

# **The Role of the CTBT in Nuclear Disarmament<sup>1</sup>**

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A Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) has long been considered the single most important measure in the nuclear disarmament field. It was at the center of the “Ban the Bomb” movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s; it figured prominently in the negotiations that led to the nuclear disarmament provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); and since 1975 it has been at the heart of the debates of the NPT’s five-year review conferences.

At the United Nations’ General Assembly a CTBT has been the subject of more resolutions than any other disarmament item. From its beginnings in 1962, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) examined the need to draft a CTBT. In 1994 it finally agreed to negotiate the treaty which was concluded in 1996 but has yet to come into force.

From the dawn of the nuclear age testing has been considered the key for improving warhead design. That is the qualitative aspect of the nuclear arms race. For proponents of a CTBT the end of testing was one way of ensuring the end of the competition in nuclear weapons; for opponents it entailed the demise of an industry built up over half a century and based in the nuclear laboratories.

In order to secure support for a CTBT the Clinton administration proposed that the Department of Energy (DOE) oversee a series of activities under the heading “nuclear stockpile stewardship.” Its aim is to maintain the safety and reliability of the US’ nuclear arsenal without underground nuclear testing. The DOE’s program includes research, design, development and testing of nuclear weapons in order to assess (and certify) their safety and reliability. In managing the stockpile the DOE oversees production, maintenance, surveillance, refurbishment and dismantling of the nuclear arsenal.

The forthcoming U.S. Nuclear Posture Review should reveal the extent of the Obama administration’s commitment to nuclear disarmament and, as set out in last year’s Prague speech, a nuclear-weapon-free world. Congressional funding for the DOE’s nuclear stockpile stewardship will be another indicator.

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<sup>1</sup> Unpublished text.

In light of the history of a CTBT, it is obvious that it should be considered a major step in limiting the ability of NWS to improve their weapons capabilities. But that will not happen. When the CD embarked on the CTBT negotiations its five nuclear-weapon states (NWS) made it clear that what would be banned would be the traditional underground nuclear tests. The shorthand employed was “ban the bang.” It was therefore assumed that other testing activities developed by NWS—including computer simulation— would not be prohibited. Thus the concept of nuclear stockpile stewardship.

In one sense, the entry into force of the CTBT is irrelevant. Nations that have signed but not ratified it (including China, Israel and United States) are bound to refrain from traditional underground tests; those that have not signed it (including DPRK, India and Pakistan) are not bound.

In another sense, the CTBT’s entry into force is important because it would establish a universal legal norm. US ratification would significantly advance that process and bring pressure to bear on China, DPRK, India, Israel and Pakistan.

The CTBT’s entry into force provisions should have been simplified. No one can deny the value of having all of the countries that might test bound by the treaty. Yet a more flexible formula—such as that envisioned in the Treaty of Tlatelolco— might have allowed the CTBT to enter into force for countries that so wished long before all of the present conditions are met. That is another way of building political pressure.

Nuclear disarmament proponents have been heartened by the Obama administration’s approach towards nuclear weapons. But, as the Los Alamos National Laboratory points out: “For the foreseeable future, however, both the US and Russia, along with other nations, still see the need to maintain some level of nuclear deterrent.” That translates into generous funding for nuclear stockpile stewardship, including non-traditional testing of nuclear devices.