

Near nuclear strike on US revealed

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The Russian military came within minutes of launching a full-scale nuclear strike on the United States three years ago, the CBS television news magazine *60 Minutes* revealed on Sunday.

In a segment entitled "Zero Alert," the program detailed how Russian nuclear defense systems were unable to distinguish the launch of a Norwegian scientific rocket from the profile of a submarine-launched US Trident nuclear missile. While the Norwegian government had notified Moscow well in advance of the planned launch, the message was lost within the military bureaucracy.

According to CBS, Yeltsin and his aides were barely two minutes from ordering a retaliatory strike on US cities before it was determined that the Norwegian rocket posed no threat. For the first time in history, the Russian nuclear briefcase, containing secret codes needed to order a missile attack, was activated.

The incident took place during the Russian invasion of Chechnya, at a time when the Russian military establishment was in a state of extreme crisis and tensions between the US and Moscow had escalated.

The program also debunked claims by the Clinton administration that the end of the Cold War had removed the threat of nuclear weapons striking US cities. Clinton claimed that an agreement between Washington and Moscow to stop targeting each other's cities had ended the danger of mutual annihilation. Weapons experts interviewed by CBS made it clear that the reprogramming of these missiles to strike their previous targets took only a matter of seconds, literally "a few strokes on a computer keyboard."

Meanwhile, Bruce Blair, a weapons expert at the Brookings Institute, warned that the threat of nuclear war had escalated in recent years amid "clear signs of continuing deterioration of the Russian nuclear command and control system." He noted that the bureau responsible for command and control of the

Russian nuclear rocket forces "is virtually bankrupt."

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Blair spoke at a press conference last week announcing the formation of the Committee on Nuclear Policy to campaign for the elimination of nuclear arms. "If a Russian missile does fire accidentally, it's going to go to its Cold War target," Blair declared. "It's not going to land in the ocean."

It is significant that the CBS revelation of a near nuclear attack on the United States was ignored by the rest of the media. Undoubtedly the decision not to cover this story was influenced by a desire not to distract the public's attention from the official propaganda about Iraq's alleged possession of "weapons of mass destruction." As opposed to the fictitious danger posed by Iraq, this story demonstrates that the legacy of Washington's military buildup against the Soviet Union poses a very real threat of a nuclear holocaust.



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