

## **Twenty Years After the Closure of Semipalatinsk the Case for the Test Ban Treaty Is Stronger Than Ever**

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Prepared Remarks by Daryl G. Kimball, Executive Director, Arms Control Association  
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Good afternoon and thank you Paul Walker and Global Green for organizing this event and for inviting me to speak here today to mark the anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, where more than 456 explosions contaminated the land and its inhabitants.

The courageous efforts of the Kazakh people and their allies forced Moscow's communist regime to halt nuclear weapons testing. It is one of the truly amazing stories of the late-Soviet era and one of the most important contributions to the end of the Cold War.

The closure of Semipalatinsk led Mikhail Gorbachev to announce a one-year moratorium on Soviet testing on October 5, 1991. This, in turn, prompted a bipartisan coalition of U.S. legislators—among them the late-great Sen. Mark Hatfield and our friend Rep. Edward Markey who is here with us today—to introduce nuclear test moratorium legislation on October 29.

Less than a year later, that bill became law. President Bill Clinton extended the moratorium the following year and launched negotiations on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Every president since then—Republican and Democratic—has sustained the U.S. nuclear test moratorium.

So, we all owe the people of Kazakhstan our thanks for their role in helping to set these events in motion.

It has now been fifteen years since the CTBT was opened for signature. The United States and 182 nations have signed the treaty. Since 1998, only one state—North Korea—has conducted nuclear test explosions.

But to finally ensure that the age of nuclear testing is truly over and to improve our ability to detect and deter testing in the future, we need—once again—enlightened, bipartisan leadership from United States to help bring the CTBT into force.

The CTBT won't by itself stop proliferation, but we can't improve our chances of stopping proliferation and reducing the nuclear threat without the CTBT.

By banning all nuclear tests, the CTBT prevents the established nuclear-weapon states from proof-testing new, more sophisticated warhead designs. And without nuclear test explosions, newer nuclear-armed states would have a far more difficult time developing and fielding smaller, more easily deliverable warheads.

With the CTBT in force, our ability to detect and deter possible clandestine nuclear testing by other states will clearly be significantly greater. Entry-into-force is essential to making short-notice, on-site inspections possible.

While the CTBT has near universal support, the Treaty must still be ratified by nine hold-out states before it can formally enter into force.

Ratification by the United States and China is particularly important. Given their existing nuclear test moratoria and treaty signatures, Washington and Beijing already bear most CTBT-related responsibilities, yet their failure to ratify has denied them—and others—the full security benefits of the treaty.

U.S. President Barack Obama pledged to “immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of” the CTBT. He said, “After more than five decades of talks, it is time for the testing of nuclear weapons to finally be banned.” Indeed.

The Obama administration can and must continue to make the case that the Treaty enhances international security, is effectively verifiable, and is essential to curb the spread of nuclear weapons in the decades to come. Assistant Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller has done an excellent job in this regard.

The technical and political case for the CTBT is much stronger today than it was in 1999 when the Senate briefly considered the treaty. The Senate must honestly review the new evidence for the treaty rather than rush to judgment on the basis of outdated information.

As Senators and their staff do so, it is important to keep in mind how the CTBT can help our efforts to curb proliferation in the years ahead.

China, which has repeatedly stated that it supports early entry into force, would likely ratify the CTBT if the United States does. Without further nuclear testing, China’s would not be able to proof test new, more sophisticated warhead designs.

India and Pakistan could advance the cause of nuclear disarmament and substantially ease regional tensions by converting their unilateral test moratoria into a legally binding commitment to end nuclear testing through the CTBT.

With no shortage of conflict in the Middle East, ratification by Israel, Egypt and Iran would reduce nuclear-weapons-related security concerns in the region.

Iran, which has signed the CTBT, said on Sept. 2 at the United Nations that it “considers this treaty as a step towards disarmament.” In my address to the General Assembly on behalf of NGOs, I responded to that statement by noting that Article VI of the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty obliges all states—the nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear weapon states—to contribute to disarmament and Iran must do its part.

I noted that if Iran ratified the CTBT, it could help reduce concerns that its nuclear program would be used to develop smaller, deliverable nuclear warheads. If Iran refuses to ratify the CTBT, it would raise further questions about the nature of its nuclear activities and increase U.S. and international support for targeted sanctions on its nuclear and missile programs.

Further North Korean nuclear tests would undermine Asian security. While Pyongyang has shown little regard for its treaty commitments, the DPRK should be pressed to declare a halt to further testing and sign the CTBT.

U.S. reconsideration and approval of the CTBT, however, is essential. And it is undoubtedly in our national security interests.

After 1,054 nuclear test explosions, the United States simply doesn’t need or want nuclear test explosions to maintain our arsenal or to develop new kinds of warheads. No serious military or technical expert believes we should, and if that changes at some point in the distant future, the CTBT contains a supreme national interest withdrawal provision.

Other states, however, could improve their nuclear capabilities through further testing. It is time we recognize that reality and act upon it.

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As Gen. John Shalikashvili, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, concluded in his [2001 report](#) on the CTBT: "For the sake of future generations, it would be unforgivable to neglect any reasonable action that can help prevent nuclear proliferation, as the Test Ban Treaty clearly would."

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