

VOICES

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: Helping to create a truly global community

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FORMER LEADER OF THE SOVIET UNION

When President Barack Obama signed the U.S. instrument of ratification for the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, on 2 February 2011, he cleared the way for the United States and Russia to put the landmark accord into effect. Three days later, the new START officially entered into force.

The new START reduces the size of the American and Russian nuclear stockpiles, thus representing a serious step forward for both countries. I hope this will energize efforts to take the next step to a world free of nuclear weapons: a ban on all nuclear testing.

In the final stretch, President Obama put his credibility and political capital on the line to achieve ratification. That a sufficient number of Republican senators put the interests of their nation's security, and the world's, above party politics is encouraging.

The success was not without cost. In return for the treaty's ratification, Mr. Obama has promised to allocate U.S.\$ 85 billion over the next 10 years for modernizing the American nuclear weapons arsenal, which is hardly compatible with a nuclear-free world.

A TOTAL BAN ON NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE

The priority now is to ratify the separate treaty banning nuclear testing. The stalemate on this agreement, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), has lasted more than a decade. I recall how hard it was in the second half of the 1980s to start moving in this direction. At the time, the Soviet Union declared a unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing. However, when the United States continued to test, we had to respond.

Even so, we insisted on our position of principle, calling for a total ban on nuclear testing under strict international control, including the use of seismic monitoring and on-site inspections.

In 1996 the United Nations General Assembly finally opened the CTBT for signing and ratification. But this pact has a particularly stringent requirement for its entry into force: every one of the 44 "nuclear technology holder states" must sign and ratify it.



»Universal ratification of the test ban treaty would be a step toward creating a truly global community of nations, in which all share the responsibility for humankind's future.«

As of today, 35 have done so, including Russia, France and Britain. Still, the list of countries that have not ratified remains formidable: It includes the United States, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, India, North Korea and Pakistan (the final three have not even signed). Each "rejectionist" country has its arguments,



The 'fireside chat' – the first meeting between U.S. President Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev during the Geneva Summit in 1985.

but all are not equally responsible for the stalemate. The process of ratification stalled after the United States Senate voted in 1999 to reject the Treaty, claiming that it was not verifiable and citing the need for “stockpile stewardship” to assure the reliability of American weapons. The real reason was doubtless the senators’ desire to keep testing.

Nevertheless, in the 21st century only one country, North Korea, has ventured to conduct nuclear explosions. There is, in effect, a multilateral moratorium on testing. It is increasingly obvious that for the international community nuclear explosions are unacceptable.

CTBT VERIFICATION REGIME CAN ALSO HELP WITH DISASTER MITIGATION

In the meantime the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) has built up a strong verification regime. Over 260 monitoring stations — around 80 percent of the number needed to complete the system — are now fully operational. The system proved its effectiveness by detecting the relatively low-yield nuclear explosions conducted by North Korea in 2006 and 2009. And in March 2011, the system once again demonstrated its capability after the 9.0 magnitude earthquake off the coast of Japan triggered a massive tsunami. Data from the CTBTO’s monitoring stations helped tsunami warning centres in Japan and the wider Pacific region to issue rapid tsunami alerts. Following the accident at

the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, the CTBTO became an authoritative source of information on radiation dispersal around the globe for both its Member States and international organizations involved in nuclear safety and disaster mitigation.

So with North Korea being the only country to have conducted any tests over the last decade, should we, perhaps, be content with this virtual moratorium on nuclear testing?

No, because commitments that are not legally binding can easily be violated. This would render futile any attempts to influence the behaviour of countries that have been causing so many headaches for the United States and other nations.

U.S. SENATE WOULD BE WRONG TO REJECT CTBT AGAIN

The American senators should give this serious thought. As George Shultz, Secretary of State under President Ronald Reagan, has said, Republicans may have been right when they rejected the Treaty in 1999, but they would be wrong to do so again.

It is fairly certain that once the Senate has agreed to ratification, most of the countries still waiting will follow. No country wants to be a “rogue nation” forever, and we have seen that dialogue with even the most recalcitrant governments is possible. Yet dialogue can work only if the United States refrains from telling others what they must not do while keeping its own options open.

On 23 September, foreign ministers from the CTBTO’s 182 Member States will gather in New York for the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT. They will jointly call upon those States that need to adhere to the Treaty so that it can enter into force. They will commit their countries to act at the highest political level to make this happen. Let’s hope that this will lead to further ratifications, especially by the ‘rejectionist’ countries mentioned above.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

was the last head of state of the Soviet Union. From 1985, he embarked on a programme of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). He declared a moratorium on nuclear testing from 1985-87 and then again from 1991. While in power, agreement was reached with the United States on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987 and START in 1991. In recognition of his outstanding services as a reformer and world political leader, Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.