

Experts Warn It Would Take More Than One US General to Thwart “Illegal” Nuclear Strike Emanating from the White House

By [Jon Queally](#)

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“What would happen if a president ordered a nuclear strike, but the commanding general refused, believing it to be illegal? The truth is, no one knows.”

Air Force Gen. John Hyten, said Nov. 18, 2017, an order from President Donald Trump or any of his successors to launch nuclear weapons can be refused if that order is determined to be illegal.

While a top U.S. nuclear military commander made global headlines over the weekend after he stated plainly on Saturday that he would resist any order from President Donald Trump that he deemed “illegal,” including an unlawful directive to carry out a nuclear strike, experts warn that individual objections such as that could be overcome by a commander-in-chief determined to launch an attack.

Speaking at a security convention in Nova Scotia, Canada, Gen. John Hyten, head of U.S. Strategic Command, said that his role in the event of the president ordering a nuclear strike would be to offer both strategic and legal guidance, but that he would not betray the laws of war simply because Trump ordered it.

“I provide advice to the President,” Hyten answered when asked how he would respond to a nuclear attack being ordered. “He’ll tell me what to do, and if it’s illegal, guess what’s going to happen? I’m gonna say, ‘Mr. President, that’s illegal.’ Guess what he’s going to do? He’s going to say, ‘What would be legal?’ And we’ll come up with options of a mix of capabilities to respond to whatever the situation is, and that’s the way it works. It’s not that complicated.”

But is it that simple?

As reporting by the *Associated Press* points out on Sunday, a simple refusal by even a top commander like Hyten might not be enough to stop a commander-in-chief bent on having such an attack carried out:

Brian McKeon, a senior policy adviser in the Pentagon during the Obama administration, said a president’s first recourse would be to tell the defense secretary to order the reluctant commander to execute the launch order.

“And then, if the commander still resisted,” McKeon said as rubbed his chin,

“you either get a new secretary of defense or get a new commander.” The implication is that one way or another, the commander in chief would not be thwarted.

Hyten’s remarks follow a Senate Foreign Relations Committee [hearing last week in which the president’s authority to launch nuclear weapons](#) was held on Capitol Hill. As *Common Dreams* [reported](#), “Trump’s behavior throughout his campaign and presidency has heightened concerns about the threat of nuclear annihilation and has, [for months](#), [provoked](#) global demands that the U.S. Congress strip Trump of his nuclear authority.”

While Hyten’s comments on Saturday likely brought some relief to those concerned about Trump’s finger on the nuclear button, Bruce Blair, a former nuclear missile launch officer and co-founder of the Global Zero group that advocates eliminating nuclear weapons, said there’s another important caveat that shouldn’t be missed: The Strategic Command chief, Hyten in this case, could be bypassed by the president.

A president can transmit his nuclear attack order directly to a Pentagon war room, Blair [told](#) the AP. And from there the news outlet reports, the order “would go to the men and women who would turn the launch keys.”

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