

## Revive the Test Ban Treaty

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Ten years ago this month, UN member states overwhelmingly endorsed and later opened for signature the longest-sought, hardest-fought nuclear arms control treaty: the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Today, despite widespread support for the CTBT and a de facto global nuclear-test moratorium, the treaty still has not entered into force.

The CTBT is a simple treaty with profound value to the struggle against proliferation. By verifiably prohibiting “any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion,” the treaty would simultaneously help constrain the qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons, curb proliferation, advance disarmament, and delegitimize nuclear weapons.

Moving forward on the CTBT is an essential step toward restoring confidence in the beleaguered nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) regime. The nuclear-weapon states’ commitment to achieve the CTBT was a crucial part of the bargain that won the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995.

A decade later, it is feared that North Korea may conduct a nuclear test explosion to demonstrate its suspected weapons capability. Iran is threatening to leave the NPT and may be able to produce bomb-grade material within a few years. The existing nuclear-weapon states, including China, India, and Pakistan, could use another round of testing to perfect new and more dangerous nuclear-weapon capabilities.

Indeed, support for the treaty has steadily grown, as 176 states have signed the CTBT and 135 have ratified it. But the U.S. Senate’s highly partisan 1999 rejection of the CTBT, the ideologically driven opposition of the Bush administration, and the reluctance of nine other CTBT “rogue states” have delayed its formal entry into force and left the door open to renewed nuclear testing. The current U.S. policy is most problematic and perplexing. Since 2001, the Bush administration has said it will not seek Senate reconsideration and approval for ratification. Senior officials say the CTBT is neither verifiable nor compatible with maintaining the existing U.S. stockpile.

At the same time, there is no requirement for new warheads that would necessitate renewed U.S. testing, and senior officials repeatedly say there is no other need for the resumption of nuclear testing in the foreseeable future. As a signatory, the United States is also bound by customary international law not to take any action contrary to the purpose of the CTBT. The Bush approach requires the United States to assume most CTBT-related responsibilities but robs U.S. diplomats of the moral and political authority to prod other nations to refrain from testing and help strengthen the nonproliferation system.

As 2008 Republican presidential hopefuls Sens. John McCain (Ariz.) and Chuck Hagel (Neb.) noted back in 1999, the Senate can and should reconsider the CTBT. “A clear majority of the Senate have not given up hope of finding common ground in our quest for a sound and secure ban on nuclear testing,” wrote Hagel.

If the next president were to press the Senate to reconsider and support ratification of the CTBT, that body would find that all the previous arguments against ratification have been soundly rebuffed. A July 2002 report of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (NAS) states that the United States “has the technical capabilities to maintain confidence in the safety and reliability of its existing nuclear-weapon stockpile under [a test ban].” The NAS report documents that no would-be CTBT violator could have confidence that a nuclear explosion of any military utility would escape detection. The

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CTBT international monitoring and on-site inspection system, buttressed by national intelligence, are more than equal to the task.

The United States is not the only guilty party. China, which signed the treaty in 1996, has said for more than three years that “all necessary work is underway in a serious and orderly fashion” to ratify. Beijing owes the world a detailed explanation for its continued delay.

Some prominent non-nuclear-weapon states whose ratification is needed for CTBT entry into force, including Columbia, Egypt, and Indonesia, have not ratified and should do so without delay. Action by these states, along with the United States, could help cure India’s CTBT allergy and lead New Delhi as well as Islamabad to enter into a legally binding test moratorium.

Overcoming the reluctance of the few also requires a stronger effort from the many friends of the CTBT. Unfortunately, top leaders of states committed to the CTBT, including Australia, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom, often fail to press their counterparts in the CTBT holdout states when they have the opportunity.

CTBT entry into force is within reach. But because of the inaction of a few states, the viability of a verifiable, comprehensive ban on nuclear tests and the future of the NPT itself is in jeopardy. With the 2008 U.S. election approaching, it is vital that CTBT supporters put the treaty back on the U.S. political map and move to secure ratification by other key states before it is too late.

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