

Securing Our Future:

Towards a Nuclear Weapons-Free World



THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) “entered into force” and became law in 1970. It is the most universal treaty of its kind in history, with 188 signatories. The NPT requires the non-nuclear states that signed not to acquire nuclear weapons. In return, it obligates the states which already had nuclear weapons to negotiate in good faith the elimination of their arsenals. In May 2000, the U.S., along with other NPT signers, agreed to 13 steps to implement the Treaty’s disarmament obligations. These steps included “an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapons states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals,” ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and further reduction of U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.

NPT signatories (all countries except Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea) meet every five years to review the status of the treaty. The last meeting in 2005 was a disaster, with most of the time taken up with an argument over the content of the meeting’s agenda. The next NPT Review Conference, in 2010, holds significant promise if the United States and other nuclear weapon states show progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN TREATY (CTBT)

The CTBT bans all nuclear explosions, whether for military or “peaceful” purposes. The treaty, introduced in 1996, cannot come into force until 44 specific countries sign and ratify it. Only three of the 44 have not signed: North Korea, India and Pakistan. The United States and China remain two of the nine countries that still must ratify the CTBT for it to come into force. China was in the process of ratification when the U.S. Congress rejected the treaty in 1999. This was followed in 2002 by a Bush Administration announcement that ratification was no longer in the U.S. interest. Three of the nations possessing nuclear weapons (Russia, Great Britain and France) have already ratified the CTBT.

The CTBT will strengthen the global non-proliferation regime by erecting a high barrier to the spread of nuclear weapons. Countries on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons will be prohibited from testing. Countries already possessing nuclear weapons will be less able to improve and modify their nuclear arsenals. In particular, the CTBT will limit the development of nuclear warheads deliverable by missiles.

Recommendations

- Negotiate and ratify a new, verifiable and legally binding U.S.-Russian agreement requiring deep reductions of strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons.
- Ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty without special concessions for increased funding for nuclear weapons development that undermines the intent of the Treaty.
- Stop funding for an expanded nuclear weapons complex or nuclear weapons with enhanced military characteristics, and close the Nevada Test Site in consultation with the Western Shoshone Nation.
- Engage in good faith negotiations towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Monitoring provisions are already in effect through the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization. There are currently 337 monitoring stations in the world, making it virtually impossible for any state to conduct a secret nuclear test.

In 1999, President Clinton's political problems combined with uncertainties about treaty verification, monitoring and the ability to maintain existing weapons in the absence of testing led the Senate to reject the treaty in a partisan vote. In 2002, the Bush Administration announced that it would not support ratification of the CTBT. Since then, prospects have become more hopeful. President Barack Obama has expressed full support for the treaty, stating, "To achieve a global ban on nuclear testing, my administration will immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. After more than five decades of talks, it is time for the testing of nuclear weapons to finally be banned."

There is now a larger Senate majority of CTBT supporters to work with the President. Additionally, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in her confirmation hearing, stated that she would work with the Senate towards ratifying the CTBT. Senator John Kerry, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote in an op-ed in the Boston Globe

that he would "begin working to build the necessary bipartisan support for US ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty."

There remains substantial concern that the 67 Senate votes needed to ratify the CTBT can only be gained by "trading off" a go-ahead for a revitalized nuclear weapons complex or nuclear weapons with new military capabilities. Any such trade-off would send the wrong message to the international community and seriously hinder international non-proliferation efforts.

STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TREATY (START)

In a recent speech in Prague, President Obama stated, "the existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War." Between them, the United States and Russia have about 95% of the world stockpile of over 25,000 nuclear warheads and bombs.

The 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) requires each country to reduce the number of deployed strategic warheads to no more than 2,200 by the end of 2012, when it expires. But SORT does not require verified dismantlement of delivery systems or withdrawn warheads. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) provides some monitoring mechanisms for SORT reductions, but expires at the end of 2009. To continue legally binding, verified bilateral reductions of their nuclear arsenals, it is essential that the U.S. and Russia agree to a follow-on treaty to START and that the U.S. Senate ratify the treaty before December.

President Obama met with Russian President Medvedev on April 1, 2009 in London. The two issued a joint statement outlining their plans to negotiate a successor to the START treaty before it expires. The statement said that the U.S. and Russia would "pursue new and verifiable reductions in our strategic offensive arsenals in a step-by-step process, beginning by replacing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with a new, legally-binding treaty." The treaty will likely come up for ratification in the Senate later this year.

