

OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM

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THE WHITE HOUSE . .  
WASHINGTON

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~~with TOP SECRET ATTACHMENT~~

July 17, 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: False Alerts (U)

Attached is a copy of your July 12 memorandum to the President on false alerts, with his comment. The President has affirmed his decision for you to hold the lead on any future investigations and corrective actions.

Zbigniew Brzezinski

Attachment

4	<del>DOD/DFOISR</del>
	<del>TOP SECRET CONTROL</del>
Copy No.	
Case No.	<del>48-F-2338</del>
T.S. No.	<del>99-75-226</del>
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DECLASSIFIED IN FULL  
Authority: EO 13526  
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS  
Date: NOV 07 2018

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~~Review July 17, 1986~~  
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14-M-4228-A1

SEC DEF CONTR No. X-09592



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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: False Alerts (U)

OSD Appeal 3.3 (vX8) + NORTHCOM Appeal DIF 3.3 (vX8)

I sent you memoranda on June 7 and 13 discussing various aspects of the false missile warning displays which resulted in [redacted]. We have continued investigating those incidents and this memorandum summarizes our present understanding of the cause, enumerates the corrective actions underway, and assesses the public and congressional reactions. (U)

The Cause (U)

NORAD attributes the source of the spurious data to the intermittent failure of a 466 micro-electronic integrated circuit (often referred to as a "chip") in a data communications interface device at the NORAD Combat Operations Center in Colorado. Although NORAD has been unable to get the suspected circuit to fail again under test, the NORAD evaluation has been confirmed by an independent task force of highly competent and respected computer experts enlisted from the private sector. (U)

Corrective Actions (U)

This particular electronic fault will be corrected by replacing the suspected integrated circuit; however, to prevent a similar, future hardware failure from causing such an undetected error, we also are proceeding to improve the [redacted] capabilities of the NORAD data communications system. Specifically, NORAD will:

- put [redacted] set to alarm whenever a warning message (whether valid or not) is being sent so as to speed confidence checking
- improve the [redacted] throughout its computer and data communications system.
- make continuous and comprehensive records of system performance to be used to improve its troubleshooting capability
- analyze its computers and communications equipment to find (and fix) other places where a [redacted]

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Until these corrective actions are implemented (about 60 days) NORAD will operate primarily on the [REDACTED] completely bypassing the equipment that caused the recent incidents. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) have assessed that this temporary mode of operations can be tolerated, although it does have certain operational limitations, notably [REDACTED]

The JCS-directed procedural changes in [REDACTED]

#### Congressional Reaction (U)

The Chairmen of the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees of both Houses of Congress were notified of the false alerts less than 24 hours after they occurred. Congressional interest has remained high ever since. We have briefed the House Armed Services Committee and several Senators individually, and we continue to respond to many letters on the subject from members of Congress. Congress seems to have been mostly reassured by our explanations, but continues to express concern about the fact that [REDACTED]

#### Press Reaction (U)

Our approach to the news media has followed that which I outlined to you in my June 18 memorandum on false missile alerts. Most of the newspaper stories which appeared immediately after a June 18 press briefing by my Assistant Secretary for Communications, Command, Control, and Intelligence, Gerry Dinneen, correctly reflected the points in that memorandum. However, television network follow-up stories appearing June 24-26 have attempted to sensationalize (mushroom cloud) the incidents or to link them to unrelated matters. We continue to receive many press inquiries and requests for interviews on the subject. We will have to continue to emphasize that there is no chance that any irretrievable actions would be taken based on ambiguous computer information, nor do the precautionary survivability measures in any way reduce the absolute human control over nuclear weapons. Conclusion: [REDACTED]

OSD Appeal 3.3(b)(8) + NORTHCOM Appeal OIF 33(b)(8)

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NORTHCOM Appeal OIF 3.3(b)(8)

The Future (U)

In summary, we are diligently pursuing corrective actions for the specific cause of the [redacted] false alerts, just as we addressed the specific cause of the November 9, 1979, event. Those causes were different, however, and as I reported to you in my June 13 memorandum, I believe we must be prepared for the possibility that another, unrelated malfunction may someday generate another false alert. Although we will make appropriate electronic improvements to minimize the probability of such a false alert, we must continue to place our confidence in the human element of our missile attack warning system. (U)

*Harold Brown*

Office of the Secretary of Defense  
Chief, RDD, ESD, WIIS

Date: 07 Nov 2018 Authority: EO 13526 + 5 USC 552

Declassify: \_\_\_\_\_ Deny in Full: \_\_\_\_\_

Declassify in Part: X

Reason: 3.3(b)(8)

MDR: 14 -M- 4226 -A1

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