

# In deleted tweet, US nuclear command declares itself “ready” to “drop something”

By Andre Damon  
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On New Year’s Eve, the US Strategic Command, which oversees the United States’ nuclear arsenal, posted a tweet declaring its readiness to “drop something much, much bigger” than the “big ball” at Times Square in New York.

The implication of the tweet is that the United States military is not only quite ready to kill people with nuclear weapons for a third time, but quite eager.

Within hours of being posted, the tweet was deleted, and replaced by a follow-up message: “Our previous NYE tweet was in poor taste & does not reflect our values. We apologize. We are dedicated to the security of America & allies.”

The original post read, “#TimesSquare tradition rings in the #NewYear by dropping the big ball ... if ever needed, we are #ready to drop something much, much bigger.”

The tweet threatening to kill millions of people was, oddly enough, dismissed as a “joke about dropping bombs,” by the *Washington Post*.

Of course, nothing about the tweet is a joke. It is in fact consistent with US military doctrine, and the constant and repeated emphasis by commanders that the military be ready to “fight tonight.”

Unlike other nuclear powers, including China and India, the United States reserves the right to the first use of nuclear weapons. This means that, effectively, there are no internal constraints if the notoriously impetuous American president Donald Trump were to decide to “drop something.”

And not just the President. In his recently published book, former US military researcher and nuclear planner Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times* in 1971, made clear that for decades, the ability to launch nuclear attacks was delegated to an unknown number of military

commanders far beyond the American President. Ellsberg makes a compelling argument that this delegation continues to this day.

In the book, Ellsberg argues that *Dr. Strangelove*, Stanley Kubrick’s 1964 film about a mad airbase commander ordering a bomber strike that triggers the destruction of the world, is a “documentary” about the massive dangers of nuclear war, both intentional and “accidental,” which stand to trigger the destruction of humanity.

Besides brief write-ups in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and others, the media has ignored the incident. There has been no reporting beyond the briefest accounts of the tweet, its retraction, and the Pentagon’s good-natured declarations that a video accompanying the tweet shows a bomber dropping a nonnuclear munition. There has been no commentary. And the issue has not come up in any reported press briefings, in the White House or otherwise.

Some questions about the incident that would be asked by a serious reporter at a Pentagon press briefing might include:

- Has the author of the tweet been formally disciplined?
- Did the author of the tweet violate orders or protocol? Was any insubordination involved?
- If so, could this point to a broader breakdown of discipline within the US military command in charge of nuclear forces?

But of course, such questions are simply not asked, and the emphasis of the media is to sweep the whole thing under the rug as quickly as possible.

In this, the media is taking the same approach it took last January when some 1.5 million people in Hawaii received, without explanation, an emergency phone alert reading “BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT

**INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.”**

In that case, too, the media simply moved on, with no opinion pieces or follow-up investigations of the event.

The threat from the US Strategic Command comes as the United States is in the midst of a massive \$1.3 trillion program to refurbish and expand its nuclear weapons, with an emphasis on building smaller weapons that are more likely to be used in combat. Earlier this month, the White House released a nuclear posture review further expanding the circumstances in which the United States could use nuclear weapons and upholding its right to their “first use.”

The Nuclear Posture Review is itself part of the framework of “great power conflict” spelled out in last year’s national security strategy, which specifically presents conflict with nuclear-armed Russia and China, and not the “war on terror,” as being the preeminent focus of the US military.

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