Ultra-fast Missile Tested by U.S. Air Force

The U.S. Air Force reported its first successful “hypersonic” missile test, overseen by Edwards Air Force Base in northern California on May 14th. After the potentially nuclear-armed missile, dubbed “Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon” (ARRW), was launched from a B-52 bomber, its “booster ignited … achieving a speed five times the speed of sound” [about 3,835 mph], according to the Air Force. Russia and China have reportedly tested similar ultra-fast weapons. “U.S. defense officials have said that Russia has used hypersonic weapons an estimated 10 to 12 times in its invasion of Ukraine,” according to CBS News, and Democracy Now reported that Russian President Putin confirmed the report. Because of its speed and maneuverability, the ARRW is hard to follow or intercept. But in a statement to Congress, General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he “could not verify any other benefits that the weapon offers. "We are not seeing really significant or game-changing effects to our defense due to the delivery of the small number of hypersonics that the Russians have used,” Milley said, according to CBS. — Reuters, CBS News, and Democracy Now, May 16, 2022

Accident at Deep Military Waste Dump

Troubles continue to plague the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), a deep burial site carved out of an ancient salt formation half a mile beneath Carlsbad, New Mexico. Workers had to hastily leave the above-ground facilities April 9, 2022, when radioactive liquid was found inside an outer shipper. WIPP had been “a clean-up” after an investigation had even begun that there was “no risk of radioactive release and there is no risk to the public or the environment.” The 2,000-foot deep waste dump is used for burial of plutonium-contaminated radioactive waste from nuclear weapons production. The Energy Department (DOE) says the waste is “mostly clothing, gloves, lab coats, tools and other debris” from the Cold War, raising questions about the presence of liquid involved in the contamination accident.

The site hasn’t fully recovered from a February 2014 accident — when a waste barrel burst and spewed contamination throughout the complex — and now the dump must contend with yet another accident. WIPP was closed for several years after the 2014 barrel explosion in which a drum spewed “self-heated” to almost 1,600 degrees, ripped open and scattered uranium, plutonium, and americium throughout the underground burial rooms, the ventilation shaft, and the above-ground plant. At the surface, 22 workers were internally contaminated after inhaling the radioactive poisons, and independent monitors recorded radiation a half-mile away. “We reached that critical level three years behind schedule, and costing up to $486 million, still prevents employees from fully utilizing the site,” said the DOE’s internal audit of the April contamination is ongoing. — Carlsbad Current-Argus, April 14; The Cortez, Colo. Journal, April 11, 2022; AP, April 11 & March 15, 2022; New Mexico, April 23, 2015; Albuquerque Journal, Aug. 23, 2015; New York Times, May 31, & Oct. 30, 2014

— Shorts compiled by Lindsay Potter, Bonnie Ufer, Kelly Lundeon, and John LaForge. Summer 2022

Protest and Resistance Continues in Germany

This year’s International Week gathering, focused on the U.S. nuclear weapons stationed at Büchel air base in southwestern Germany, set a new record for pace of activist interventions across Germany, the U.S., Holland, and elsewhere. The Büchel base will also travel north to Nörvenich Air Base where Tornado jet fighters from Büchel will temporarily be stationed while their new base in Cornwall is refurbished. The Büchel base’s bunkers that hold U.S. nuclear gravity bombs are also being rebuilt to handle the delivery of the new B61-mod 12 bombs now in production.

Meanwhile, nuclear weapons abolitionists continue to appear in court for go-on-act charges in two convictions cases. Susan Crane of the Redwood City California Catholic Worker will appear for an appeal hearing in Koblenz Regional Court September 20, as she is contesting her earlier conviction in Koblenz District Court. Frits ter Kuile of the Amsterdam Catholic Worker has been order to self-report to jail in Germany that the courts erred by denying LaForge his right to present a defense. Like many other resistors, LaForge argues that because planning nuclear attacks is an international criminal conspiracy to commit mass-murder, the defense of “crime prevention” excuses the trespass. The court won’t rule before August.

Endnotes to “Can Nuclear Power Be the Answer?”

[1] Radioactivity is ionizing energy that is damaging to human health and other living things; see page 4, “New Study: Cancer Epidemic.”

