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FACT SHEET

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During the morning of 3 June and again on 6 June a missile warning incident occurred which caused certain precautionary measures to be taken within our strategic forces in accordance with standard procedures. The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide information concerning this incident and to outline corrective steps which have been and will be taken.

On 3 June technical problems in the computer system that provides information to the National Command System caused erroneous data to be generated which in turn provided indications in the National Military Command Center (NMCC) and at the Strategic Air Command (SAC) Headquarters of a missile attack against the United States. However, key missile warning sensor systems, which are connected directly to the NMCC, to the SAC Command Center, and to the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) gave no indication of hostile missile activity and, therefore, strong indications of the spurious nature of the data were immediately obvious. Throughout the incident, the data at NORAD headquarters reflected that all sensor systems were functioning properly and that no missile launches had been detected by these sensors.

The first threat indication was received by SAC directly from the NORAD computer. The indication was a missile warning display of two Sea Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) trajectories indicating the possibility of the missiles being targeted against the United States. Within a short time, this display had increased to a large number of SLBM trajectories. The SAC Senior Controller, acting in accordance with standard precautionary procedures to ensure survivability, initiated an alarm which caused all SAC alert bomber, tanker, and postattack command and control crews to move to alert aircraft, start engines, and await further instructions. Commander in Chief, SAC, subsequently directed that the SAC crews shut down engines but remain in their aircraft.

The National Emergency Airborne Command Post (NEACP) at Andrews AFB received the initial notification of a possible threat of large numbers of SLBMs and initiated prescribed actions preparatory to emergency launch. By the time the NEACP had taxied into position for takeoff, the SLBM threat no longer appeared on the display consoles in the NMCC, and the senior watch officer directed the NEACP to hold in place. The Pacific Command Airborne Command Post, however, did launch in response to the indications.

The human safeguards which are a central part of our system worked as designed. The duty officers at the command centers immediately recognized and within two or three minutes confirmed that the computer-generated data were false, primarily because the displays which presented the warning data directly did not show any activity, and it was known that the warning sensors were all working. The only display which showed any activity was one coming from the computer

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processor at NORAD. As a result the only actions that were taken were those precautionary measures for the survivability of the SAC bombers indicated above. The bombers did not even taxi away from their normal alert positions.

This incident may appear similar to the false indication of a missile attack which occurred on November 9, 1979. However, that event was caused by an inadvertent injection of a test scenario into the NORAD computer system. Extensive corrective actions have been taken to prevent a similar incident, and all testing and corrective work is being transferred to a separate computer system.

After the June 3rd incident analysts at NORAD concluded that the error had occurred in a minicomputer which is used with the NORAD computer system to transform the missile warning data from the NORAD computers into a form suitable for transmission to the NMCC, SAC, and ANMCC where it is automatically displayed. NORAD continued to operate in a diagnostic mode and in parallel established a continuous voice telephone conference with SAC, NMCC, and ANMCC. When the trouble recurred on 6 June, purely as a precautionary matter SAC again alerted their crews until the problem was confirmed about two minutes. No SAC bombers were taxied from their positions, and the incident was very quickly resolved.

Following the June 6 incident, NORAD was instructed to use an alternate computer, the Mission Essential Backup Computer, as their prime computer. This computer uses completely different hardware and software from the system that caused the problem. All command centers involved in missile attack warning now have special voice circuits continuously operating, over which we quickly identify false displays.

A team of outside experts is at NORAD from June 11th to 12th to fully explore this computer malfunction. Once their report is complete, additional corrective actions will be taken. In addition to these technical steps the JCS are also reviewing operational procedures related to this incident. Incidents such as those on June 3 and June 6 and the one on November 9 were anticipated in the design of the system; hence, procedural safeguards are executed by highly-trained, experienced officers at all command centers. Furthermore, a CINCNORAD assessment that the U.S. is under attack is required before progressing beyond these early stages of warning for which only precautionary measures are taken for survivability.

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