

Comprehensive Test Ban: The Worst Arms Control Treaty Ever

Dr. Kathleen C. Bailey
Senior Associate, National Institute for Public Policy
former Deputy Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency

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Senior Associate, National Institute for Public Policy
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The U.S. Senate should not consent to ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The treaty would gravely undermine the ability of the United States to maintain a strong nuclear deterrent into the 21st century.

A credible U.S. nuclear deterrent plays a critical role in U.S. security. Nuclear testing is vital to the U.S. deterrent for several reasons. First, nuclear testing assures U.S. leadership-and the leaderships of our allies and potential enemies-that the U.S. nuclear deterrent works as intended. Without testing, confidence in stockpile weapons declines. History has demonstrated that components and materials age in ways that cannot be predicted. In the past, nuclear weapons testing has been instrumental not only in discovering problems in a given type of weapon, but also in assuring that the "fix" worked.

Second, testing will be vital for validating the components, materials, processes, and procedures for remanufacturing existing nuclear warheads. Today's weapons cannot simply be rebuilt "as is" for a host of reasons. For example, some components and materials are no longer available and substitutes must be created, and some manufacturing procedures are no longer considered safe and must be revised.

Third, nuclear testing is essential for the inevitable need to produce nuclear weapons of new designs in response changing threats to U.S. security. As the directors of both U.S. nuclear weapons design laboratories have stated, they would not have confidence in the workability of a new design that had not been tested. The need for modernization of U.S. nuclear warheads is likely to increase as other nations develop their own nuclear weapons and effective countermeasures against the capabilities of existing U.S. nuclear weapons

delivery systems. China's recent acquisition of top secret information about the performance of U.S. nuclear-weapons submarines demonstrates that we cannot control or predict when our existing weapons types will become more vulnerable.

Fourth, we cannot maintain a nuclear deterrent without a competent cadre of scientists and engineers. Testing is needed to recruit, train, and validate the competence of these experts.

Test ban treaty proponents argue that past testing data and sophisticated computer simulations are sufficient to perform these tasks and that, if necessary, nuclear testing could be resumed. Neither contention is accurate. No one would believe that an auto maker is doing its job of providing a safe vehicle if it depends on 15-year-old test data to determine how well components and materials will fare. No one should want to buy a year-2000 model if it were designed using only 1985 test data. Similarly, we should not trust that the continuing reliability of our nuclear arsenal can be assured using old test data.

Claims that a rapid return to nuclear testing in a crisis is possible are preposterous. Anyone knowledgeable of the Washington political process would know that the decision to resume testing would be too politically explosive. Additionally, at present, the U.S. test site in Nevada is more than a year away from being able to conduct a test. This situation is worsening as experts retire and equipment becomes unworkable.

Not only does the test ban treaty have high national security costs, it has few, if any benefits. Test ban proponents claim the treaty is necessary to constrain other nations from developing nuclear weapons. This is simply untrue. Most nations are already obligated not to develop nuclear weapons. More than 180 nations already have committed to not testing by virtue of their ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

For the few nations who have stayed outside Non-Proliferation Treaty, or who might cheat on their treaty obligations, the test ban poses no serious obstacle. Some designs of nuclear weapons are relatively simple, so the user can be certain of their performance without testing. One of the bombs that the U.S. dropped on Japan to end World War II, over 50 years ago, was untested. Also, South Africa designed and deployed nuclear weapons that had never been tested. Think how much easier it must be today with the wide availability of sophisticated computers and the massive amount of information that has been declassified about the U.S. nuclear weapons program. Even relatively sophisticated designs, untested, can be deployed with high confidence that they will work well enough to create massive damage. Testing is necessary, however, when safe, highly complex nuclear weapons designs are required for the United States' high-performance delivery systems.

Treaty proponents also contend nations will not proliferate if the U.S. shows moral leadership. Presumably, other nations will see that U.S. testing has ended and follow suit. This idea can be discredited with recent history. Despite the U.S. self-imposed ban since 1992, India and Pakistan openly tested nuclear weapons and there are indications that both Russia and China may have conducted clandestine nuclear tests (we have no way of knowing with current detection technologies).

In reality, the test ban is likely to foster proliferation. On one hand, U.S. allies who now feel secure under the U.S. nuclear umbrella will, over time, see the aging U.S. stockpile as increasingly unreliable. They will see that the

U.S. is no longer committed to keeping the arsenal modern. Perhaps Japan, Germany, Italy or others will be tempted to develop their own nuclear arsenals as the best means to maintain security.

The test ban is also likely to stimulate increased nuclear weapons production in some countries. This is because they will see the opportunity to level the playing field: the U.S. arsenal will be "frozen" in terms of sophistication and number. China, for example, may feel that it can match U.S. capabilities if the United States can no longer modernize its arsenal.

If China, Russia, or others were to want to continue nuclear testing under a CTBT, they could do so with little or no risk of detection. There are currently no technical means to detect some methods of clandestine testing, such as muffling the explosion by conducting the test in a large underground cavity. Also effective would be conducting the test in mid-ocean where the tests occurrence would be known but those responsible would not.

The majority of Americans support maintenance of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. A Senate debate can help the public understand the irreplaceable role of nuclear testing for maintaining safe and reliable nuclear weapons. The debate would make clear that the test ban treaty posed great dangers, but no benefits, for U.S. national security.