

Washington Commemorates Peace and Nuclear Disarmament by Testing a New Advanced Nuclear Missile

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The US plan to test nuclear missiles next week has drawn fire from international peace activists who have been calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons for years.

"Instead of honouring the significance of these dates and working in good faith to achieve nuclear disarmament, the United States has chosen to schedule two tests of its Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile on September 22 and September 26," said Rick Wayman of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.

September 21 is the International Day of Peace that would be observed throughout the world before the UN high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament takes place at the world body's headquarters in New York on September 26.

"Just hours after the International Day of Peace ends, the US plans to launch a Minuteman III – the missile that delivers US land-based nuclear weapons – from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California to the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands," Wayman said.

In a statement sent to Daily Times, he added, "Then, on the same day that most countries will send their head of state or foreign minister to New York for the UN's first-ever High-Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament, the US plans to send another Minuteman III missile from California to the Marshall Islands. These missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads capable of killing thousands of times more people than the chemical weapons used in Syria," he added.

The US Vandenberg Air Force Base has not yet publicly announced either of these launches, but sources say there are two Minuteman III launches scheduled for some time this month.

According to them, the launches are due to take place on September 22 and 26.

"We are disappointed that a test launch is scheduled for the same day as the High-Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament at the UN in New York," Wayman told Daily Times.

Asked to comment on this issue, the UN spokesperson, Farhan Haq, cited the UN secretary general's recent statement in which he said, "We should all remember the terrible toll of nuclear tests."

In his statement, Ban Ki-moon mentioned that as many as 456 nuclear tests were carried at Semipalatinsk since the first explosion there more than 64 years ago. Nearly one and a half

million people were affected by the consequences of nuclear testing, and an immense territory has been contaminated with radiation, he noted

With the adoption of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, he said, the international community completed its first step towards putting an end to all nuclear weapon test explosions.

In his view, this objective is “a serious matter of unfinished business on the disarmament agenda”. Until now, 183 countries have signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and 159 have ratified it.

Ban is urging all states to sign and ratify the CTBT without further delay. Eight states whose ratifications are necessary for the treaty to enter into force have a special responsibility: China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the United States.

“None should wait for others to act first. In the meantime, all States should maintain or implement moratoria on nuclear explosions,” Ban said.

Writing on this issue, Jonathan Granoff, the president of the Global Security Institute and an adjunct professor of international law at Widener University School of Law, notes that “many countries know this and that is why” the 67th session of the General Assembly moved to convene the high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament for the 68th session next week.

China and India have both expressed support for negotiating a universal ban on the weapons and Pakistan has stated it would follow. France, the US and UK, and Russia openly oppose progress now on even taking preliminary steps to negotiate a legal ban.

“It is hard to make the case that the US military should ever be constrained without demonstrating the benefits of obtaining a universal ban on the weapons. Incoherence in advocacy leads to policies going in multiple directions,” he says.

These issues related to nuclear disarmament, according to him “will not be resolved soon since behind them all is a cadre within the US military which wants to always have a dominant position for security purposes”.

“Progress is unlikely while Russia feels threatened,” he says.

John Burroughs, executive director of the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy, offered similar thoughts.

“In March, US Defence Secretary Charles Hagel delayed a missile test launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base because it might be seen as provocative by North Korea. Hagel should also delay or, better, cancel the tests planned for late September,” he told Daily Times via email.

“A test on September 26 will definitely be a slap in the face to the foreign ministers and heads of state assembled for the first-ever High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament at the United Nations,” he said.

“Instead of sending a test missile to the Marshall Islands, where health and environment were badly damaged by ferocious atmospheric US nuclear testing in the 1950s, the United

States should send President Obama or Secretary of State Kerry to the High-Level Meeting to explain how the United States intends to begin participating in multilateral efforts for global elimination of nuclear weapons," he added.

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