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Nukes Over America: Just a Stupid Mistake. Sure It Is

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The Air Force's Friday report on the August 29-30 nuclear weapons incident which saw six armed cruise missiles flown across the continental US in launch position on a B-52H bomber leaves all the big questions unanswered, attempting to shuck the whole thing off as an "unacceptable mistake."

To be sure, Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne and Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Maj. Gen. Richard Newton, said that after a six-week investigation, five officers, including Col. Bruce Emig, commander of the Fifth Bomb Group at Minot AFB in North Dakota, where the flight originated, have been relieved of duty, and 65 other Air Force personnel were also removed from their duties, and both Barksdale and Minot were decertified for their strategic nuclear responsibilities. But that's still pretty small beer for an incident so serious it's never happened before in half a century of nuclear weapons handling.

There are, at this point, no court martials being contemplated, and nobody's been discharged from the military.

Put simply, six 150-kiloton warheads were improperly attached to six Advanced Cruise Missiles, all loaded onto a wing launch pod, and then mounted on the wing of a B-52 H Stratofortress at Minot, along with six similar missiles with dummy warheads, which were loaded onto a launch pod on the plane's other wing, an all 12 were improperly and illegally flown across the country to Barksdale AFB in Louisiana.

The Air Force, following its "investigation," is saying the same thing it said before the investigation: it was all a big "mistake"—the result of "widespread disregard for the rules" regarding handling of nuclear weapons.

A few guys at Minot "inexplicably" screwed up and loaded the nukes and then there were a chain of mistakes because no one else treated the nuclear-tipped missiles as if they were armed with nuclear weapons.

The trouble with this theory, or story line if you will, is that while nobody at Minot, supposedly, noticed what was happening—even though ground crew workers spent eight hours laboring to get the pod with the six nuke-tipped missiles mounted on the plane's wing. This despite the warheads are clearly visible and identifiable by the silver coating they exhibit when viewed through a little window in each nosecone cover, and because there are red coverings on the nuke nosecones—once the plane got to Barksdale, the ground crew there, which had no reason on earth to suspect it was looking at nuclear warheads, spotted

them immediately upon going to the plane.
They had no reason to expect nukes because for 40 years it has been illegal for the military to carry nuclear weapons on bombers over US territory, and indeed since 1991, it has been illegal to even load nuclear weapons on a plane, period, even for training purposes on the ground.

How can it be that Air Force ground crew people at Barksdale could spot the nukes in a flash while nobody at Minot—not the workers who mounted the warheads on the missiles in the heavily guarded bunker, not the guards who are supposed to guard those weapons with their lives and prevent any unauthorized removal from the bunkers, not the ground crew that loaded them onto the plan, and not the pilot and crew of the bomber, who are supposed to check every missile before they take off—noticed they were nuclear warheads? (The weapons went unnoticed for 10 hours in Barksdale, but that's only because no groundcrew visited the plane for that long, but when they did go to it, they reportedly spotted the nukes right off the bat.)

The Air Force, at a press conference announcing the results of its investigation, didn't answer this question. It appears they reporters at the session didn't ask it either.

Certainly the AP reporter didn't ask it, because if she had, she would surely have included the Air Force's answer, or it's non-answer, in her story.

Nobody, apparently, asked the Air Force either about six mysterious violent deaths of Air Force personnel from Minot and Barksdale, and from a mysterious Air Force Special Commando Group, all of which occurred in the days and weeks immediately before, during and after the incident. Two of those deaths—of the Special Commando Group officer and of a Minot weapons guard—were reportedly "suicides."

In an article in the current issue of *American Conservative* magazine, currently on newsstands, I report that incredibly, no federal investigators from the Pentagon or the federal government even bothered to contact the police investigators or medical examiners who investigated those six deaths—an remarkable failure of due diligence, given the seriousness of this incident.

One retired Navy officer who contacted me during my investigation, who worked in electronic warfare, told me it would be simply impossible for those weapons to have been moved out of the storage bunker. He claims to know for a certainty that all nuclear weapons in the US arsenal are equipped with high-tech tags ("like they have at WalMart and Kmart only better") that would instantly trigger alarms when the weapons are moved, unless they were deliberately disarmed.

So what we have is pretty clearly a cover-up here.

A cover-up of what though?

Here we're into speculation.

One thing we need to keep in mind is that Barksdale AFB, on its website, advertises itself proudly as the base that prepares B-52s for duty in the Middle East Theater.

Another thing we need to keep in mind is that Vice President Dick Cheney is trying hard to

gin up a war against Iran, against the better judgment of top military leaders and Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

And a third thing to remember is that these particular six warheads, called M80-1 warheads, are able to be adjusted to have a power of anywhere from 150 kilotons down to just 5 kilotons—a so-called "tactical" size.

Perfect for a tactical strike on an Iranian nuclear processing or research site, or for a "false flag" type attack that could be blamed on a fledgling nuclear power…like Iran.

Of course this is all speculation.

What we do know is that for 36 hours, six nuclear warheads went missing. Nobody at the Pentagon in authority knew they were gone or where they were. And when they were discovered, the initial Pentagon response was to cover it all up. The only reason we know about this incident is that three Air Force officers became whistle-blowers and contacted a reporter at Military Times, a private newspaper trusted by and popular with the rank-and-file military.

And what we know is that this couldn't have been what the Air Force, six weeks and one "investigation" late, is calling a "mistake."

Dave Lindorff is a Philadelphia-based investigative journalist and columnist. His latest book, co-authored by Barbara Olshansky, is "The Case for Impeachment" (St. Martin's Press, 2006 and now out in paperback). His work is available at www.thiscantbehappening.net

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