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0524 hours, Tuesday, January 22, 2013, the White House.

The door to the president's bedroom opened and lights from two side lamps came on as two men entered; one headed for the bed where the nation's newly elected chief executive slept, the other remained at the door.

"Mr. President," the man called out above a conversational level. "Sir?"

A slight groan came from the sleeping figure, his back to the visitor.

"Sir, I'm Agent Moore."

The groggy president rolled onto his back and rubbed his eyes, squinting, as he waited for his eyes to adjust to the lights. "Good morning," the reclining figure groggily uttered. "My alarm not go off?"

"No sir. We have a serious emergency."

"What? Is this a drill for the new guy?" he asked, as he propped up on his elbows.

"I wish it were, sir. There's been a nuclear explosion."

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Michael Paul Macdonald had barely been President of the United States for 17 ½ hours and was less than four hours from climbing into bed after a night of delirious celebrations.

“When?” he asked, pulling on the sweat pants.

“At 5:22:21 a.m., which was two minutes ago.”

He pulled on his sweat shirt. “Where?”

“Detroit, sir,”

“In our country? I thought ... where we going?”

“Situation Room first, sir.”

They rushed to the elevator. “One bomb?”

“Yes sir. That’s what I was told.”

“Good God,” Macdonald exclaimed.

The elevator doors opened and they jogged through halls Macdonald had not yet seen under the White House and the West Wing to the Situation Room. Army NCOs were busily hooking into NORAD’s Distant Early Warning (DEW) system control center in Colorado.

The system was designed and built during the Cold War as the primary air defense warning line in case of an over-the-pole invasion of North America. It covered the tundra of northern Greenland, Canada and Alaska. There had been no reports of an intrusion into NORAD’s umbrella surveillance, yet a nuclear explosion had flattened an American city.

President Macdonald was handed a sheet of paper and was told it was all they had at the moment. It was enough. An Army Major escorted him into the communications room where he would broadcast a brief message prepared by a military aide. He quickly studied it and

then adlibbed a less than one minute announcement about the attack. He also assured his audience he would be back to them shortly with more detailed information.

It was not a message he'd ever envisioned having to make and certainly not on his first day in office. Once finished, he headed up to the Oval Office to receive senior staff and Cabinet Designees.

Few arrivals to the White House knew exactly what had happened, except that the nation's defense system had gone to DEFCON 1, (*DEFense readiness CONdition*) automatically issuing orders for all military personnel to report for duty and prepare to defend the United States. All commercial and private aircraft were ordered out of the air and all pending flights were cancelled.

His first briefing told him no unauthorized planes or missiles had violated northern hemisphere air space and yet a nuclear explosion had obliterated most of Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Canada.

Members of the new administration were straggling in, foggily recovering from the exhilarating events of the night before, celebrating the inauguration of the first Centrist Party President and Vice President in American history.

Everyone was suffering from some gradation of sleep deprivation. To make matters worse, they were ushered off to the Situation Room, Cabinet Room, Roosevelt Room, or some unknown space, muddling their already confused minds even further.

Questions flew through the air. Where is President Macdonald? Who did it? What's happened? Are we being invaded?

Most everyone believed their first day on the job would be taken up with finding their desk, the restrooms and the coffee machine, not dealing with a national emergency.

The presence of generals and military aides entering the West Wing added to the ominous desperation pervading the dark paneled Situation Room with its wall-imbedded television monitors. People milled around, waiting. Conversations were questions that received no answers.

The Situation Room suddenly began to fill rapidly with Cabinet Designees and senior White House staffers who had met briefly with the president. The many high ranking military officers from all services became more alert.

The low murmurs were interrupted by a uniformed guard. "The President."

Two middle aged, smartly dressed women, whom every civilian in the room knew from the campaign and transition, entered and walked to the middle of one side of the huge conference table, as people nearby backed away. The table could easily accommodate 40.

President Mike Macdonald then strode in looking like he had just come from the gym. Six foot five solidly built and grim faced, the newly elected President of the United States was followed by a general and an admiral. He took a position between the two women. The military officers went to a position directly across from the president.

“Good morning,” said the woman to his right. Darlene Sweetwater was Chief of Staff (COS) to the President. “This is not how we hoped to start our first day. All Cabinet Designees and senior staff please sit along this side.”

The generals and admirals splayed out alongside both sides of the two directly opposite the president, who sat. The few empty seats at the ends of the conference table filled quickly. The overflow lined the walls.

While everyone was getting arranged, President Macdonald had a brief whispered conversation with Chief Sweetwater. When he turned to the assemblage, he spoke in a calm, firm tone, belying the bitter rage he felt.

“About a half hour ago, I broadcast a short announcement to the American people. I told them what had happened and that their government was fully engaged, responding to this despicable act that has brought death and devastation to millions in America and Canada.”

That sudden reality brought forth groans.

“The investigation into this attack is already underway. We will find out who did this, and we’re going to do it fast. I have been apprised that the device set off in Detroit was not flown in. NORAD reports no sightings of any unknown or unauthorized planes or missiles. We have no understanding of the type or class of the device.”

He looked across the table. “General Gibbons?”

“Thank you, Mr. President. Nuclear bomb experts are being flown as close to Detroit as we can get them,” said the first female Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Carla Gibbons, her voice steady. A graduate of the US Military Academy at West Point, class of 1978, she had been Chair for a little over a year and Army Chief of Staff three years prior to that.

“We are viewing hundreds of satellite photos and security surveillance tapes from prior to the blast. Although the bomb took out most of them, some videos were fed to sites 20 to 50 miles out from the central city area. This had been a plan developed soon after 9/11.

“Our satellite readings have identified the device as having roughly a three mile primary radius expanding a radiation ring out five to eight miles depending on the terrain. Initial radiation readings appear to be low. There appears to be about a mile wide crater formed from the explosion that transcends the Detroit River into Windsor, Canada. The bomb is estimated to have been less than a half mile from where the river once was.

“There does not appear to have been a poisonous mushroom cloud. I am confident our senior staff and scientists at the Pentagon will quickly come to a more accurate understanding of the type of ordnance used, especially after our team is able to reach ground zero. It is an hour from daylight and the satellites discern heavy smoke clouds blanketing a very large area.”