

Senate Panels Begin Hearings On CTB Treaty and Stewardship

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Due to its preoccupation with NATO enlargement, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will not hold its hearings on the ratification of the CTB Treaty until next year. The administration hopes that a Senate floor vote on advice and consent to ratification will take place in the spring of 1998.

During the hearings, which were held on October 27 and 29 in the Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation and Federal Services and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, several key administration officials testified that the SSMP is capable of fulfilling its objectives and that the CTB Treaty will enhance U.S. and international security. Critics, however, questioned whether the United States would be able to maintain the safety and reliability of its nuclear stockpile in the long term without nuclear testing.

Addressing these concerns, Secretary of Energy Federico Peña said, "I have visited each of the department's three weapons laboratories, and have personally engaged each of the weapons laboratory directors in discussions about the strength and adequacy of stockpile stewardship. . . . I am pleased to report that there is a strong consensus that stockpile stewardship is the right program to address the challenges of maintaining our nuclear deterrent without underground nuclear testing." Peña also stated that he and Secretary of Defense William Cohen will soon certify to President Clinton that the U.S. nuclear stockpile is currently safe and reliable, the second such certification since the annual procedure was established by Clinton in August 1995.

Furthermore, Peña said during his October 29 testimony that the United States will be able to maintain a safe and reliable nuclear stockpile under the CTB Treaty because of the six "safeguards" Clinton announced more than two years ago.

These safeguards include the conduct of the SSMP; the maintenance of modern nuclear laboratory facilities and programs in theoretical and exploratory nuclear technology; the maintenance of the basic capability to resume nuclear testing; the continuation of a research and development program to improve our treaty monitoring capabilities and operations; the continued development of a broad range of intelligence gathering and analytical capabilities; and the option of withdrawing from the CTB under the "supreme national interests" clause in the event that a high level of confidence in the safety and reliability of a nuclear weapon type critical to the U.S. nuclear deterrent could no longer be certified.

Appearing before both subcommittees, Victor Reis, assistant secretary of energy for defense programs, said, "We can maintain the safety and reliability of the nuclear weapons in the stockpile indefinitely without underground testing and keep the risks to manageable levels." (Emphasis added.) According to Reis, the basis for this optimism stems from the belief that the United States already has a substantial understanding of the nuclear stockpile due to its extensive experience with nuclear testing. In response to concerns that the SSMP will not be capable of meeting its objectives, Reis pointed out that stewardship efforts are working now, as demonstrated by the fact that the

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nuclear stockpile is safe and reliable today even though it has been five years since the last U.S. nuclear test.

Representing the Department of Defense, Franklin Miller and Harold Smith testified that the CTB Treaty will strengthen U.S. security and is effectively verifiable. Miller said the treaty "is an important element of our approach to national security in the post Cold War world. . . . It will constrain nuclear and non nuclear weapons states from developing more advanced nuclear weapons capabilities."

Smith added that the United States will be able to monitor compliance with the CTB through its own intelligence capabilities, on site inspections permitted under the treaty, bilateral agreements with key countries (including Russia) and various open sources.

Critical Testimony

In their October 27 testimony, James Schlesinger, former secretary of defense and energy, and Robert Barker, assistant to the director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, both challenged the capacity of the SSMP to be a viable alternative to nuclear testing. Despite the best efforts of the SSMP, Schlesinger claimed that confidence in the reliability of the U.S. nuclear stockpile will "inevitably" decline over the next several decades if the Senate approves the CTB Treaty. He said that U.S. nuclear weapons will be "vulnerable to the effects of aging" under the test ban and that "there is no substitute for nuclear testing" when it comes to ensuring weapon reliability. Schlesinger argued that he was especially concerned about the permanent nature of the CTB as well as its complete ban on nuclear tests, even those involving low yields.

In his prepared testimony, Barker said that "sustained nuclear testing, with no less than six tests per year, is the only demonstrated way of maintaining a safe and reliable nuclear deterrent." He stated that confidence in the safety and reliability of the U.S. nuclear arsenal has already declined since the cessation of nuclear testing in 1992, and that the SSMP will never be a perfect "substitute" for nuclear testing. In a statement for the record, C. Bruce Tarter, director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, contradicted these views and said he is "quite optimistic" that the SSMP will enable the United States to preserve confidence in the safety and reliability of its nuclear stockpile under the CTB.

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