Why is the media silent on the continuing shakeup in the US nuclear command?

Bill Van Auken
8 November 2014

The US mass media and the country's political officials have shown a remarkable lack of interest in what the Pentagon acknowledged earlier this week was the unprecedented simultaneous firing of two senior commanders at two separate Air Force Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) bases and the administrative disciplining of a third.

Major news outlets, to the extent that they carried the story at all, relied solely on the item prepared by the Associated Press, and for the most part buried even that. The AP got the story by calling the Air Force public information office. No follow-up was done by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* or any other major newspaper or television network to probe the significance of these disciplinary actions in terms of the extreme state of crisis that has pervaded Washington's nuclear strike force for well over a year.

Why the silence? By tacit agreement, clearly secrets are being kept about the real state of affairs within a military command whose nuclear war-fighting mission constitutes one of the single greatest threats to the survival of humanity.

The crisis in the US nuclear war command has now been unfolding for over one year, involving the sudden sackings of top commanders and senior officers, as well as the snaring of fully 20 percent of the ICBM missile launch crew members in a cheating scandal and the implication of several others in the use of illegal drugs.

The cases involving the most senior officers are the most startling. Vice Adm. Tim Gardinia, the second-in-command at the US Strategic Command, responsible for formulating nuclear war plans and relaying launch orders, was sacked after he was charged with trying to gamble with $1,500 in fake chips at an Idaho casino.

Maj. Gen. Michael Carey, the commanding officer of the entire US ICBM force, was fired for alleged drunken antics while leading an official delegation to Moscow, including making provocative comments to his Russian counterparts about Syria and Edward Snowden.

In the latest firings, Col. Carl Jones, who was the second in command at the 90th Missile Wing in Wyoming, was fired for behavior that fellow officers described as "shocking," apparently involving uncontrollable rage and mistreatment of subordinates.

Another fired commander, Lt. Col. Jimmy "Keith" Brown, a missile squadron leader at the ICBM base in North Dakota, was said to have engaged in "unlawful discrimination and harassment," leading in one reported incident to members of a launch crew being hospitalized after staying at their posts despite exposure to dangerous fumes because of fear they would be punished if they complained.

A third officer, Col. Richard Pagliuco, the commander of the 91st Operations Group, was charged with having "failed to promote and safeguard the morale, wellbeing and welfare of the airmen under his command" and subjected to administrative discipline.

Together, these officers are responsible for hundreds of Minuteman 3 ICBMs, each of which carries a nuclear warhead with 27 times the destructive power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, capable of wiping out millions of human beings in a matter of minutes.

That senior missile commanders were simultaneously sacked at two separate bases comprising two-thirds of the US ICBM force was described by a Pentagon spokesman as merely a coincidence.

The series of firings, scandals and incidents, however, suggest two possibilities, which are not mutually exclusive. First, that the US nuclear command is under the control of certified maniacs, the real-life counterparts of the "Dr. Strangelove" character, Gen.

© World Socialist Web Site

Jack D. Ripper, who unilaterally launches a nuclear bomber strike on the Soviet Union on the theory that "war is too important to be left to politicians."

It is worth recalling that among the recent scandals plaguing the Air Force has been the overwhelming influence of the Christian right at the US Air Force Academy, where a religious ideology embracing the Armageddon has been promoted even as cadets are trained in practical measures for bringing it about.

The other possibility is that the US nuclear war command is being subjected to a deliberate and wholesale restructuring of its personnel for unspecified reasons.

The shakeup has unfolded within a definite and disturbing wider context. In the first instance, President Barack Obama, who came into office vowing to pursue a policy of nuclear disarmament—one of the main things cited in the decision to award him a Nobel Peace Prize after barely 10 months in office—is now presiding over a major buildup of US imperialism's nuclear arsenal. This includes plans to spend a staggering $355 billion over the next decade and at least $1 trillion over the next 30 years, with the deployment of 12 new nuclear submarines, some 100 nuclear bombers and 400 new land-based ICBMs.

Moreover, this buildup takes place under conditions in which Washington is engaged in steadily escalating provocations against Russia and China, both nuclear-armed powers, even as it embarks on a major new war in the Middle East. The threat of a nuclear Third World War is now greater than it has been for decades.

While the media respects the veil of secrecy imposed over these matters within the military, and there has been no move by either Democratic or Republican politicians to convene congressional hearings on the troubling events in the US nuclear war command, the American people need answers as to what is really going on. The exposure of the immense dangers posed by the explosive growth of American militarism is a vital element in the preparation of a new mass antiwar movement based upon the working class.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site