

The media's guilty silence on Hawaii nuclear war alert

Bill Van Auken
29 January 2018

Little more than two weeks after Hawaii's 1.5 million people received a false alert of impending nuclear disaster, the media has quietly shelved the story.

The January 13 false alarm sent out messages to hundreds of thousands of cell phones and beamed warnings over television and radio broadcasts that a ballistic missile attack was imminent. The alert—which continued for a full 38 minutes before being rescinded—represented one of the most terrifying episodes of the nuclear age.

An entire state's population was essentially told that they had barely ten minutes to live. Parents were sent scurrying to find their children and attempt somehow to shield them from a nuclear blast. Families and loved ones called to deliver last goodbyes.

Yet the story has quickly faded from the pages of major newspapers and disappeared from the news broadcasts of the networks and major cable outlets. There is quite clearly no appetite to dig into the extraordinarily murky facts and feeble explanations surrounding the incident.

The only hearing to be held thus far on the false nuclear war alert was carried out January 25 by the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. Representatives of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the CTIA (the wireless communications industry's trade association) and the National Association of Broadcasters who testified before the panel were unable, or unwilling, to provide any substantive answers about the Hawaii alert, while the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) boycotted the session.

The witness for the FCC, Lisa Fowlkes, chief of the agency's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, told the panel "it appears that the false alert was issued as a result of human error and the state having

insufficient safeguards and process controls in place to prevent that human error from resulting in the transmission of a false alert."

She went on to inform the committee that, while the FCC was conducting an investigation, "one key employee"—the person who transmitted the false alert—is refusing to cooperate with our investigation." The identity of that "key employee" remains unknown, concealed by the authorities.

A number of senators expressed frustration at the failure of the government to offer the slightest clarification. "How is it that a single government employee could trigger an alert without any kind of meaningful mechanism to override?" asked Senator Shelly Moore Capito, a Republican from the state of Washington.

"That's actually one of the issues that we're exploring as part of our investigation," answered the FCC's Fowlkes.

Among other reports, carried only in the local Hawaiian press, a state lawmaker who asked for release of surveillance footage from inside the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency headquarters was told that no such footage exists and no security cameras were in place in one of the most critical security sites in the state. "If there are no tapes, why would there be no tapes, and what can we do to make sure we have transparency?" demanded State Representative Gene Ward.

Finally, the Hawaiian media noted that Governor David Ige in his state of the state address last Monday mouthed platitudes about "the most beautiful place on earth" but failed to mention the single most momentous event of his one term in office—the broadcasting of a message to all of his constituents telling them they faced imminent death.

The only clarification of the incident offered by Ige thus far is his claim that the agonizingly protracted gap between the issuing of the alert and the announcement that it was a false alarm was due to his own inability to remember the password to his Twitter account!

With the silence of the media, the refusal of government officials to provide substantive information and the preposterous character of the explanations given thus far, questions as to the real source and motives underlying the false nuclear war alarm become all the more pressing.

Who was responsible for the “human error”? The lone employee who allegedly clicked on the wrong link—twice—ordering a missile alert rather than a test of a missile alert has never been named. Now the public is told that he is refusing to cooperate with federal investigators. Does such an individual even exist, or was the “error” invented in order to cover up for a more deliberate and planned action?

What were the Pentagon and the CIA up to during the 38 minutes of sheer terror inflicted on the people of Hawaii? Were they monitoring the population’s reaction, gathering intelligence on how the public would behave in the event of a real nuclear exchange?

There is no question that after the alert was issued, the US military and intelligence agencies were carefully observing the response of governments and militaries in the countries that Washington has branded as “revisionist powers”—Russia and China—and “rogue states”—North Korea and Iran. Any one of them, and North Korea in particular, would have had to interpret the phony missile alert in Hawaii as a potential provocation aimed at preparing a US nuclear first strike against them.

American spy satellites, the electronic snoops at the National Security Agency and other US military and intelligence assets were given a golden opportunity to watch what “lit up” in terms of command-and-control and radar and missile sites, amassing information that would prove valuable in preparing a real first strike.

Given the advanced state of preparations for a potential nuclear first strike against North Korea, with B-2 and B-52 nuclear-capable bombers deployed on Guam, three aircraft battle groups either in theater or en route to the waters off the Korean peninsula and US ground forces carrying out multiple exercises simulating an invasion, the single most salient question

about the Hawaii missile alert is whether it was a deliberate act, an operation planned and ordered at the highest levels of the state as part of the preparations for war.

The guilty silence of the major media is in all likelihood based on the suppression of information that the government and its military and intelligence apparatus wants kept from the public. As the former executive editor of the *New York Times* put it in 2010 “transparency is not an absolute good,” and “freedom of the press includes freedom not to publish, and that is a freedom we exercise with some regularity.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact