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US Air Force Reviews Close Encounter Between B-52 and Passenger Jet

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A close call between a U.S. Air Force B-52 bomber and a commercial airliner near Minot, North Dakota, has prompted a formal investigation by the Air Force and civilian aviation authorities. The incident occurred on July 18 when a Delta Connection flight operated by SkyWest Airlines was forced to make an abrupt maneuver to avoid a potential collision with the bomber.

The regional jet, an Embraer E-175, was carrying 76 passengers and four crew members on approach to Minot International Airport from Minneapolis–St. Paul. As the aircraft prepared to land, the flight crew spotted an unexpected presence in the flight path, a B-52 Stratofortress operating out of nearby Minot Air Force Base (AFB). The pilot responded immediately, performing a go-around and executing a sharp turn behind the military aircraft to maintain safe separation.

According to passenger accounts and cockpit audio, the flight crew had not been informed of any military aircraft in the vicinity. One passenger described the pilot's announcement as calm yet unsettling, noting that he apologized for the "aggressive maneuver" and stated he had not expected the B-52 in their path. Passengers remained calm, though several reported that the near miss caused a brief alarm.

Air Force officials later confirmed that the bomber had been performing a flyover related to the North Dakota State Fair. However, questions remain regarding communication between military air traffic controllers and the civilian tower handling incoming flights at Minot International. Notably, the airport's control tower is privately contracted, with radar guidance provided by a regional Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) center.

SkyWest Airlines stated that their flight was cleared by the tower and that the crew responded appropriately when an unannounced aircraft entered their path. The FAA is reviewing the incident, focusing on whether proper coordination protocols were followed between civilian and military authorities.

The Air Force acknowledged the event and is conducting an internal review to determine if standard procedures were adhered to during the

bomber's flyover. The incident comes amid broader concerns over civil-military airspace management, especially following a fatal midair collision earlier this year involving another military aircraft.

This near miss highlights the critical need for clear, real-time communication between military and civilian aviation authorities. With increasing military activity near commercial flight routes, experts are calling for tighter safeguards to prevent future incidents that could endanger both military personnel and civilian passengers.