

Don't wait for the United States

by Deepti Choubey

After Republicans halted the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1999, the Bush administration treated it as a four letter word not to be uttered in its bilateral talks with both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon States. The time has come to put the CTBT back on the agenda of other nations and not just the United States.

Welcome change in U.S. policy on the CTBT

CTBT proponents are encouraged by the Obama administration's declaration that it will seek ratification and then mount a full diplomatic effort to get hold-out States to do the same. This change in U.S. policy is welcome, but to assume that action by the Obama administration alone will guarantee the CTBT's entry into force is a mistake. Both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon States as well as civil society must act now if Obama's leadership is not to go to waste. Their efforts can increase the prospects of U.S. ratification and pressure CTBT laggards.

Republicans must be convinced of importance of ratification

Committed leadership from the Obama administration is essential, but insufficient for persuading Republican senators to vote for ratification. It is impressive that overall 148 countries have now ratified the CTBT -- a significant increase from the 51 who had done so when the Senate rejected it almost a decade ago. The number of outstanding Annex 2 States has halved from 18 to nine over the past 10 years. Nevertheless, senators concerned more about domestic political debates over the Reliable Replacement Warhead will not be swayed by this evidence of increasing international support against nuclear testing.

Indonesia expresses serious interest in ratifying

Almost counter-intuitively, senators are worried that the United States will ratify the CTBT and none of the remaining eight States will. The good news is that Indonesia has demonstrated solid political and financial support and recently declared that it is undertaking "serious preparations for the ratification of the CTBT." This could happen before the Senate considers the Treaty itself.

A move by China would be important

China's move, however, will be of far greater interest to senators. And China, too, will be watching American developments closely. Recalling the rivalry between the two nations when the CTBT opened for signature and China's possible discomfort with being the last of the five nuclear weapon States recognized by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to ratify, China might do so just before the Senate. In its 2008 defense

white paper, China emphasized its support for the CTBT to enter into force as soon as possible. This matters not only for China's own ratification prospects, but also because of the role China might be willing to play in persuading hold-out States such as Pakistan, North Korea and Iran to ratify. A Chinese, rather than American, diplomatic effort may be more effective with these States.

Treaty would help create stability in South Asia

China's ratification is a necessary precursor to addressing India and Pakistan. India has stated that it would not stand in the way of the Treaty entering into force. More recent assertions from India's External Affairs Minister, Pranab Mukherjee such as "We will not sign the CTBT," are worrying if they indicate a lasting change in policy. As there are Indian analysts advocating for the CTBT, there may be some hope for moderating the government's position through efforts within India. With Pakistan's ratification contingent

NOTES & QUOTES



"Early US ratification would do much to encourage the few remaining states to follow suit, thereby finally enabling the treaty – concluded in 1996 – to take legal effect and ban all nuclear weapons test explosions."

DAVID MILIBAND, THE U.K.'S FOREIGN MINISTER
THE GUARDIAN, 8 DECEMBER 2008



on India, the push for the CTBT in South Asia will be a key test of what benefits the newly transformed U.S.-India strategic partnership will yield. States in favour of the CTBT must push India and Pakistan to agree to move if China and the U.S. do so. The CTBT is an important step to creating stability in a region badly in need of it.

Confidence- and security-building measure in the Middle East

The Middle East is another region where the actions of others will matter. The Olmert government in Israel has conveyed positive signals about CTBT ratification. U.S. ratification could trigger ratification by Israel. Evidence of Israeli ratification ahead of time, along with other progress on nuclear disarmament and, in particular, the resolution to create a zone free from nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East¹, could spur Egypt to reconsider its position, which has hardened since 2000. As in South Asia, the ratification of the CTBT in the Middle East could help with security-building.

Iran's ratification could assuage concerns about its nuclear programme

Iran poses a different problem and requires a diverse selection of countries to promote the CTBT bilaterally. Countries aside from France, Germany

and the United Kingdom, such as China and Russia, could frame the CTBT as a confidence-building measure. Ratification could assuage international concerns about Iran's nuclear programme. If Egypt is reluctant to ratify, the Iranians could make the CTBT an issue where they can demonstrate regional leadership. This would be a gambit with little cost as the Treaty would not enter into force until Egypt and other hold-outs like North Korea ratify.

Prominent statesmen can ensure prioritization of the CTBT

On all of these issues, other States and civil society have an important role to play as a conduit by which the intentions of other hold-out States can be determined and communicated. Bridge-building initiatives such as the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, launched by the Australian and Japanese governments in June 2008, can pressure governments to prioritize the CTBT. Their regional consultations over the next year will reveal which way the wind is blowing in the Middle East, South Asia and Northeast Asia. Through concerted government-to-government consultations, the Seven Nation Initiative² and the New Agenda Coalition³ could also ensure that the CTBT rises to the top of the agenda. Uniquely influential are specific individuals such as US senior statesmen George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, who can

advance their vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, including interim steps such as the CTBT's entry into force, with senators directly.

Without a doubt, activities this year can create positive momentum and good will in advance of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. The CTBT will be high on the agenda of non-nuclear weapon States. Early progress on the CTBT, due to the initiative of other States and civil society, can be converted into the political capital needed to sustain efforts to shore up the nonproliferation regime.

Considering the progress of the last 10 years, it is not impossible to see the CTBT enter into force within the next decade. Doing so, however, will require everyone to play their part and no one can afford to wait. ■

Biographical note



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¹ The **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty's 1995 resolution** NPT/CONF.1995/32/RES/1 called for a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons as well as other weapons of mass destruction.

² The **Seven Nation Initiative** represents the strong commitment of Australia, Chile, Indonesia, Norway, Romania, South Africa and the United Kingdom to all three 'pillars' of the NPT - non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. It was launched in July 2005.

³ The **New Agenda Coalition (NAC)**, composed of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, and Sweden, seeks to build an international consensus to make progress on nuclear disarmament. The NAC was launched in June 1998 and played a crucial role in achieving the successful outcome of the 2000 NPT Review Conference.