

Getting to Grips with the Nuclear Paradox

The Netherlands, a leading CTBT advocate, says now is the time for entry into force.

BY URI ROSENTHAL, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS

The proliferation of nuclear weapons is one of the major threats to international peace and stability. Although most nations have ratified or acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the ban on nuclear testing is gaining ground, we are facing a threat paradox. As President Obama said, 'In a strange turn of history, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up.'¹

Disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are therefore cornerstones of Dutch foreign security policy and we have consistently worked to strengthen the international system of legally binding treaties and law in this field, with the NPT at its core.

PUSHING FOR THE CTBT'S ENTRY INTO FORCE

In this context, the recent establishment of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), of which the Netherlands is a founding partner, is an important development. At our last ministerial NPDI meeting in Berlin in April, we decided to aim for greater transparency in the way nuclear weapon States report their disarmament efforts. This can also help create the conditions for

new steps towards further nuclear arms reductions between the existing nuclear weapon States. As NPDI partners, we will also intensify our efforts to universalize the International Atomic Energy Agency's Additional Protocol, which is vital to ensure that nuclear activities remain peaceful, and work for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The CTBT is an essential part of the non-proliferation and disarmament system. The Netherlands has always been one of its strongest advocates. It was among the first Annex 2 States² to sign it and did so on 24 September 1996 – the very day that the Treaty was opened for signature. Former Ambassador Jaap Ramaker, who had played a key role in the

[1] Barack Obama, Prague, 5 April 2009.

[2] The Annex 2 States include 44 countries, which possessed nuclear power or research reactors in 1996. Thirty-five have already ratified the CTBT.

Treaty's drafting and adoption, became the Special Representative to Promote the Treaty's Ratification Process.

However, nine remaining Annex 2 States still need to ratify the Treaty before it can enter into force. The Dutch government will continue its diplomatic efforts to reach that target. Some argue that nuclear tests are still necessary for safety, to verify the reliability of existing arsenals. But technological progress has made nuclear tests redundant. Today's sophisticated, computerized simulations can effectively guarantee the reliability of nuclear stockpiles.

A BAN ON NUCLEAR TESTS IS MORE NECESSARY THAN EVER

Why ban nuclear tests then, one could argue, when there's no more need to conduct them anyway? The reason is that by banning the tests, we can



restrain new countries from developing new nuclear weapons programmes and halt the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons.

Such restraint is more necessary today than ever before. The recently discovered enrichment facility in North Korea augments our concerns about its nuclear programme. The full extent of the Iranian nuclear programme – especially its possible military dimensions – remains unclear. The international relations expert Parag Khanna noted that ‘States seek nuclear weapons to deter the United States and nearby enemies, to compel neighbours to accept their dominance, and to gain status in the world’s nuclear club.’³

In addition to concerns about certain States, we also have to confront the danger of nuclear arms falling into the hands of non-State actors like international terrorist groups. The political commentator Moisés Naím pointed to an increase in illegal arms smuggling and its links with international, organized crime³. Unconventional, hybrid threats caused by a combination of such forces may seem remote, but the danger of nuclear terrorism is real. NATO referred in its new Strategic Concept to nuclear terrorism as one of the primary international threats.

A POWERFUL DETERRENT TO WOULD-BE VIOLATORS

This brings me to another issue: the CTBT’s verifiability. Some argue that despite the Treaty, clandestine tests can still go unnoticed by the international community. This is not true: the CTBT’s International Monitoring System is up and running. From its earliest stages, the Netherlands has been closely involved by contributing expertise to its further development. Moreover, the monitoring system has proven its effectiveness

[3] Parag Khanna, *How to Run the World: Charting a Course to the Next Renaissance* (New York, 2011).

[4] Moisés Naím, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York, 2005).

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already. Its seismic monitoring network successfully detected both nuclear tests by North Korea in 2006 and 2009. However, we would have been able to conduct intensive on-site inspections had the Treaty been in effect. Once the Treaty is in force, the combination of the monitoring system’s technologies and the possibility of on-site inspections should deter countries considering future clandestine tests.

MONITORING DATA ALSO HAVE CIVILIAN USES

The monitoring system’s relevance to early warning for natural disasters has grown as well, for example by contributing seismic and hydroacoustic monitoring data to tsunami warning centres. If it had not been for the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization sharing these data with the Japanese authorities on 11 March, the number of casualties from the 9.0 magnitude earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan would have been even more tragic. From the very next day, the monitoring system’s radionuclide stations around the globe could trace the dispersion of radioactivity from the Fukushima nuclear power plant to Russia, the United States, Europe and eventually to the southern hemisphere. In this regard, we should explore the possibilities of expanding the civilian use of the monitoring system in other areas of emergency awareness.

Finally, although the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has not yet entered into force, it has already contributed to the international norm against nuclear weapons testing. Since the early 1990s, the five NPT nuclear weapon States have maintained their moratoria on tests. Pakistan and India have maintained their moratoria since 1998. Ratification by remaining Annex 2 countries will further strengthen the norm. The Treaty’s entry into force will bolster the verification system. I therefore welcome Ghana’s recent ratification and Indonesia’s efforts to complete its ratification process in the course of this year. I hope that more announcements will follow at this month’s Article XIV conference in New York. Fifteen years after the Treaty’s adoption by the UN General Assembly on 10 September 1996, we should make a strong push towards its entry into force. Now is the time.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in October 2010. From 1999, he represented the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) in the Dutch Senate, becoming its leader in the Senate in 2005. Prior to this, he was appointed professor of political science at Erasmus University in 1980 and professor of government at Leiden University in 1987. Besides his academic career, he was chairman of the Institute for Safety, Security and Crisis Management.