

Project On Government Oversight

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September 4, 2008

General C. Robert Kehler
U.S. Strategic Command
150 Vandenburg Street, Suite 1105
Peterson AFB, CO 80914-4020

Via facsimile: (719) 554-7810

Dear General Kehler:

We are concerned with the Air Force's willingness to mislead the public and the media about an investigation into a serious breach of security at the Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota.

In July of this year, the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) received a tip that an airman at Minot improperly took home a nuclear weapon launch code device. POGO shared the tip with journalists who cover national security issues.

When these reporters contacted the Air Force for more information about this incident, the Air Force Public Affairs Office dismissed the allegations. Instead of admitting to the truth, the Air Force pulled a bait and switch, denying the incident and telling reporters about another, less serious, security breach in which officers were caught sleeping at a missile alert facility.

Now we see that the Air Force was not being entirely honest. On August 29, 2008, both CNN and the *Washington Post* reported that two Air Force officers at Minot are under investigation for removing classified nuclear missile components from the base. Both officers signed a document stating that they had destroyed the launch devices, but, for reasons that are unclear, they kept the components and took them home. We understand that one of the devices is still missing. POGO does not think it a coincidence that the Air Force disclosed this investigation the Thursday before Labor Day, a notoriously good time to release news when the public is not paying as much attention.

Why did the Air Force not tell reporters that it was investigating the launch device incident at Minot when it was asked?

We believe that your recent statement pledging to "hold the mission to the highest standards of performance and accountability" was genuine, and that you will hold the appropriate Air Force public affairs officials accountable. Meanwhile, the Air Force should take responsibility for misleading POGO and the American public about a serious security breach.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Danielle Brian".

Danielle Brian
Executive Director
Project On Government Oversight

CC: Senator Carl Levin
Senator John Warner
Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

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