



POLICY BRIEF

COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN TREATY TALKING POINTS

By: Professor David Koplow

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), signed on September 24, 1996, is the most important arms control agreement now pending. It would create a permanent, global, legally-binding prohibition on all nuclear explosions.

The CTBT cannot enter into force until the United States and 43 other specified countries ratify it. To date, 41 of those countries (excluding India, Pakistan, and North Korea) have signed the treaty; 32 of them (including Russia, France, the United Kingdom, and all the other members of NATO) have ratified. The United States (along with China, Israel, and Iran) has not ratified.

The Bush Administration opposes the CTBT. The Republican-dominated U.S. Senate voted against ratification of the treaty in October 1999.

The United States has not conducted any nuclear explosions since 1992, and the Bush administration has agreed to continue this moratorium. At the same time, the administration has signaled a possible interest in resuming testing at some point: it has pursued funding for studies of new types of nuclear weapons, and for reducing the amount of time that would be necessary for the resumption of testing in Nevada.

I. CTBT is crucial for nuclear non-proliferation. Under the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the United States and others undertook to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date. The test ban treaty has repeatedly been cited as the key instrument for validating this commitment, and a promise to create a prompt CTBT was a vital *quid pro quo* in the agreement in 1995 to extend the NPT indefinitely.

II. CTBT is crucial for preventing a new nuclear arms race. Nuclear testing might not be indispensable for the development of a new type of nuclear weapon, but a test ban would certainly complicate the task of any country that attempted to pursue new weapons. A test ban is therefore the best guaranty against a return to competition in nuclear arms development.

III. CTBT is adequately verifiable. The CTBT incorporates an unprecedented agreement to install hundreds of technical monitoring stations of various sorts all over the world, and to authorize a regime of on-site inspections to clarify ambiguities. There will always be some uncertainties in monitoring the activities inside other countries, but implementation of a CTBT will greatly facilitate our intelligence-gathering.

IV. The U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons will remain reliable even without further testing. The United States has conducted more nuclear tests than any other country, and

has the greatest ability to maintain the effectiveness of our arsenal. An elaborate program of stockpile stewardship can ensure that our deterrent does not atrophy under a CTBT.

The United States should: a) ratify the CTBT; b) urge other states to sign and ratify the treaty, bringing it into force as soon as possible; c) continue the moratorium on nuclear testing; and d) forswear development of new nuclear weapons.

About the Author

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