses from nose cone assemblies.

Q But a period before that was when there was ongoing discussion that they had the wrong part. So at least for some period of time before last week, there were ongoing discussions between the United States and Taiwan about them not having the right part.

SEC. WYNNE: I believe so but I'd like for that to come out during Admiral Donald's investigation.

(Cross talk.)

Q You may have already covered this.

Does the fuse, are you able to explain, does the fuse assembly that you're talking about involve a firing circuit, a trigger, an igniter? What exactly are the components of this assembly?

SEC. WYNNE: Well, there you have it.

This is the warhead. This is the electrical component that is the fuse. And that's what's on here.

Q Right, but -- I'm so sorry -- was only the fuse shipped, or was the whole --

SEC. WYNNE: Just this.

Q So only the electrical component was shipped. And is that a firing mechanism in and of itself -- not in and of itself, but is that an actual firing --

SEC. WYNNE: Well, the fuse is a -- a fuse is a -- it has a small battery in it, and so it is the firing mechanism. But it does not -- obviously, separated, it has no nuclear material associated with it.

MR. HENRY: So for total accuracy, it sends a simple electrical signal to the weapons package, which has its own triggering mechanism. So this is just to tell the triggering mechanism within the weapons package to start its sequence of events. But it's a very simple electrical signal. This is similar to what we find in artillery shells. It's in many, many conventional weapons. It has to do with sensing proximity to the ground and saying when you get within a certain distance to the ground, it sends out the simple single -- signal.

Q And is there anything about this that is similar in physical appearance to the helicopter batteries that Taiwan thought it was buying?

SEC. WYNNE: I would say once you set them side by side, no.

Q And are these inventoried items? In other words, are you --

SEC. WYNNE: Yes. We have these in inventory both at the bases where they're in use and at DLA.

Yes, sir.

Q How were they recovered?

SEC. WYNNE: How were they recovered?

GEN. HAM: Thanks, Mr. Secretary.

When we became aware of this, of the misshipment and the Taiwanese had these items under their control, U.S. military personnel serving a liaison function were able to coordinate at the warehouse which these items were stored, to -- first, again, to establish security for those items and then later to transport them to a site where they could be

under U.S. control until such time as air transportation could be arranged to move them on further.

Q And so this was all coordinated with the Taiwanese?

GEN. HAM: This was with the -- U.S. Pacific Command, at our end, had the lead for this, to coordinate through the liaison offices that exist there, yes.

Q Could I -- I'm still confused on this fuse. This fuse has no nuclear components, but it could detonate a nuclear warhead, correct?

SEC. WYNNE: Well, it is the electrical firing mechanism that allows the rest of the system to detonate.

So I mean, that's what it's used as, just like a fuse on a piece of dynamite.

Q (Off mike) -- nuclear weapon?

SEC. WYNNE: It has no nuclear material associated with it. It is an electrical component called a fuse.

MR. HENRY: It could set off -- (off mike) -- a separate component inside the weapons package. This sends the electrical signal to that trigger to say that it can start its sequence.

Q This tells the trigger it's time to start firing. So it's part of the triggering mechanism.

SEC. WYNNE: Yes, ma'am?

(Cross talk.)

Q (Off mike.)

SEC. WYNNE: Not for me.

Q Is it a yes or -- Mr. Henry? Is it part of the triggering mechanism?

MR. HENRY: It is a fuse, the same sort of fuse that you would have in a conventional artillery shell, that would send a signal to the explosive charge. So it is a generic sensing proximity fuse for the ground with the battery to help send that electrical signal out.

The weapons package itself is a -- it's a very complex sequence of events, and that is contained in the weapons package, which is immediately behind the fuse assembly.

SEC. WYNNE: That was this one.

Q That's a yes, right?

Q Is this fuse unique to nuclear weapons?

SEC. WYNNE (?): No.

MR. HENRY: The specific manufacturing of this is done to be made specifically with this weapons package. So you would not be able to use this in any other weapons system, nuclear or non-nuclear. But the mechanism itself is common to many, many different weapons.

Q But it would only work on that nuclear warhead.

MR. HENRY: This specific one will only work on this weapons package, the Mark-12, and no other weapons package.

Q And Mark-12 is a nuclear warhead?

MR. HENRY: And this is -- yes.

Q But the simple question was if it's part of the triggering mechanism, and the answer is yes, it is part of the triggering --

MR. HENRY: It's a matter of how you use your definitions, and it depends -- triggering, to us, and in the nuclear arena means something very specific. Okay. This does say that the weapons package can become active. So it depends. If you're defining it in layman's terms, the specific way we define it, the triggering mechanism is confined within the -- in the weapons package. But it's a matter of whether you're using our military definitions or if you're using a layman's definition.

SEC. WYNNE: Yes, ma'am?

Q (Off mike) -- can you work out the timeline again? First you mentioned is March 2005. Is that the day Taiwan was notified to --

SEC. WYNNE: No, that was when we declared it excess at FE-1, and if you have excess in your storehouse, then you ship it to a central location, which was the Defense Logistics Agency warehouse at Hill Air Force Base.

They maintain the larger stock, and they have control over it. So we maintain what we would call on-site stock, which is a smaller set. And the larger buffer, if you will, in a supply sense, is at Hill.

Q So Taiwan actually received that in 2006 --

SEC. WYNNE: So then in 2006, then the Defense Logistics Agency picked up this shipping container, four of them, and shipped it to Taiwan in response to a foreign military sales case for helicopter batteries.

Q Well, since there's -- you know, there is no nuclear material associated, what -- can you tell us the impact, you know, why this becomes so sensitive?

SEC. WYNNE: Well, I would say, first of all, as was indicated before, this is a part and parcel of our strategic weapons systems. We had an incident. We want to be very sensitive to that nuclear incident. We did control all of the nuclear aspects, and here we have something that is, as you say, non-nuclear component. And the question before the secretary, which he'd like answers to, is, should we and do we monitor and proctor this side of the nuclear components? And there's a lot of different components that would, if you will, comprise our totals. And that's why he's asked not just the Air Force but also the Navy to follow through.

Yes, ma'am?

Q So you say there were four of those together?

SEC. WYNNE: There were four batteries asked for and there were four containers shipped.

Q And all four had this in them?

SEC. WYNNE: All four had the same device in them.

Q Can you say at this point whether -- first of all, they were sent to this other facility because they were in excess where they were. So was it -- was it these nose cones that were in excess, or was it helicopter batteries that were in excess and the mistake was made there?

SEC. WYNNE: That's for the -- for Admiral Donald to discern.

I can't -- I can't go into that right now because I'm -- we're looking at it.

Q Was it one fuse in each container, or there's more than one in each container?

SEC. WYNNE: No. There's one fuse in each container.

(Cross talk.)

Yes, sir.

Q How closely are these normally monitored, these assemblies? And what were they -- what was supposed to happen to them at DLA once they were shipped?

SEC. WYNNE: I'm going from memory now because I'm not Defense Logistics Agency.

But when they arrive at a shipping dock, there's a classified storage and an unclassified storage. And these went to the unclassified storage. They should have gone to the classified storage. There is a classified storage there.

Q And how carefully are they normally monitored?

SEC. WYNNE: We reconcile quarterly to, and each location is reconciled quarterly, to make sure that there's been no pilferage or loss. So that's what the secretary is very concerned about, is that this clearly is an escape from that process.

MR. HENRY: I might add that we have had the opportunity to have a team working this through the weekend, giving up their Easter holiday to try to understand this.

We -- it was not crystal clear exactly what happened. We took this to the secretary, let him know that there were some differences in understanding what the records mean. There were some differences in understanding what the sequence of events are. And therefore we suggested, and he readily took the -- went forward with the idea that we do a real investigation into this.

And so as you start to ask all these logistics questions and what went where, when is, there are bits and piece of information, indicate it might have happened one way. But we really don't know and we really think it's too early to start to speculate exactly what the sequence of events were, what the interactions were between multiple agencies. That's the purpose of the investigation.

The secretary has tasked Admiral Donald to move with alacrity, to get back to him with an interim report very quickly. And as we understand these things, and we can come to you with rather than what may have been, what actually is, then we'll come forward, those things. But to continue to dig into the little bits and pieces we know right now, we really don't think is helpful, because many of them could be proved wrong as we gather more facts.

Q Just to be clear about what has been said today already, I think what I've heard is that March 2005, they were shipped to the DLA and put in unclassified storage when they should have been put in classified storage. Is that correct? And who made that error?

SEC. WYNNE: That actually is some speculation on my part as to what their transit was. And as to your second part of your question, that's what Admiral Donald is empowered for.

Q So we don't know who's doing that shipment, who's moving them at that point in 2005?

SEC. WYNNE: What we do know is they were shipped from F.E. Warren to Hill Air Force Base. And as I said, that was some speculation on my part that they -- they have classified storage, I'm aware of that, but remember, I was going from some distant memory. And this was picked from unclassified storage for processing to the -- for the FMS case. As to what happened between arrival and departure is for Admiral Donald to surmise.

STAFF: We have time for just one or two more.

SEC. WYNNE: Yes, sir.

Q Going back on the timeline a bit, can you tell us when the secretary was told about this and when, then, he informed -- I would assume he informed the White House, when -

MR. HENRY: As I mentioned in my statement, he was informed this last Friday morning, at which time he directed the steps to secure the material, put it under positive control and return it to the United States to a secure facility, all of which has been done. That day, the president was notified.

Q Initially, though, it was Thursday, you said, that the Pentagon kind of figured out what --

MR. HENRY: Thursday afternoon, different elements here in the Pentagon, the Air Force and on the secretary's staff, learned of this. They verified what they were getting. This, as you can imagine, was somewhat unusual to come forward. So they wanted to make sure they were coming forward with accurate information. That happened over a matter of hours. After the close of business Friday afternoon, different senior officials were notified. They gathered more facts and then notified the secretary Friday morning as he came into work.

SEC. WYNNE: One more question.

Q Mr. Secretary, you just said that they reconcile the inventory quarterly. Is that correct?

SEC. WYNNE: That's their normal procedure.

Q So there were arguably six to eight different inventories at which time these four fuses were never -- it was never realized that these fuses were missed?

SEC. WYNNE: That's the concern.

Q I mean, is that -- is there a larger concern at this point? I know you guys are -- you're going to undergo this large investigation, but is there a larger concern that there's other potentially dangerous material --

SEC. WYNNE: Well, the secretary's actually asked the secretary of the Air Force and the Navy to essentially arrive at that comprehensive review.

But suffice it to say here that we have done a real scrub, for this particular part, and have identified and found all of the ones that we are aware of.

(Cross talk.)

Thank you very much.

Appendix Z

The White House Regular Briefing

Dana Perino – Briefer

March 25, 2008

Federal News Service

(only relevant section included)

Q Dana, when was the president first briefed about the missile parts that were mistakenly sent to Taiwan? What was his reaction? And does he still have confidence in the Air Force leadership, considering this is now the second example of nuclear- related equipment being mishandled?

MS. PERINO: I do know that the president was briefed. I don't know exactly when, but it would have been recently. But he appreciates that they are taking action, and there is a full investigation under way. And he's glad that the result is that they got the parts back. But he'll be interested to hear what the results are from that investigation.

Q Does he still have confidence in the Air Force leadership?

MS. PERINO: Yes. Yes, he does.

Appendix AA

Nuclear Parts Sent To Taiwan In Error; U.S. Just Learned Of 2006 Mix-Up

Josh White
March 26, 2008
Washington Post

The Defense Department mistakenly shipped secret nuclear missile fuses to Taiwan more than 18 months ago and did not learn that the items were missing until late last week, Pentagon officials acknowledged yesterday, deepening concerns about the security of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Officials with the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) sent four nose-cone fuse assemblies to Taiwan in August 2006 instead of four replacement battery packs for use in Taiwan's fleet of UH-1 Huey helicopters. The fuses help trigger nuclear warheads on Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missiles as they near their point of impact. It was unclear yesterday how the two very different items were mixed up at a warehouse at Hill Air Force Base in Utah and how they were shipped out of the country without notice.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates immediately ordered an investigation, the second such probe in the past year to examine serious lapses in the care of U.S. nuclear weapons and accessories. Gates learned of the erroneous shipment on Friday and informed President Bush, but officials waited until yesterday -- after Saturday's elections in Taiwan -- to disclose the incident. Pentagon and State Department officials have conferred with Taiwanese and Chinese diplomats over the past three days.

"In an organization as large as DOD, the largest and most complex in the world, there will be mistakes," said Ryan Henry, principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy, speaking at the Pentagon yesterday. "But they cannot be tolerated in the arena of strategic systems, whether they are nuclear or only associated equipment, as was in this case." Gates found the incident "disconcerting," he added.

In August, the Air Force lost track of six nuclear warheads for 36 hours when they were inadvertently flown on a B-52 bomber between bases in North Dakota and Louisiana. The incident exposed security flaws and raised similar questions about the safety of U.S. nuclear weapons.

Senior defense officials said it was almost certainly human error that led to the nose cones being shipped, and Air Force officials were concerned the classified items were placed in an unclassified area of a DLA warehouse and not properly tracked. Quarterly inventory checks over the past 18 months did not show the nose cones were missing.

A DLA spokesman did not respond to questions about the incident. A spokeswoman for the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office, Taiwan's principal representative office in the United States, declined to comment.

Missile defense experts said the United States may have violated nuclear nonproliferation agreements and U.S. export laws by sending the items to Taiwan. Such treaties and regimes are designed to prevent the transfer of nuclear technologies between countries, and sensitive nuclear missile parts are among the most regulated items.

"This is a case of horrifying mismanagement of the inventory at this location," said Leonard S. Spector, deputy director of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. "But it does seem more like mismanagement rather than a nefarious scheme to get them to Taiwan."

Since 2003, the Air Force had made 139 separate transfers of classified parts between F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming and the base in Utah -- mainly to store excess parts in a DLA warehouse -- and only the March 2005 transfer of four nose cones was misplaced, two defense officials said. How that oversight occurred will be at the center of the investigation.

Taiwan received four drum-shaped packages from the United States in August 2006 and placed them, unopened, into storage. Taiwanese officials realized only recently that the packages contained the nose cones when they went looking for the helicopter batteries, according to U.S. defense officials.

In trying to arrange reimbursement for the missing battery packs, U.S. officials determined that the drums contained classified material, quickly secured the items and returned them to the United States.

Henry and Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne said the Taiwanese did not appear to tamper with the items, which contain 1960s-era technology, and that the nose cones would not have been dangerous on their own because they work only with U.S. missile technology. Of greater concern to senior U.S. officials is that classified nuclear-related items left U.S. control, reached the hands of a foreign military and went without notice for so long.

U.S. foreign military sales to Taiwan totaled nearly \$10 billion in deliveries from 1999 through 2006, second only to Saudi Arabia, which received \$13.3 billion, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service. Sales to Taiwan have included numerous weapons systems -- from helicopters and tanks to air defense missiles and radar systems -- as well as parts and services.

Beijing regards Taiwan as a breakaway province and has more than 700 ballistic missiles pointed at the island. Much of China's military buildup appears aimed at achieving air and sea superiority in any conflict with Taiwan.

The United States has long maintained a "one China" policy -- acknowledging that both China and Taiwan say Taiwan is part of China -- while supporting Taiwan with arms sales. In discussions with U.S. officials, the Chinese have argued that one of three communiques governing U.S.-China relations, signed in 1982, requires the United States to reduce arms sales to Taiwan.

But President Ronald Reagan, who signed the communique, at the same time secretly signed a one-page memo stating that the communique restricted U.S. arms sales only if the balance of power between Taiwan and China was preserved.

Joseph Cirincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund, said the nose-cone incident underscores how Washington has "too many nuclear weapons with too little control over them." He said he worries that the incident will raise Chinese suspicions that Taiwan is restarting its nuclear program -- it does not now have nuclear capabilities -- and could spur China to assume a more aggressive stance.

"Imagine how we would feel if the Russians accidentally shipped warhead fuses to Tehran," Cirincione said. "We'd be going nuts right now. It would be hard for them to convince us that it was an accident."

Appendix AB

U.S. Initially Unconcerned About Erroneous Shipment

Josh White and Glenn Kessler
March 27, 2008
Washington Post

After Taiwanese officials reported in early 2007 that four packages they had received from the U.S. military did not contain the helicopter batteries they had expected, U.S. officials suggested that Taiwan simply dispose of the incorrect items -- which turned out to be parts for U.S. nuclear missiles.

In e-mail correspondence over several months between U.S. defense officials and Taiwan, the U.S. officials assumed that the erroneous shipment simply contained the wrong type of batteries, not that Taiwan had received four classified nuclear-related items that never should have left U.S. soil.

U.S. government officials familiar with the communications said yesterday that at some point between August 2006 and last week, Taiwan opened the drum-shaped packages and noticed that the items inside were labeled "secret" and that they included Mark 12 nose cones, which are used with U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Since early 2007, Taiwan had been asking U.S. officials to either reimburse it for the missing batteries or replace them, as part of billions of dollars in U.S. military sales to Taiwan over the past decade. But after the situation was resolved and U.S. authorities told the Taiwanese to get rid of the items they had received -- missing warning signs of a serious breach -- the Taiwanese double-checked the packages because of worries that discarding them could be dangerous.

Taiwan last week alerted U.S. authorities that it believed the military had shipped items related to U.S. "warheads," sparking alarm at the highest levels of the Pentagon. It is unclear when the Taiwanese opened the packages and how long they knew they had classified U.S. materials in their possession, but the drums were in a warehouse for more than 18 months while the United States did not know the sensitive materials were missing.

"Last week they said they didn't think they could destroy these items and said it was warhead-related material," said one U.S. government official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity because the incident is under investigation. "That was the first time there was any indication we weren't dealing with a battery. All the alarm bells went off at that point."

The parts that the United States shipped to Taiwan are Mark 12 nose-cone assemblies, which have 1960s technology and are being phased out by the Air Force in favor of nose cones compatible with newer Mark 12A warheads for its Minuteman III missiles. There are about 700 Mark 12 assemblies in the U.S. inventory, and the Air Force has been shipping excess to the Pentagon's Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) for storage at an air

base in Utah. The assemblies do not contain nuclear material but help trigger a detonation as a ballistic missile nears its target.

U.S. officials said yesterday it appears that workers at the DLA initially did not determine that the materials Taiwan received were classified because the outside of the packages had unclassified inventory codes that indicated they contained batteries. Quarterly inventory checks -- about 10 of them -- also missed the error, and the discrepancy was not discovered until Thursday. Air Force and DLA spokesmen declined to comment and referred questions to the Pentagon.

"Once the error was verified, the department took immediate action to acquire positive control of the equipment and commence the recovery process," said Brian Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman. "Positive control was gained in hours, not days."

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates learned of the error late last week, informed President Bush and immediately ordered an investigation, which will focus on whether the Air Force properly labeled the packages for shipment to the DLA and then how the DLA stored, tracked and shipped them overseas. Authorities said the packages were inappropriately stored in an unclassified warehouse and that the outer packages might have been mislabeled.

The incident has been embarrassing to Defense Department officials charged with securing and maintaining the U.S. nuclear arsenal and has added tension to the relationship between the United States and China.

China responded sternly yesterday to the news of the erroneous shipment, issuing a vehement protest, warning of "disastrous consequences" and demanding a thorough investigation.

The response reflected the depth of Chinese opposition to U.S. weapons sales to Taiwan, a self-ruled island that Beijing maintains is a part of China. In particular, China has responded with irritation to a recent effort by the Taiwanese Defense Ministry to buy advanced F-16 warplanes to enhance its fleet of older F-16s bought from Washington a decade ago.

Bush administration officials said the nose-cone assemblies had been returned and that U.S. diplomats contacted China and Taiwan to explain the error after it was discovered last week. But the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it expects more information about what occurred and that the shipment could affect relations between Washington and Beijing.

"We demand that the U.S. side thoroughly investigate this matter and report to China in a timely manner the details of the situation and eliminate the negative effects and disastrous consequences created by this incident," said a declaration attributed to Qin Gang, a ministry spokesman. "We urge the U.S. side to keep the promises they have made . . . and stop weapons sales and military contacts with Taiwan to avoid endangering peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and the improvement in Sino-U.S. relations."

In a phone conversation yesterday between Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao, the subject of the errant delivery came up briefly, according to national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley. "It came up very briefly, and basically the president indicated that a

mistake had been made," Hadley told reporters. "There [was] very little discussion about it."

Such classified materials are supposed to be closely monitored, and defense officials said the shipment to Taiwan almost certainly occurred because of human error.

"The investigation will determine the integrity of the shipping containers and their contents during the foreign military sales process," said Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne, in announcing the erroneous shipment on Tuesday.

Appendix AC

Gates orders full inventory of U.S. nuclear weapons

March 28, 2008
Bismarck Tribune

WASHINGTON (AP) - Defense Secretary Robert Gates has ordered a full inventory of all nuclear weapons and related materials after the mistaken delivery of ballistic missile fuses to Taiwan, the Pentagon said Thursday.

Gates told officials with the Air Force, Navy and Defense Logistics Agency to assess inventory control procedures for the materials and to submit a report within 60 days.

Earlier this week, Gates directed Navy Adm. Kirkland H. Donald to take charge of a full investigation of the delivery mistake in which four cone-shaped electrical fuses used in intercontinental ballistic missile warheads were shipped to the Taiwanese instead of the helicopter batteries they had ordered.

It was the second nuclear-related mistake involving the military that has been revealed in recent months. In August an Air Force B-52 bomber was mistakenly armed with six nuclear-tipped cruise missiles and flown from Minot Air Force Base, N.D., to Barksdale Air Force Base, La.

Gates orders full inventory of U.S. nuclear weapons, related materials after mistaken delivery.

Appendix AD

5th Bomb Wing flunks nuclear inspection

Michael Hoffman
May 30, 2008
Military Times

The 5th Bomb Wing at Minot Air Force Base, N.D., has failed its much-anticipated defense nuclear surety inspection, according to a Defense Threat Reduction Agency report.

DTRA inspectors gave the wing an “unsatisfactory” grade Sunday after uncovering many crucial mistakes during the weeklong inspection, which began May 17. They attributed the errors primarily to lack of supervision and leadership among security forces.

Inspectors from Air Combat Command also participated, but the Air Force refused to provide specifics on their findings.

Security broke down on multiple levels during simulated attacks across the base, including against nuclear weapons storage areas, according to the DTRA report, a copy of which was obtained by Air Force Times.

Inspectors watched as a security forces airman played video games on his cell phone while standing guard at a “restricted area perimeter,” the DTRA report said. Meanwhile, another airman nearby was “unaware of her duties and responsibilities” during the exercise.

The lapses are baffling, given the high-level focus on Minot since last August, when 5th Bomb Wing airmen mistakenly loaded six nuclear-tipped cruise missiles onto a B-52 Stratofortress and flew them to Barksdale Air Force Base, La., where the plane sat on the flight line, unattended, for hours. That incident not only embarrassed the Air Force, but raised concerns worldwide about the deterioration in U.S. nuclear safety standards.

Col. Joel Westa took command of the 5th Bomb Wing following that fiasco. After it failed an initial nuclear surety inspection, or dry run, in December, Westa acknowledged this inspection was going to be the “most scrutinized inspection in the history of time.”

Even so, airmen were unprepared.

“Overall their assessment painted a picture of some things we need to work on in the areas of training and discipline,” Westa said in a statement.

His airmen are working diligently to correct deficiencies, he said.

Inspectors from Air Combat Command will now return to Minot in August to determine if the necessary improvements have been made. Eventually, the wing will have to pass a full defense nuclear surety inspection.

Although the wing failed, it will keep its certification to handle nuclear weapons and will carry on with training right up to the day ACC inspectors revisit the base, said Maj. Thomas Crosson, a command spokesman. The base lost its certification immediately after the incident last August and didn't have it restored until March 31, after it passed a second dry run.

The wing will participate in both a Red Flag exercise this summer and a nuclear readiness operation exercise as it prepares for the inspectors' next visit, Crosson said.

DTRA inspectors gave the wing passing grades in nine of 10 areas they examined, including safety and technical operations, but failed it for its nuclear security.

"The most serious failure is the one regarding security, which is exactly what the Minot incident was all about," said Hans Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists.

Litany of failure

The DRTA report highlighted an incredible number of gaffes:

- * An internal security response team didn't respond to its "pre-designated defensive fighting position" during an attack on the weapon storage area, leaving an entire side of the maintenance facility vulnerable to enemy fire.
- * Security forces didn't clear a building upon entering it, which allowed inspectors to "kill" three of those four airmen.
- * Security forces failed to use the correct entry codes, issued that week, to allow certain personnel into restricted areas.
- * Security forces airmen failed to properly check an emergency vehicle for unauthorized personnel when it arrived at a weapons storage area, or search it correctly once it left.
- * While wing airmen simulated loading an aircraft with nuclear weapons, security forces airmen failed to investigate vulnerabilities on the route from the storage area to the flight line, and didn't arm three SF airmen posted at traffic control points along that route.
- * While on the aircraft, one flight of security forces airmen didn't understand key nuclear surety terminology, including the "two-person concept" — the security mechanism that requires two people to arm a nuclear weapon in case the codes fall into the hands of an airman gone bad.

“Security forces’ level of knowledge, understanding of assigned duties, and response to unusual situations reflected a lack of adequate supervision,” wrote the DTRA team chief.

Security forces leaders rarely visited their airmen on post, and routine exercises “were neither robust nor taken to their logical conclusion,” according to the report.

After reviewing base records, inspectors found “leaders were unengaged [in] the proper supervision of SF airmen.”

“If the leadership is still unengaged after all that has happened with the warheads, the missing ballistic missile fuses and problems with the first inspection, then they’re not fit to have this mission,” Kristensen said. “It’s really frightening.”

Security forces errors made up the majority of the 14-page DTRA inspection report, but inspectors found fault with other parts of operations, including late status reports and major errors in the wing’s personnel reliability program, which dictates who can handle nukes.

While reviewing records, inspectors found one individual cleared to handle nukes had been “diagnosed for alcohol abuse” but was allowed to keep his certification, according to the report.

More fallout?

Immediately after the loss of control over the six nuclear warheads last August, the former 5th Bomb Wing commander was fired, along with three other high-ranking officers. Sixty-nine airmen temporarily lost their certification to handle nukes.

Crosson said there are no plans to fire any “key personnel” now. He did not rule out punitive actions for other airmen, however.

This latest setback comes shortly after Air Force officials announced plans to form a new B-52 squadron at Minot, which will allow one bomber squadron to focus solely on the nuclear mission. The move is largely in response to the findings of a blue ribbon panel, which told Congress the bomber force had lost sight of the nuclear mission due to the heavy demands of supporting troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Several of the senior [Defense Department] people interviewed believe that the decline in focus has been more pronounced than realized and too extreme to be acceptable,” according to a report written by a Defense Science Board task force headed by retired Air Force Gen. Larry Welch, a former chief of staff.

Considering the level of resources dedicated to ensuring the 5th Bomb Wing could meet standards — including the arrival of new senior noncommissioned officers from other bases — Kristensen said he worries about nuclear security not only at Minot but across the service.

“It makes you wonder what’s going on elsewhere, like the nuclear weapons stationed at bases overseas, and at Barksdale Air Force Base and Whiteman Air Force Base,” he said.

ACC officials said the command will continue to support the 5th Bomb Wing’s leadership and provide the manning to fix security problems.

“We take our responsibilities to protect and safeguard weapons with the utmost seriousness, and understand there is zero tolerance for errors,” according to an ACC statement.

Airmen with the 5th Bomb Wing can expect more long hours ahead as the wing scrambles to fix its security holes before ACC inspectors return.

“They really need to drill their people to make sure this can’t happen,” Kristensen said.

It’s not the first time airmen at Minot have heard such warnings.

Appendix AE

Air Force Unit's Nuclear Weapons Security Is 'Unacceptable'

Walter Pincus
May 31, 2008
Washington Post

The same Air Force unit at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota that was responsible for mishandling six nuclear cruise missiles last August failed key parts of a nuclear safety inspection this past weekend, according to a Defense Department report.

The 5th Bomb Wing was given an "unacceptable" grade in security of nuclear weapons, according to the review by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. In another category, management and administration, it received a grade of "marginal," based on deficiencies in recording changes that affected the operational status of nuclear cruise missiles and gravity bombs.

Those are two areas where failures last summer allowed a B-52 at Minot to be loaded with six air-launched cruise missiles and flown to Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana without the pilots, air or ground crews knowing they contained nuclear warheads.

Among the problems found during last week's inspection: Internal security forces did not go to assigned defensive areas during an exercise that involved an attempt to steal a nuclear weapon; security guards failed to search an emergency vehicle that entered and left the nuclear storage area during that exercise; a security guard used his cellphone to play video games while on duty; and guards were unarmed at traffic control points along the route where nuclear weapons were to travel.

While 5th Bomb Wing units received passing grades in the remaining eight categories, agency inspectors concluded that security forces' lack of knowledge of their duties represented "a lack of supervision" and a "lack of training," according to the report.

The test failure was first reported yesterday by Air Force Times.

Hans Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, who has seen the report, said yesterday that "this certainly requires a closer look than we have so far, because these are serious issues."

Maj. Thomas Crosson, spokesman for Air Combat Command, which supervises the 5th Bomb Wing, said yesterday that he would neither confirm nor deny the contents of the defense agency's report. He said they would not be released.

"There are areas identified as needing improvement," Crosson said. He said 5th Bomb Wing units will be reinspected in 90 days by the command's inspector general. In the interim, however, he said the wing will not lose its certification to handle nuclear weapons.

Col. Joel Westa, who took over the wing after last summer's incident, had warned his subordinates that the inspection would be tough. On Thursday, in a commentary on the

Minot Air Force Base Web site, he praised two units of the wing that received good grades but made no mention of the poor ones.

After investigations that followed the August incident, the 5th Bomb Wing lost its certification, and personnel at every Air Force base with nuclear weapons had to go through retraining. Five officers, including the 5th Bomb Wing commander, lost their jobs along with some noncommissioned officers.

The Minot unit was recertified two months ago, after increased training and several practice runs.

Appendix AF

Defense Department Briefing Regarding Nuclear Surety

Robert Gates – Briefer
June 5, 2008
Federal News Service

SEC. GATES: I'm here today to provide a summary of the investigation into the shipment of sensitive missile components to Taiwan, and to announce the resulting actions and decisions. A copy of this statement, which I confess is a little long, and a fact sheet will be available after the press conference.

A credible nuclear deterrent has been essential to our security as a nation. And it remains so today. The safety, security and reliability of our nuclear weapons and associated components are of paramount importance.

Our policy is clear. We will ensure the complete physical control of nuclear weapons. And we will properly handle their associated components at all times. It is a tremendous responsibility and one we must and will never take lightly.

On March 25th of this year, I appointed Admiral Kirkland H. Donald, director of Naval Propulsion, to conduct a thorough investigation into the facts and circumstances regarding the misshipment of four MK-12 forward-section reentry vehicle assemblies to Taiwan.

Admiral Donald holds the most senior position in our military, dedicated to the safe and effective employment of nuclear technology in defense of the nation. Admiral Donald has completed his investigation. And I have received his final report.

Let me summarize the findings of Admiral Donald's investigation. First, the investigation did not find anything that would affect the health and safety of the public or our men and women in uniform or call into question the safety, security and reliability of our nuclear arsenal.

Second, the integrity of the nation's nuclear deterrent force was not placed at risk as a result of this mis-shipment. MK forward section assemblies are devices that arm and fuse nuclear warheads. They do not contain explosives or fissile material and are not inherently dangerous.

Further, the investigation yielded no evidence that the forward section assemblies were compromised when they were out of U.S. custody, nor was there ever any compromise of control of nuclear materials.

Having said that, this incident represents a significant failure to ensure the security of sensitive military components. And more troubling, it depicts a pattern of poor performance that was highlighted to us following last year's incident involving the improper movement of nuclear weapons between Minot Air Force Base and Barksdale Air Force Base.

The specific cause of this event was the Air Force and Defense Logistics Agency's sole reliance on and lack of compliance with existing supply system procedures to provide positive control of the four forward section assemblies. The supply system is designed to move and control large quantities of typically low-value material, and mistakes do occur. However, mistakes are not acceptable when shipping and controlling sensitive, classified parts.

Additional controls that would have been appropriate were not used. Moreover, existing procedures were not always followed. Based on Admiral Donald's initial assessment provided to me in April, I directed the Air Force, the Navy and Defense Logistics Agency to conduct a comprehensive inventory of all nuclear and nuclear-related materials, to reestablish positive control of these sensitive, classified components. These actions have been completed, and the results are being evaluated.

However, those actions only address the immediate problem.

During the course of the investigation, other issues indicating a decline in the Air Force's nuclear mission focus and performance became apparent. Rather than an isolated occurrence, the shipment of the four forward-section assemblies to Taiwan was a symptom of a degradation of the authority, standards of excellence and technical competence within the nation's ICBM force. Similar to the bomber- specific August 2007 Minot-Barksdale nuclear weapons transfer incident, this incident took place within the larger environment of declining Air Force nuclear mission focus and performance.

Specifically, the investigation identified systemic issues associated with this decline. First, the investigation identified commonalities between the August 2007 Minot incident and this event. Both events involved a chain of failures that led to an unacceptable incident. The investigation determined the Air Force does not have a clear, dedicated authority responsible for the nuclear enterprise and who sets and maintains consistent, rigorous standards of operation. The investigation concluded that these shortcomings resulted from an erosion of performance standards within the involved commands and a lack of effective Air Force leadership oversight.

Second, the investigation found that the failures that led to the misshipment could have been prevented had the Air Force's inspection and oversight programs been functioning effectively. The investigation also determined that the lack of a critical self- assessment culture in the Air Force nuclear program, and inspection processes that diminish ownership at the command level, make it unlikely that systemic weaknesses can be discovered and addressed. Overall, the Air Force has not been sufficiently critical of its past performance, and that has led to recurring problems of a similar nature.

Third, the investigation confirmed a declining trend in Air Force nuclear expertise similar to findings in other, earlier reports.

This lack of expertise contributed to involved commands overlooking the problems that led to the misshipment.

Years ago the career path for Air Force personnel in the nuclear field was well established and prestigious. However, the overall mission focus of the Air Force has shifted away from this nuclear mission, making it difficult to retain sufficient expertise.

The Air Force has not effectively compensated for this diminished expertise through training and active career management.

The report makes clear that these problems and mistakes have their roots in decisions made over a period of at least 10 years. Nonetheless, many of the problems leading to the Minot and nose cone incidents have been known or should have been known.

Action is required on two fronts: first, fixing the structural, procedural and cultural problems; and second, ensuring accountability. In terms of addressing the problems, the Air Force already has taken initial steps. However, I believe an outside perspective is required to ensure sufficiently far-reaching and comprehensive measures are taken.

Accordingly, I have asked Dr. James Schlesinger, former secretary of Defense, secretary of Energy and director of Central Intelligence, to lead a senior-level task force that will recommend improvements necessary to ensure that the highest levels of accountability and control are maintained in the stewardship and operation of nuclear weapons, delivery vehicles and sensitive components.

The work of the task force will have two phases. The first phase, to be completed within 60 days, will make recommendations on organizational, procedural and policy matters involving the Department of the Air Force. The second phase, to be completed within 120 days, will examine management and oversight of nuclear weapons and related materials and systems across the entire Department of Defense.

The task force will be drawn from the Defense Policy Board and the Defense Science Board. A copy of the task force's mission statement and charter letter will be provided at the end of this briefing.

The problems identified by the investigation have been developed -- have developed over a period of years.

However, Admiral Donald's report also identified contemporary failures and a lack of effective oversight. Individuals in command and leadership positions not only fell short in terms of specific actions, they failed to recognize systemic problems, to address those problems or, where beyond their authority to act, to call the attention of superiors to those problems. Each had the leadership responsibility to identify and correct or flag for others the structural, procedural and performance deficiencies identified in just a few weeks by Admiral Donald.

The challenge, then, is how and at what level to apply individual accountability. Here, Admiral Donald's report provides guidance. He concludes, and I quote, "Senior leadership accountability also arises from the findings indicative of an overall decline in Air Force nuclear weapons stewardship, a problem that has been identified but not effectively addressed for over a decade. Both the Minot-Barksdale nuclear weapons transfer incident and the Taiwan misshipment, while different in specifics, have a common origin: the gradual erosion of nuclear standards and a lack of effective oversight by Air Force leadership."

It is my responsibility to ensure that the Air Force is on the right path to correcting the systemic and institutional nuclear weapons stewardship problems that have been identified. A substantial number of Air Force general officers and colonels have been identified as potentially subject to disciplinary measures, ranging from removal from

command to letters of reprimand. Such measures, whether taken by the Air Force or by my direction, might help address the immediate problems but, I have concluded, would not adequately address the broader issues involved.

Accordingly, after discussion with the president and with the support of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I have accepted the resignation of the secretary of the Air Force and the resignation of the chief of staff of the Air Force.

I will direct the new secretary and the new chief of staff, once confirmed, to evaluate each of the individuals identified by Admiral Donald as bearing responsibility in the recent incidents and systemic problems, to determine whether and what disciplinary measures are warranted, and whether or not they can be part of the solution to the problems identified by the investigation.

In summary, I believe these actions are required because, first, the focus of the Air Force leadership has drifted with respect to perhaps its most sensitive mission.

Second, performance standards in that sensitive area were allowed to degrade.

Third, only after two internationally sensitive incidents did Air Force leadership apply increased attention to the problem.

And fourth, even then, action to ensure a thorough investigation of what went wrong was not initiated by the Air Force leadership but required my intervention.

Mike Wynne is a dedicated and honorable public servant, and Buzz Moseley has given decades of courageous and devoted service to his country. They both deserve our gratitude for their service. I have enjoyed serving with them, and I deeply regret that the issues before us require the actions that I have taken.

While this is a difficult day for the Air Force, for the Department of Defense and for me, it also marks the beginning of a return to the standards of excellence and accomplishment for which the Air Force has long been known. I will make recommendations for a new secretary and new Air Force chief of staff shortly.

Let me close on a personal note. The Air Force is my service. That is the uniform I wore nearly 42 years ago when I first encountered, in the Strategic Air Command, the extraordinary men and women who protect and defend our country. Every day the amazing men and women of our Air Force are in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, supporting all the services worldwide and deterring potential adversaries. They have my respect, my support and my commitment to do everything I can, in my remaining time to work with them, to sustain the tradition of service and excellence that has been the hallmark of the United States Air Force since its inception.

Thank you.

Q Did you conclude that General Moseley and Secretary Wynne were simply incapable of changing course and fixing the problems, or were they unwilling to do what you wanted them to do?

SEC. GATES: I believed that we needed a change of leadership to bring a new perspective and to especially underscore the importance of accountability in dealing with

these kinds of problems. As I say, I have the highest respect for both men, but I felt the change was needed for a number of these reasons.

Q Sir, can you tell us -- the other two pieces of the investigation, into the Navy nuclear arsenal and the DLA -- did they find similar problems, or did they get a clean bill of health?

SEC. GATES: The investigation really did not deal with the Navy part of it. It did deal with the Defense Logistics Agency, identified some problems.

And there are a couple of disciplinary recommendations that have been made to the secretary of the Army.

Q Dr. Gates, you have been critical of the Air Force and other officers who have been not focused on the current wars. You used "next war-itis" in one speech. You criticized UAV efforts. How much do these other issues that you have highlighted in speeches regarding the Air Force come into your decisions on a leadership change?

SEC. GATES: I've made the decisions that I've made based entirely on Admiral Donald's report.

Q Sir, this is obviously, as far as I could tell, looking back, an unprecedented move to see both the civilian and military leadership of a service removed in this fashion. What does this say about the seriousness with which you view this issue and, you mentioned, the most sensitive mission that the Air Force has? Could you speak a little bit to that?

SEC. GATES: I think that really is the crux of it, is the stewardship of our nuclear deterrent is the most sensitive mission that we have. And therefore, I think, the problems that have been identified -- despite the fact there was no compromise of the technology, despite the fact that there was no danger involved -- the fact that the stewardship itself and the declining standards raised questions in the minds of the public as well as internationally, in my view, required strong action.

One more question.

Q Sir, you talk about the degradation of focus in terms of nuclear shipping and you talk about the critical lack of self- assessment culture. Can you talk a little bit more about that? I mean, is it beyond the nuclear mission, in the way you see it?

SEC. GATES: All of the conclusions that I have described were focused strictly on the nuclear mission, on the ICBM force and the bombers. And I assume high standards of excellence elsewhere but, you know, if problems occur, then we'll look at them. But this has been focused -- Admiral Donald's report really focused only on the nuclear mission.

Q (Off mike) -- would not have been made had it not been for the Taiwan sale mistake? Is that what you'd sort of conclude?

SEC. GATES: I think it was the second incident that prompted me to believe that there were serious systemic problems here, a part that went well beyond the incident involving Minot and Barksdale. So the Taiwan incident clearly was the trigger.

Thank you very much.

Q (Off mike) -- would you have liked to see a lot of changes after Minot? Should the Air Force have taken more dramatic steps more quickly on the protection of the nuclear arsenal?

SEC. GATES: Well, I think it goes back to the point that I think that there was, as Admiral Donald points out, the lack of critical self-assessment. And I would just leave it at that.

Thank you.

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