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Is USAF Stand Down To Find A Missing Nuke?

**Someone, operating under a special chain of command within
the United States Air Force, just stole a nuclear weapon.**

By Chuck Simpson
AboveTopSecret.com
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Some History

Barksdale Missile Number Six deserves far more public attention than it's received to date. Missile Number Six is potentially the major story of at least this year.

Until 1968 under the Airborne Alert Program, informally called Operation Chrome Dome, the Air Force routinely kept about a dozen strategic bombers with nuclear weapons flying at all times.

One predictable result was crashes and incidents. In 1968 the Department of Defense published a list of 13 serious nuclear weapons accidents that occurred between 1950 and 1968. In 1980 the list was revised to include 32 incidents through that year.

Notably, the Pentagon has not acknowledged any accidents since 1980. This alone highlights the importance the Pentagon is placing on the recent transportation of nuclear weapons from North Dakota to Louisiana.

Through 1968, several reported incidents involved plane crashes or malfunctions, beginning with the crash of a B-29 near Fairfield, California in August 1950. The resulting blast was felt 30 miles away.

In July 1950 a B-50 crashed near Lebanon, Ohio. The high-explosive trigger for the nuclear weapon detonated on impact. The blast was felt over 25 miles away.

In May 1957 a nuclear weapon fell from the bomb bay of a B-36 near Albuquerque, New Mexico. Parachutes malfunctioned and the weapon was destroyed on impact.

In October 1957 near Homestead, Florida a B-47 crashed. The nuclear weapon was burned.

In March 1958 a B-47 accidentally dropped a nuclear weapon near Florence, South Carolina. The high-explosive trigger detonated on impact.

In November 1958 a B-47 crashed near Abilene, Texas. The trigger of the nuclear weapon exploded upon impact.

In July 1959 a C-124 crashed near Bossier City, Louisiana. Both plane and nuclear weapon were destroyed.

In October 1959 a B-52 with two nuclear weapons was involved in a mid-air collision near Hardinsburg, Kentucky. One weapon partially burned.

In January 1961 a B-52 broke apart in mid-air near Goldsboro, North Carolina. Two nuclear weapons were released. The parachute on one weapon malfunctioned, and contamination was spread over a wide area. The uranium core was never recovered. Daniel Ellsberg reported that detonation was a very real risk because five of six safety devices failed.

In that month near Monticello, Idaho a B-52 carrying nuclear weapons exploded in mid-air. No information was made available as to the weapons.

In March 1961 a B-52 with two nuclear weapons crashed near Yuba City, California.

In January 1964 a B-52 carrying two nuclear weapons crashed near Cumberland, Maryland.

In January 1966 a B-52 carrying four hydrogen bombs crashed after a mid-air collision near Palomares, Spain. Two weapons exploded on impact, with resulting plutonium contamination. A months-long program was undertaken to locate and extract the other two weapons from the ocean. Major policy changes were taken under consideration.

In January 1968 a B-52 carrying four hydrogen weapons crashed and burned near Thule AFB in Greenland. Explosives in one bomb detonated, spreading plutonium contamination. Apparently, the other three weapons have never been accounted for.

Following large public protests Denmark, which owns Greenland and prohibits nuclear weapons on or over its territory, filed a strong protest. A few days later the Secretary of Defense ordered the removal of

nuclear weapons from planes. After that order was issued, all aircraft armed with nuclear weapons were grounded but kept in a constant state of alert.

In 1991 by Presidential order, nuclear weapons were removed from all aircraft. Bomber nuclear ground alerts, during which nuclear weapons are loaded onto bombers during test and training exercises, were halted. After that time, all nuclear weapons to be delivered by plane were permanently maintained in secure storage facilities.

August 30, 2007

All of which makes the transport of nuclear weapons in combat position on a combat plane so newsworthy.

On August 30, for the first time since 1968, nuclear warheads in combat position were carried by an American bomber. Numerous international treaty provisions were violated in the process.

That Thursday, a B-52H Stratofortress flew from Minot AFB in North Dakota to Barksdale AFB in Louisiana while carrying twelve cruise missiles. Either five or six of those missiles were armed with nuclear warheads.

Cruise Missiles

The missiles on the B-52 were AGM-129 Advanced Cruise Missile units, specifically designed to be launched from wing pods of B-52H planes.

A total of 460 units were manufactured by Raytheon. A total of 394 units are currently maintained by the Air Force. Apparently, 38 are to be modernized and upgraded in Fiscal Year 2008 and the other 356 are to be decommissioned pursuant to the 2002 Moscow treaty.

Raytheon has publicly announced the AGM-129 missiles are to be modified to accomplish a "classified cruise missile mission". This has widely been interpreted to mean conversion to bunker-busters, most likely for use in Iran. This widely accepted explanation is being used to explain why armed cruise missiles are being flown in American airspace.

Nuclear Warheads

The AGM-129 was specifically designed to deliver a W-80 nuclear warhead. The W-80 weapon has a variable yield capability, of 5 to 150 kilotons. For comparison purposes, the bomb used on Hiroshima was 13 to 15 kilotons, or equivalent to 13,000 to 15,000 tons of TNT explosive.

News Stories and Flawed Explanations

The story of the B-52 flight was first reported by Army Times, owned by Gannett, on Wednesday September 5. Gannett relied on information provided by "anonymous officers". The story was picked up by Yahoo Wednesday morning, published by USA Today and The Washington Post, and then quickly spread.

In response, the Pentagon quickly spread an official explanation.

The Air Force admitted to an inadvertent error: The intent was to transport ACMs without weapons. According to military officers, the nuclear warheads should have been removed before the missiles were mounted on the pylons under the wings of the bomber.

In the words of the Pentagon:

"There was an error which occurred during a regularly scheduled transfer of weapons between two bases. The weapons were safe and remained in Air Force control and custody at all times."

For almost the first time in the history of the nation, the military has publicly and promptly admitted it "made a mistake". This in itself is truly astounding.

To reinforce the military's claim that a mistake was made, a system-wide stand-down was ordered for September 14.

That official explanation was quickly explained away. The mistake was made intentionally, so a "deliberate leak" of a secret operation could occur.

The CIA and the Office of Counter-Terrorism in the State Department explained that Barksdale AFB is a "jumping off point" for re-supply of the Middle East.

The "deliberate leak" was intended to serve as a veiled warning to Iran. This deliberately misleading explanation is evidently intended to lead the public or Iran or both to logically conclude the missiles are bound for Iran.

Bluntly, State and the CIA converted a whistleblower leak by true American patriots into a deliberate leak by official Washington, to scare Iran.

By this means Washington has led the public to forget or overlook the real issue.

To begin, the multiple official explanations reek to high heaven. They

collectively read suspiciously like flimsy cover stories concocted in hasty desperation. And no amount of pretty lipstick will be able to make the official explanations pretty.

Transportation Violations

More conflicting explanations followed. These missiles are part of a group scheduled to be decommissioned. This would explain why they were shipped out of North Dakota.

But the missiles were not transported on their way to decommissioning. Missiles are normally decommissioned at Davis-Monthan AFB at Tucson. Nuclear weapons are decommissioned at the Department of Energy's Pantex facility near Amarillo, Texas, accessed through Kirkland AFB in New Mexico.

And military policy requires minimization of the number of flights made with nuclear weapons aboard. So the weapons should not have been mounted on the missiles, flown to Louisiana, un-mounted and flown to New Mexico.

The mode of transportation is also a major issue not defused by official explanations. Per standard operating procedures, or SOPs, both missiles and nuclear warheads are transported primarily by air, in specially modified C-130s or C-17s. Under no peacetime circumstances do military SOPs allow transport of nuclear weapons mounted in cruise missiles mounted in combat positions on combat planes.

Department of Defense Directive Number 4540.5, issued on February 4, 1998, regulates logistic transportation of nuclear weapons.

By delegation of Commanders of Combatant Commands, movement of nuclear weapons must be approved by commanders of major service commands.

Commanders of Combat Commands or service component commanders must evaluate, authorize and approve transport modes and movement routes for nuclear weapons in their custody.

The Air Force is required to maintain a Prime Nuclear Airlift Force capability to conduct the logistic transport of nuclear weapons.

Under SOPs, combat planes with combat-ready nuclear weapons can only be flown on the authority of the Commander in Chief, the Joint Chiefs of Staff or the National Military Command Authority.

All of these transportation regulations were flagrantly violated on August 30.

Handling Violations

Violations of regulations concerning handling of the nuclear weapons in North Dakota are worse.

A sophisticated computerized tracking system is used for nuclear weapons. Multiple sign-offs are required to remove the weapons from their storage bunkers.

The AGM-129 Advanced Cruise Missile was designed to carry nuclear weapons. No non-nuclear warhead is available for this missile. So the only possible error could have been loading nuclear warheads on the missiles instead of practice dummies.

The practice warheads have standard blue and yellow signs declaring "Inert, non-nuclear". The nuclear warheads have at least three distinctive red warning signs. This error is therefore highly improbable, absent tampering with signage.

Nuclear weapons are transported from the storage bunker to the aircraft in a caravan that routinely includes vehicles with machine guns front and rear and guards with M-16s. All steps in the process are done under the watchful eyes of armed military police.

Rules require that at least two people jointly control every step of the process. If one person loses sight of the other, both are forced to the ground face-down and temporarily "placed under arrest" by observant security forces. All progress stops until inspections are made to assure the weapons weren't tampered with.

All nuclear weapons are connected to sophisticated alarm systems to prevent removal or tampering. They could only be removed from the storage bunker by turning the alarm off. And the squad commander clearly would not have authority to turn off the alarm.

The Impossible Mistake

Bluntly, the mistake of loading nuclear weapons on a combat aircraft in combat-ready position is simply not possible to make. Safeguards are far too stringent and far too many people would be involved. Particularly given that the mounting was in violation of policy that's been in place without exception for almost 40 years.

No discipline is expected to be meted out. The New York Times tried to imply the commanding general had been fired. Actually, the squad commander in charge of munitions crews at Minot was "relieved of duty pending an investigation". He has not been removed from his position or disciplined. The crews involved have been "temporarily decertified pending corrective actions or additional training" but have not been disciplined. No mention has been made of the wing commander.

Note carefully: These actions amount to nothing at all. The wing and squad commanders are still in place and the crews can easily be re-certified.

Successful Confusion

Washington's efforts to confuse the public have been successful. Attention has shifted from the crucial issue.

This news has already become non-news. The August 14 stand-down will momentarily become news, followed by announcements of more stringent restrictions, improved safeguards and additional training. The public always has been and always will be safe.

One of the major issues will be avoided:

Someone in an irregular chain of Air Force command authorized loading and transport of nuclear weapons.

And that would never have been done without a reason. Given the magnitude of regulatory violations involved, the reason must be extremely important.

The paramount issue will be avoided, if necessary with repetition of the reassurance that the Air Force was in control at all times. The weapons were only missing during the 3.5-hour flight.

At Barksdale, the missiles were considered to be unarmed items headed for modernization or the scrap heap, and of no particular importance. They were left unguarded for almost ten hours.

According to one report, almost ten hours were required for airmen at Minot AFB to convince superiors that the nuclear weapons had disappeared. According to information provided to Congress, this time lapsed before airmen at Barksdale "noticed" the weapons were present. News reports will continue to overlook this fact also.

Even here the focus is on time. The number of missiles and warheads issue was overlooked.

Early news reports spoke of five nuclear warheads loaded onto the bomber. Apparently, this information was provided from Barksdale.

That number was later updated to six weapons missing from Minot, apparently based on anonymous tips provided to Military Times by people at Minot. This information has also been forgotten.

Conclusion

Six nuclear weapons disappeared from Minot AFB in North Dakota.

Five nuclear weapons were discovered at Barksdale AFB in Louisiana.

Which leads to my chilling conclusion:

Someone, operating under a special chain of command within the United States Air Force, just stole a nuclear weapon.

What next?

The answer has been provided several times, most recently by CIA Director and General Michael Hayden. On September 7, dressed in full military uniform, Hayden told assembled members of the Council of Foreign Relations:

"Our analysts assess with high confidence that al-Qaida's central leadership is planning high-impact plots against the U. S. homeland."

"We assess with high confidence that al-Qaida is focusing on targets that would produce mass casualties, dramatic destruction and significant aftershocks."

An eye for an eye. Use of nukes will justify use of nukes. A perfect excuse to wage nuclear war against Iran.

I suspect Hayden is absolutely correct, except for his mistaken identification of the "central leadership" that is planning detonation of a nuclear weapon on American soil.

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