

NUCLEAR TESTING AND THE ARMS RACE

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During the Cold War, nuclear testing was emblematic of the arms race.

Testing was deemed to be so essential – and understanding of the societal impacts of nuclear testing were so poorly understood – that countries tested in the open air and in the atmosphere.

By the early 1960s, the human and environmental consequences of open air and atmospheric nuclear testing were clearly understood.

- One US test in 1962 disabled or destroyed every satellite then in orbit. US, British and Soviet satellites were affected.
- The risk of atmospheric testing to astronauts and cosmonauts were also understood.
- Public health consequences began to be acknowledged in the West. Strontium 90. Mothers' milk. Bones.

These understandings reinforced cautionary instincts after the Cuban missile crisis. The Limited Test Ban Treaty was negotiated.

But the superpower nuclear competition was unaffected by the LTBT's constraint on above-ground testing.

Testing continued underground. The superpower strategic competition intensified.

Warheads weren't designed to last – any more than missiles were designed to last. Everything was designed to be replaced by something newer and better. Underground testing continued without let-up.

The CTBT came as a severe shock to cycle of newer and better. Nuclear enclaves were not happy. Neither were governments that believed they needed more tests.

- China hadn't tested very much, and was reluctant to close this door.
- India and Pakistan hadn't conducted any hot tests – and were upset that nuclear weapon states that had tested a great many times wanted to close this door – after the Non-proliferation Treaty was indefinitely extended.
- Great Britain and France were reluctant to close this door – even if their options to test nuclear weapons on foreign soil had reached a dead end.
- And some in the United States and the Soviet Union had difficulty imagining a world without nuclear testing.

The result was the CTBT's entry into force provision, which plagues us to this day – twenty years after the Treaty was ready for signatories and ratifications.

The CTBT @ 20 is in limbo.

It doesn't take as many tests to provide for strategic modernization as it used to – making the CTBT's norm against testing as important as ever.

The CTBTO, its IMS and its Technical Secretariat reflect an overwhelming degree of support to end nuclear testing.

The CTBTO, its IMS and its Technical Secretariat represent the global norm – a taboo – against testing. A norm that only one state has rejected since 1998.

The CTBTO, its IMS and its Technical Secretariat provide essential global services – not just the detection of very low-yield tests, but also precious early warning of tsunamis.

The CTBTO, its IMS and its Technical Secretariat are no longer “provisional” and “preparatory.” They work just fine.

So, it's time to take a concrete step toward the Treaty's entry into force.

It's time to underscore international commitment to the CTBT, the nuclear taboo, and the NPT.

It's time to reinforce the commitment to arms control – especially by states that have tested nuclear weapons and that have on-going strategic modernization and replacement programs.

It's time to make the “provisional” and “preparatory” mechanisms of the CTBT permanent, or at least re-designate them

to communicate they are essential elements of the international security architecture.

How? Where there's a will, there's a way. Diplomats can figure this out.

UNGA and UNSC resolutions can lend impetus to this concrete step - especially during the 20th year of waiting for the CTBT's entry into force.

This concrete step makes sense for many powerful reasons. And the reasons to refrain from taking this step are not persuasive.

The longer the Treaty remains in limbo, the more we need concrete steps toward implementation.

Shall we consider this step?