

Nuclear Shorts

Biggest NATO War Games on Russian Front Since 1988

On Jan. 18, 2024, NATO launched its biggest anti-Russia war games in 35 years. Dubbed “Steadfast Defender,” the rehearsals involve 90,000 troops from all 31 NATO allies, 50 battleships, 80 fighter jets, helicopters, drones, and over 1,200 combat vehicles, according to Reuters. The exercises, funded by NATO states, are being staged in thirteen countries. Provocatively, in the midst of ongoing war against Russia in Ukraine, the participating Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, and Poland, comprise NATO’s eastern front and three of them directly border Russia. The last NATO war games of this size took place in 1988. The rehearsals are to continue through May like a trade show for new weapons systems. NATO’s massive military theatrics were described defensively by U.S. Army General Chris Cavoli, the alliance’s top commander, who said January 18 that they “demonstrate NATO’s ability to rapidly deploy forces from North America and other parts of the alliance.” — NATO.ACT, Jan. 26; Reuters, Jan. 18, 2024

St. Lucie Reactor Coolant System Leak

On January 3, staff at Florida Power and Light’s St. Lucie nuclear power station on Hutchinson Island north of West Palm Beach, reported moving reactor Unit 2 to cold shutdown after showing signs of a coolant system leak that “rendered both trains of high pressure safety injection inoperable,” according to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission incident summary. The incident report attributes the leak to the “degraded condition” of the reactor. The two reactors began operating in 1976 and 1983. In 2003, they were both granted 20-year license renewals, extending operation until 2036 and 2043. Both units are currently in the process of seeking another 20-year extension that would bring their operating lifetime up to 80 years — double the 40-year lifespan originally prescribed for nuclear reactors — whose many parts are subject to degradation by corrosion, heat, vibration, embrittlement, and irradiation. The NRC has yet to issue the current request for a license extension and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Safety Review processes are still underway. — nrc.gov, Jan. 4, 2024

Dirty Reactors Financed by Dirty Politics

Touted by PR hucksters as a crucial element to fight climate change, today’s lying about “clean nuclear” is easy to debunk if people only hear the facts. Nuclear waste remains toxic for eons and must be containerized at a cost that can’t even be estimated. And the dirty business begins long before reactors operate, with uranium mining, milling, and fuel fabrication all leaving water pollution to poison their surroundings for — here’s that word again — eons. Dirty mechanics and waste products aren’t the nuclear industry’s only nastiness. It turns out the inside players need the dirtiest of politics to keep their reactors both “popular” and running-while-bankrupt.

In Ohio, former executives of FirstEnergy corporation have finally been indicted in the state’s famous \$60-million bribery scandal. The giant swindle has already seen former speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives Larry Householder and former state republican party chair Matt Borges sent to prison. The politicians used the bribes to pass reactor bail-out legislation that kept retirement-age reactors operating in Ohio though they couldn’t compete against renewables.

As Taylor Giorno reported for *The Hill*, FirstEnergy paid a \$230 million fine and fired some executives, but this is the first time anyone from FirstEnergy has faced criminal charges in the bribery investigation. Former FirstEnergy CEO Charles Jones and former VP Michael Dowling are accused of joining a “largescale covert scheme to corrupt the chair of the Ohio Public Utilities Commission (PUCO), steal millions of dollars of cash from a large publicly

traded electric utility, forge a spurious contract to conceal a cash ‘side deal’ in a PUCO ratemaking case, steal millions of dollars from a non-profit trade group representing large industrial energy users, and tamper with government records involving financial public disclosures and disclosures of the identities of paid lobbyists,” according to the indictment.

Former PUCO chair Sam Randazzo was also indicted by a federal grand jury last year. “This indictment is about more than one piece of legislation. It is about the hostile capture of a significant portion of Ohio’s



“FIRST WE HAVE TO CONVINCE THE PEOPLE THAT GOOD HEALTH ISN'T EVERYTHING.”

Source: cartoonstock.com

state government by deception, betrayal, and dishonesty,” said Ohio attorney general Dave Yost.

How much bribery has been involved at other points on the nuclear fuel chain, we can only imagine. When Nukewatch worked with Canadian activists fighting a waste dump next to Lake Ontario, the locals said they lived “in the bribery zone.” Maybe we all do. — *The Hill* and AP, Feb. 12, 2024

Be Afraid. Be Very Afraid.

Google would have us believe that the United States is in grave danger, threatened by the likes of North Korea, China, Iran, and asteroids. A holiday list of headlines from Google’s nuclear weapons prompts included these fearsome warnings:

“N. Korea will likely keep amassing nuclear warheads until next negotiation,” *The Korea Times*, Dec. 25, 2023; “Iran’s nuclear breakout: ‘Twas the night before Armageddon,” *New York Post*, Dec. 24, 2023; “China’s H-20 Bomber Is a Real Threat to the U.S. Military,” *The National Interest*, Dec. 24, 2023; “Is China rebuilding its old base for nuclear tests? Should India be concerned?” *Firstpost*, India, Dec. 23, 2023; “Buried nuclear secrets, exploding U.S. tensions: Inside China’s Lop Nur,” *The Victoria Advocate*, U.K., Dec. 23, 2023; “U.S. expresses serious concern over signs of N. Korea commissioning light-water reactor,” *The Korea Times*, Seoul, Dec. 26, 2023; “Iran navy receives new cruise missiles amid growing regional tension,” *Deccan Herald* India, Dec. 24, 2023; “Scientists explore using nuclear explosions to fend off asteroids,” BGR [consumer electronics news], Dec. 24, 2023.

Ironically, supposed U.S. “concern” over a nuclear reactor in North Korea contradicts Washington’s boldly broadcast embrace and promotion of nuclear reactor construction, demonstrated most theatrically at COP28 with Biden’s declaration to “triple global nuclear capacity by 2050.”

If the United States truly has the intention to harass, condemn, and weaken North Korea, it could not do more harm to its government and its territory than to promote the hasty and widespread construction of nuclear reactors, uranium mines, and uranium fuel fabrication factories like the kind spreading cancer and immune deficiency disorders in industrialized countries.

Fighting authoritarianism? Sell radiation to dictators! The grave wave of the future.

Radioactive Cesium Found in Texas Scrap Yard

Last October a Houston police officer making rounds was startled to find his federally supplied radiation detector, one of 2,000 in the Houston metro and 56,000 nationwide, buzzing at high alert. The radiation detectors are provided by the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction office, created in 2018 to run for five years pending reauthorization by Congress. The office and its radiation detectors, which range from small hand units to truck-sized and helicopter-mounted devices, are intended to sniff out “dirty bombs” in major U.S. cities and at large public events such as the Super Bowl. The source of the October radiation alert in Houston turned out to be small flow gauges from a chemical factory containing cesium-137. With a 30-year half-life, it’s also found in medical devices, in nuclear reactor waste, and at the sites of nuclear reactor catastrophes. The canisters were found at a recycling scrap yard and sent to a U.S. Department of Energy waste site near San Antonio. — dhs.gov Jan. 5, 2024; *USA Today* Nov. 22, 2023

U.S. Nuclear Weapons May Soon Return to British Air Base

New U.S. hydrogen bombs may soon return to England, according to classified Pentagon documents obtained by London’s *Daily Telegraph*. The documents report a “nuclear mission” to get underway “immediately” at Lakenheath air force base. On February 5, Russia’s permanent representative to the United Nations Gennady Gatilov vowed, on state television, to respond if the U.S. enacts the transfer. Moscow has warned it would see the move as provocative, with Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova saying last fall, “If this happens, it will be treated by us as an escalation, which will lead to the exact opposite of achieving the pressing task of removing all U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe,” the Tass news agency reported. During the Cold War, U.S. nuclear bombs and missiles were stationed in England. The last was removed in 2008. The 1970 Nonproliferation Treaty forbids such transfer of nuclear weapons to other countries. — *Newsweek*, Feb. 5; *Defense Post*, Jan. 30; *The Guardian*, Jan. 27, 2024

Latest Litany of Accidents at WIPP

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, the nation’s only permanent repository for radioactive waste from nuclear weapons production, is a network of 2,000-foot-deep caverns in a salt bed roughly 30 miles east of Carlsbad, New Mexico. In its 35 years of operation, WIPP has been plagued by accidents and mishandlings resulting in radioactive releases and contamination of the land, air, and workers, requiring temporary work stoppages. One radioactive catastrophe and explosion of improperly packed rad waste in 2014 caused a dangerous level of contamination causing work to be paused for several years. A new shaft, like four others already at WIPP, had to be designed to increase air flow and create access to additional cavern space. The \$100 million new shaft, in tandem with a \$470 million renovation of the ventilation system, plan to triple the “air capacity...allowing maintenance, mining, and waste operations to occur simultaneously,” according to the *Carlsbad Current-Argus*.

WIPP recently won a 10-year permit renewal, effective Nov. 3, 2023, nullifying its original 2024 closure. However, reports of three accidents during the new shaft construction within roughly one month last fall led to a temporary stop work order. In October, a swinging skid steer collided with the scaffolding platform of the shaft. In two incidents in November, a rigging cable snapped in the shaft, in one case causing the loading “basket” to sail 2,000 feet to the mine’s floor. Work began again on December 16. — *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, Jan. 26 and Jan. 3, 2024; *Nuclear Newswire*, Oct. 12, 2023

— *Shorts by Lindsay Potter and John LaForge*