

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: Ratification Is More Important than Ever Before

A supportive Obama administration and significantly increased Senate support make prospects for U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) better than ever before. In 1999 President Clinton's political problems and uncertainties about treaty verification, monitoring, and the ability to maintain existing weapons in the absence of testing led the Senate to reject the treaty. A decade has passed since that vote, and the United States has observed a nuclear testing moratorium for nearly two decades. Time has helped address the concerns of the treaty's detractors while proving its necessity. Conflicts between India and Pakistan, and North Korea's nuclear test, have further shown that the world is less secure without a nuclear test ban.

TECHNICAL ADVANCES ADDRESS PREVIOUS CONCERNS

During the 1999 CTBT debate, lawmakers' two biggest worries were whether other countries' compliance could be verified and whether the safety and reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile could be maintained. These concerns contributed to the treaty's defeat. A decade later, the stockpile has been certified as safe and

reliable every year by the secretaries of Defense and Energy. A 2002 report from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) expressed confidence that the improved Stockpile Stewardship Program can ensure the stockpile's safety and reliability.

According to the NAS panel, age-related defects, mainly related to nonnuclear components, can be expected, "but nuclear testing is not needed to discover these problems and is not likely to be needed to address them." A 2006 Energy Department study showed that warheads' nuclear cores remain undamaged by age for 85 years or more.



Technological advances in U.S. and global nuclear

test monitoring provide high confidence that any country violating the treaty would be caught. This was borne out by the CTBT International Monitoring System's detection of a low-yield North Korean test in 2006. CTBT ratification is essential to make short-notice, on-site inspections possible and to maintain long-term support for the operation of the global monitoring system.

TEST BAN DIMINISHES RELEVANCE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Nuclear testing has been used for more than half a century to intimidate military rivals. In 1998 India and Pakistan conducted tests that brought the two nations to the brink of war. U.S. ratification of the CTBT will reinforce the de facto global nuclear test moratorium and diminish the perceived political value of nuclear weapons.

OVERWHELMING POPULAR AND POLITICAL SUPPORT

A 2004 poll found that 87 percent of U.S. respondents support this country's ratification of a treaty prohibiting nuclear-weapons test explosions worldwide. Eight-five percent of Republicans support U.S. ratification.¹

The CTBT has been signed by 180 countries and ratified by 146, including every U.S. ally. In 1999 India and Pakistan expressed a desire to ratify the CTBT, but they walked away when the U.S. Senate rejected it.² In February 2009 British Foreign Secretary David Milliband said China is interested in talking with the United States about ratifying the CTBT.³

World leaders agree that the CTBT will make the world safer. Pope Benedict XVI

recently declared his support for ratification. A Vatican spokesman argued that "global security must not rely on nuclear weapons. The Holy See considers the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) an important tool to achieve this aim. . . . The Holy See is convinced that. . . .the Treaty will represent a great leap forward for the future of humanity, as well as for the protection of the earth and environment entrusted to our care by the Creator."⁴

RATIFICATION IS WITHIN REACH

In October 1999 the treaty won only 49 of the necessary 67 votes for ratification. The 2008 elections dramatically changed the composition of the U.S. Senate, and FCNL estimates that 60 senators now support ratifying the treaty. Furthermore, President Obama pledged during

his campaign to "take advantage of recent technological advances to build bipartisan consensus behind ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty."⁵

With more congressional support and a president willing to use the bully pulpit to promote the treaty, ratification is achievable with a strong and sustained campaign propelled by the grassroots.

How You Can Make a Difference

Organize Your Community

Collect contact information for like-minded people or even host a house party to discuss how best to contact Congress and support treaty ratification.

Spread the Word

Get the attention of your elected officials with letters to the editor and op-eds in your local newspapers.

Ask for a Speaker

If you believe your community would benefit from hearing a CTBT expert, contact FCNL, and we can arrange for one to visit you.

¹ "Survey Says: Americans Back Arms Control," Program on International Policy Attitudes, Washington, DC, June 2004.

² "India Pledges to Sign CTBT by Next Sept.," *Asian Political News*, September 28, 1998.

³ "David Milliband Address," International Institute for Strategic Studies, February 4, 2009.

⁴ "Holy See to Atomic Energy Agency," *Zenit*, October 2, 2008.

⁵ Barack Obama, "Renewing American Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007.

Photo Credit: National Nuclear Security Administration/NV Site Office