

Several public interest groups have drawn attention to a third area of concern, by making public hitherto classified data on errors and false alarms within the US strategic warning system. The data they have produced suggest that false alarms (even quite serious ones) are a good deal more common than generally believed, and have apparently increased in frequency. Even more alarming, when the particular events leading to serious instances of false alarms are examined in detail, is the evidence that increasing automation of command and control systems gives rise to a greater number and a wider range of failures and false alarms.

In response to these trends, academics from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds and national origins have begun to study the magnitude of the risk that nuclear war might occur by accident. Is this risk (as the official view would have it) still infinitesimal, or has it reached an alarming level as a result of the factors mentioned above? The conclusion seems to be that in all probability the risk has increased substantially, but we lack the data, methodology and conceptual tools to assess the danger precisely.

In view of this situation there was felt to be a need for an international, interdisciplinary conference to exchange information and insights on the risk of accidental nuclear war. A committee was therefore struck to organize this, comprising representatives from the sponsoring organizations, and academics engaged in research in the field.