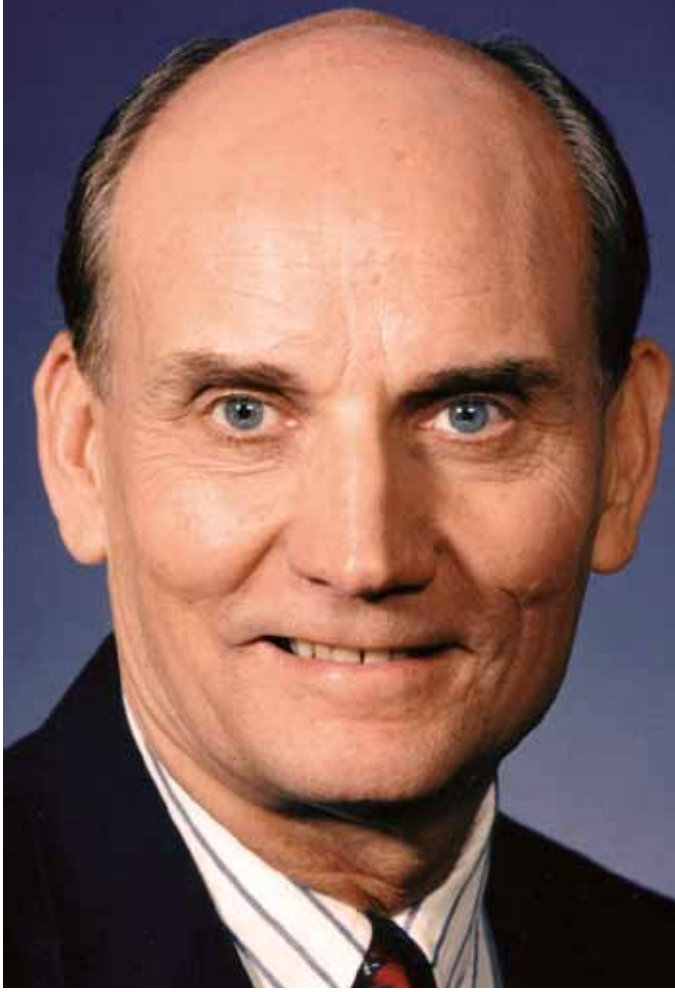
VOICES

Ratifying the CTBT is a critical step for the United States

BY SENATOR JAKE GARN



For a week in 1985, I joined the Space Shuttle Discovery in orbiting the Earth 109 times. This experience allowed me a unique perspective on the pace of technological advancement, and the nature of national and global security.

Viewing the Earth from space, you see neither borders nor nations; all the eye beholds is a small and fleeting glimpse of life. Nothing else threatens to extinguish that life so quickly and so permanently as nuclear weapons.

Since that experience, I have often reflected on the wisdom of President Ronald Reagan's statement: "The only value of possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure that they can't be used ever. I know I speak for people everywhere when I say our dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the Earth."

With the Cold War 20 years behind us and a new set of nuclear dangers ahead, the United States should provide the leadership needed to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons by permanently ending nuclear weapons testing and ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

FAILURE TO SECURE CTBT RATIFICATION IN 1999

Six years after I left Congress, the U.S. Senate briefly debated and voted on whether to provide its advice and consent for ratification of the CTBT.

Although the United States was the first signatory to the Treaty, we failed to secure ratification in 1999 partly due to concerns about monitoring a zero-yield global test ban with existing technology, and doubts about the ability of the United States to maintain existing nuclear warheads without a regular programme of nuclear test explosions. During debate, Republican Senator Orrin Hatch (Utah), who voted against the Treaty, presciently remarked that "there may be a day when my colleagues and I can be convinced that science-based technology can ensure the reliability and safety of our arsenal to a level that matches what we learn through testing. That would be a time to responsibly consider a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty."

That day has arrived. The situation has changed dramatically in the last decade, and now is the responsible time for the United States – and all other Annex 2 States - to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

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THE U.S. NUCLEAR ARSENAL CAN BE MAINTAINED UNDER THE CTBT

In 1999, major elements of the United States' expanded Stockpile Stewardship Program were in the planning stages. Since then, results of the Stockpile Stewardship Program show that the U.S. nuclear arsenal can be maintained under a CTBT. Warhead life extension

programmes have refurbished and recertified major warhead types, effectively extending their service lives. New studies demonstrate that plutonium parts in warheads are not affected by ageing for at least 85 years, much longer than previously thought. Limited production capacity can remanufacture new parts when needed, making new-design "replacement" warheads unnecessary. The Obama administration's 10-year plan for stockpile stewardship activities credibly demonstrates that resources will be available to maintain the existing arsenal if the Senate approves the CTBT.

NORTH KOREA'S 2009 TEST DETECTED BY 61 INTERNATIONAL MONITORING SYSTEM STATIONS

In 1999, there were only 20 monitoring stations in place around the world managed by the fledgling Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). Today, almost 280 of the 337 International Monitoring System facilities foreseen in the CTBT have been installed (with 258 already transmitting data to the International Data Centre in Vienna). These facilities are located in over 80 countries around the world and are capable of detecting underground nuclear explosions as small as 0.1 kilotons. In 2006, when North Korea tested a nuclear weapon, advancements in technology enabled the CTBTO to register the explosion accurately at more than 20 different sites within two hours of detonation. North Korea's second test, in 2009, was detected by 61 stations.

Banning nuclear weapons testing restricts the ability of nuclear-armed States to develop and demonstrate more advanced warhead designs and acts as a significant barrier to non-nuclear weapon States seeking the bomb. The CTBT will be able to conduct critical on-site inspections of nations suspected of testing once the Treaty enters into force. The Treaty also secures an international norm against testing that would inflict isolation, significant loss of prestige, and provoke prompt international sanctions.

SOME FORMER SKEPTICS NOW STRONGLY SUPPORT THE TREATY

Former CTBT skeptics such as former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, are now ardent proponents of the Treaty. In the decade since the U.S. Senate rejected the Treaty, conditions have changed so dramatically that in the words of Ronald Reagan's former Secretary of State, George Shultz, some Republicans "might have been right voting against it [CTBT] some years ago, but they would be right voting for it now, based on these new facts."

As a former U.S. Senator as well as a U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force pilot, I have always supported a strong national defense. As a man who gazed upon Earth from space and understands the threat nuclear weapons pose to all life on Earth, I recognize that ratifying the CTBT is a critical step for the United States and global efforts to reduce and eventually eliminate the nuclear weapons threat.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

SENATOR JAKE GARN
served as a United States Senator representing the state of Utah from 1974 to 1993. Prior to his election as Senator, Mr. Garn was the Mayor of Salt Lake City, Utah, from 1972 to 1974. Senator Garn served as a pilot in the United States Navy and retired as a Brigadier General in 1979. He joined the Space Shuttle Discovery on its mission from 12 to 19 April 1985.

The first radioactive noble gas measurement system installed at RN75 in Charlottesville, United States, was certified on 19 August 2010.