

Questions remain unanswered after New York City nuclear war alert

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Two days after the July 11 release of a public service announcement by New York City's office of emergency management (OEM) for the case of a nuclear attack, there has been no serious explanation given for this extraordinary step taken by the administration of America's largest city, which is home to almost 8.5 million people and the country's financial center, Wall Street.

The 90 second long video, which has now been watched by over half a million people, was issued without any political explanation or context. In what appeared like a parody on the Cold War-era advice to children to "hide under your desk" in case a nuclear bomb is dropped, the video recommended the public to "get inside," "shower with soap or shampoo," and then "stay put" and check their "safety alerts" from the city for more information. To top it all, the presenter ended the video with a reassuring smile, stating, "You've got this."

The utter irrationality of the content was almost as disturbing as the very fact of the release of the video itself. Of course, all of these recommendations would be worthless in case of an actual nuclear detonation, which would incinerate the city and surrounding area and turn much of the East Coast uninhabitable for generations.

A 2015 article published by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* noted that Russia at the time had an estimated 700 strategic nuclear warheads each with an explosive power of 800,000 tons of TNT that, if fired, could hit the US within less than half an hour. If such a warhead exploded over midtown Manhattan, it would create a gigantic fireball which would "vaporize the structures directly below it and produce an immense blast wave and high-speed winds, crushing even heavily built concrete structures within a couple miles of ground zero. ...Within tens of minutes, everything within approximately five to seven miles of Midtown Manhattan would be engulfed by a gigantic firestorm."

The article continues to describe the apocalyptic scenario as follows: "Those who tried to escape through the streets would have been incinerated by the hurricane-force winds filled with firebrands and flames. Even those able to find shelter in the lower-level sub-basements of massive buildings would likely suffocate from fire-generated gases or be cooked alive as their shelters heated to oven-like conditions. The fire would extinguish all life and destroy almost everything else. Tens of miles downwind of the area of immediate destruction, radioactive fallout would begin to arrive within a few hours of the detonation."

The response in the national and local media to the public service announcement has been marked by extreme complacency and indifference, with most outlets limiting themselves to perfunctory reports. The *New York Times*, which just found that "people around the world are better off than ever," has not published a single article on it, as of this writing.

By contrast, thousands took to social media to express their shock and profound discomfort, with many correctly asking, "is there something I should know about?" Clearly, there is.

But no serious answer to this question has been given by either New York City or White House officials. In a press conference that was almost as bizarre as the video itself, Democratic Mayor Eric Adams defended the video, saying, "I don't think it was alarmist. I'm a big believer in better safe than sorry. I take my hat off to OEM. This was right after the attacks in the Ukraine, and OEM took a very proactive step to say let's be prepared. And it doesn't mean just a nuclear attack, it's any natural disaster. Pack a bag. Know where your medicines are located. These are just smart things to do."

Adams then insisted that the decision to publish this video was made by his administration alone, stating, "it was of my briefing, because when I saw it and heard it, I

thought it was a great idea. My understanding is that it was really taking necessary steps after what happened in Ukraine to give preparedness.”

At a White House briefing on Wednesday, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan also insisted that the initiative had been taken by the city, without coordination with the White House. His language, however, was notably evasive. He said, “I do not believe that it [the public service announcement] was the result of any intelligence-sharing from the federal government to New York City,” and added, “I can’t speak as to why they put it out at this point.”

Workers cannot take these statements at face value. The decision for the release was taken in the midst of the biggest war ranging in Europe since 1945, in which NATO is effectively fighting a proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, the world’s second-largest nuclear power.

Without any public declaration, much less public discussion or democratic decision, the US has effectively entered a military conflict with Russia. While gutting funds to social and COVID spending, the US government has funneled tens of billions of dollars worth of weapons into the Ukrainian army, including long-range missiles that can hit Russian territory, assisting in military strikes on Russian targets and engaging in one major provocation after another.

Although US President Joe Biden has repeatedly ridiculed and dismissed warnings by Russian President Vladimir Putin that the Kremlin is prepared to make use of its nuclear arsenal, the *Wall Street Journal* reported recently that since February, there had been “a series of urgent meetings in the administration to map out how Mr. Biden should respond if Russia conducts a nuclear detonation in Ukraine or around the Black Sea. Officials will not discuss the classified results of those tabletop exercises.”

At its summit two weeks ago, NATO announced plans for “high-intensity ... warfighting against nuclear-armed peer-competitors,” an extraordinary announcement that, again, has been almost entirely blacked out by the media.

It should also be noted that the head of New York City’s Office of Emergency Management is Zach Iscol, who was appointed by Adams on February 22, just days before the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Iscol is a representative of what the WSWS has termed the “CIA Democrats”: former intelligence and military personnel who are deeply embedded in the US national security apparatus and have come to play a major role in Democratic Party politics.

Iscol is a former Marine who was involved in the Second Battle of Fallujah in 2004, the single biggest battle during the bloody, decades-long US occupation of Iraq. The city, one of the oldest urban settlements of human civilization, was turned into a sea of ruins and has become a sinister symbol of the war crimes of US imperialism against the people of Iraq. In 2020, Iscol unsuccessfully ran for the office of mayor, pledging to “translate” his experience during the battle of Fallujah to New York City — a threat that must no doubt be taken seriously.

While the immediate background behind the issuing of this video remains to be clarified, it confirms the warnings by the WSWS about the very real threat of nuclear war. Writing in April this year, the WSWS warned that “Capitalism is normalizing mass death,” first from the pandemic, and now from a war, including one fought with nuclear weapons.

The total devaluation of human life, the indifference to mass death in the pandemic and the recklessness with which American capitalism is rushing into conflict with Russia reflect the views and social character of the American ruling class. This parasitic oligarchy feasts upon the impoverishment and exploitation of the working population.

Living on financial speculation made possible by a credit bubble inflated by the Federal Reserve, fearing and hating the working population of America and the world, the American ruling class is as desperate and reckless as it is ruthless. The central question is what will develop more quickly: the war drive of the capitalist oligarchy or the growing global rebellion of the working class.



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