

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Ratification Is More Important than Ever Before

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) prohibits all nuclear test explosions and establishes a global monitoring system to ensure compliance. To date, the CTBT has been signed by more than 180 countries and ratified by more than 150. The treaty will enter into force when it is ratified by the United States and a group of eight other hold out states. The other holdouts include China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan.

In 1999 when the treaty was brought before the Senate for ratification, uncertainties about verifying compliance and about the ability to maintain existing weapons in the absence of testing led the Senate to reject the treaty. Now, a supportive Obama administration and technical advances in test monitoring and nuclear stockpile maintenance have increased Senate support, making prospects for U.S. ratification of the CTBT better than ever before.

Technical Advances Address Previous Concerns

During the 1999 CTBT debate, lawmakers' two biggest worries were whether the safety and reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile could be maintained and whether the compliance of other countries could be verified.

More than a decade later, the stockpile has been certified as safe and reliable every year by the secretaries of Defense and Energy. A 2002 report by the National Academy of Sciences expressed confidence that the nuclear weapons stockpile is safe and reliable. In 2011, National Nuclear Security Administration administrator Tom D'Agostino reiterated this point when he said, "we have a safe and secure and reliable stockpile.... There's no need to conduct underground [nuclear] testing."¹

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 when the international monitoring system for the CTBT detected the first (2006) low-yield and the second (2009), more powerful, North Korean nuclear tests. CTBT ratification is essential to make on-site inspections possible. Until the treaty goes into effect, on-site inspections are not possible.

Test Ban Diminishes Relevance of Nuclear Weapons

Entry into force of the CTBT would constrain the development of new nuclear weapons by existing nuclear weapons states and strengthen efforts to prevent



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additional nations from developing nuclear weapons. Entry into force of the CTBT would also increase the international ability to detect and deter secret nuclear testing, while allowing the U.S. to maintain a reliable nuclear arsenal. The CTBT is a major step toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

Popular and Political Support

A 2004 poll found that 87 percent of U.S. respondents support ratification of a treaty like the CTBT prohibiting nuclear weapons test explosions worldwide.² A second survey in 2007 found that 80 percent of people in the country believe the U.S. should participate in the CTBT.

U.S. ratification of the CTBT would prompt a chain reaction of ratifications by the other eight hold out states which must ratify in order for the treaty to enter into force. Many of these nations, including China, India and Indonesia, have expressed a desire to ratify the CTBT, after the United States does.

World leaders agree that the CTBT will make the world safer. Current and former senior government officials, technical and scientific experts, military officials and faith leaders have spoken in support of ratification. Pope Benedict XVI 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, in working together, the signature, ratification, and entry into force of 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.”³

Ratification Is Within Reach

In October 1999 the treaty won only 48 of the necessary 67 Senate votes for ratification. However, less than 41 senators who voted on the CTBT in 1999 are still in the Senate today.

Recent debate and ratification of the New START Treaty raised the level of knowledge of nuclear weapons issues in the Senate. In December 2010, 71 senators voted to ratify the New START Treaty.

In 2009 President Obama pledged “to immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.”⁴ 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 general public.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Contact Your Senators

E-mail or write your senators and ask them to support ratification. If you have the time, schedule a lobby visit at one of your senators’ offices.

Spread the Word

Get the attention of your elected officials and your neighbors with a letter to the editor or an op-ed in your local newspaper.

Organize Your Community

Gather with like-minded members of your community to discuss how to support Senate ratification of the CTBT.

1 “The Stockpile’s Steward: An Interview with NNSA Administrator Thomas D’Agostino,” Arms Control Association, March 25, 2011, <http://www.armscontrol.org/pressroom/DAGostinoInterviewRelease>.

2 Steven Kull, “Survey Says: Americans Back Arms Control,” *Arms Control Today*, June 2004, http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2004_06/Kull.

3 “Statement by H.E. Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for the Holy See’s Relations with States, at the 52nd General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency,” Vienna, September 29, 2008, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2008/documents/rc_seg-st_20080929_mamberti-iaea_en.html.

4 “Remarks by President Barack Obama,” Prague, April, 5, 2009, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered>.

