



## The South Asian Bomb: Forum

# Should We Continue to Seek Ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty?

Neither India nor Pakistan is a party to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, passed by the United Nations in December 1996, or to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. India has argued vociferously that the CTBT and the nonproliferation regime are tantamount to a form of nuclear apartheid. Supporters of the treaty, including many abolitionists, argue that only these two agreements, flawed though they may be, stand in the way of rampant growth in the number of nuclear weapon states. *M&GS* asked two abolition advocates with differing views—Dr. Victor Sidel of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and Daryl Kimball of the Coalition to Reduce Nuclear Dangers—to explain the cases for and against CTBT ratification in light of the South Asian nuclear tests.

### **Why Abolitionists Should Not Support the CTBT in Its Current Form**

Victor W. Sidel, M.D.

Since the nuclear explosive tests by India in early May it has become clear to me that I can no longer participate unservedly in efforts by anti-nuclear-war groups to urge the US Congress to ratify the CTBT in its current form. This is a sharp change in my view that requires some careful explanation.

#### **Atmospheric Testing**

I have personally been working for a ban on nuclear weapons testing since the early 1950s when I was an undergraduate physics major at Princeton. Despite assurances by the US that nuclear fallout from the atmospheric tests in the open air posed no health risks, those of us who were aware of the local and global fallout of radionuclides produced by the tests knew the assurances were uninformed or, more likely, purposely false. Documentation by the National Cancer Institute 40 years later [see "NCI Study Raises New Concerns about Fallout-Related Thyroid Cancer," *M&GS* 1998;5:8-10] confirmed our concerns.

Because of the potential health consequences of the radioactive fallout and because of the role of testing in perpetuating

### **Why the CTBT Is Still An Essential Step Toward Nuclear Abolition**

Daryl Kimball

The nuclear weapons test explosions by India and Pakistan in May 1998 have pushed those nations to the edge of a full-scale nuclear arms race and have increased the likelihood of a nuclear conflagration involving one-fifth of the world's inhabitants. The tests have also rekindled the debate on the value of the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and how to break through the obstacles to the elimination nuclear weapons worldwide.

From the perspective of this nuclear weapons abolitionist, the troubling events in South Asia underscore three things:

- a need to reassess India's policies on testing and disarmament, which now appear to have been designed to preserve India's nuclear capability;
- the importance of prompt implementation of the CTBT;
- the need for new leadership and more aggressive action to achieve nuclear weapons abolition.

#### **India, Pakistan and the CTBT**

The Indian government's reckless

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the nuclear arms race, those of us in the Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), formed in 1961, argued vigorously for a test ban. The 1963 Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), which banned nuclear testing in the atmosphere, under the oceans and in space, was seen as a major victory.

## Underground Testing

While the LTBT did nothing to slow the nuclear arms race and permitted the pollution of the ecosphere by radionuclides through venting or underground deposit, it at least sharply reduced the accumulation of short-lived iodine-131 in the thyroid glands of children and delayed the ecologic spread of long-lived isotopes. Efforts then shifted to urging a moratorium on all explosive (fissile) testing and urging a “comprehensive ban,” not only to stop further despoilment of the ecosphere but even more because we believed a moratorium and a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) would block military forces from developing new nuclear weapons and prevent these forces being secure in the reliability of the nuclear weapons in their stockpiles. A CTBT, many of us thought, would make reliance on “nuclear deterrence” more problematic, would slow the nuclear arms race and would be a step in the direction of nuclear abolition. We thought it a step forward when a number of nuclear weapon states (NWS) established and respected a moratorium on testing.

## Negotiation and Signing of the CTBT

I began to have my doubts, as a member of a delegation to Geneva, about the value of the CTBT as it was being negotiated by the Conference on Disarmament (CD). The Indian ambassador to the CD told us that India would refuse to accept the CTBT then being negotiated because it would allow the nuclear weapon states to maintain their nuclear weapons stockpiles and even to develop and test new nuclear weapons. She said that India would only accept a CTBT that called for a timebound goal of nuclear abolition. We responded that while we respected India’s principled position, we nonetheless believed that the CTBT then being negotiated was better than no CTBT at all and that it would lead toward the goal that we and India were seeking.

The CTBT negotiated in Geneva was approved by the UN General Assembly and was signed by 147 nations at the UN in September 1996. This treaty bans “any

nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion,” but the US claims that “subcritical” explosions and inertial confinement fusion explosions as well as computer simulations—central components of the so-called Stockpile Stewardship and Maintenance Program (SSMP)—are permitted and is conducting such tests [1,2]. Without a real move by the NWS towards the abolition of nuclear weapons, the CTBT in its current form permits continued “vertical” proliferation by the NWS, helps maintain the NWS monopoly, is provocative to the nuclear have-nots, and may actually intensify the nuclear arms race [3,4,5].

## The India and Pakistan Tests

The NWS have refused for 3 decades to set up any timetable for compliance with Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1970, which calls for nuclear as well as general disarmament. Even after the World Court in a unanimous advisory opinion in 1997 called on the NWS to move expeditiously toward fulfillment of their obligations under Article 6, the NWS have refused to make a timebound commitment. At a NPT Preparatory Committee meeting in Geneva two days before the India tests no progress toward abolition was made.

This refusal to proceed toward abolition alongside a history of some 2,000 US explosive nuclear tests (and a comparable number of Soviet tests), the continuation of US non-explosive tests, and the size of the current US nuclear stockpile, make US complaints about the tests by India and Pakistan and the imposition of economic sanctions against the poor people of these countries seem cynical and hypocritical.

A group of 73 US Roman Catholic bishops in June 1998 issued a statement commenting on the India and Pakistan tests and on the SSMP: “Such an investment in a program to upgrade the ability to design, develop, test and maintain nuclear weapons signals quite clearly that the United States shows no intention of moving forward with progressive disarmament, and certainly no commitment to eliminating these weapons entirely.”

I of course believe the action of the new Indian government and the response by Pakistan in conducting explosive tests was self-destructive and immoral. But the explosive nuclear tests by India and Pakistan were,

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as many have said, a “wake-up” call to the world. I have come to agree with India’s long-held position that a CTBT without a timebound framework for abolition may be a step backwards.

### What Is To Be Done

I will in the future devote my own energies to support a series of steps that I believe may lead more directly to nuclear abolition [6]:

- Immediate de-alerting of all nuclear weapons. This is relatively simple process that can be undertaken unilaterally by any of the nuclear weapon states.

- Ratification by the Russian Duma of START II and its prompt implementation by the US and Russia. This will almost certainly require that the US pay the costs in both countries.

- Negotiation of START III, with the inclusion of other nuclear weapon states.

- A ban on production and on transfer of all weapons-grade fissile material with progress toward elimination, and a ban on production of tritium.

- A cessation or at least a sharp reduction in the SSMP, as called for in House Concurrent Resolution 307, introduced on July 23, 1998 by Representative Markey.

- Most important, progress toward nuclear abolition requires prompt negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention that sets forth a schedule for abolition of nuclear weapons. A “Model Nuclear Weapons Convention,” in the drafting of which I was privileged to participate, was circulated by the UN in 1997 (A/C.1/52/7) as a work in progress. Both India and Pakistan have agreed to participate in negotiations for a nuclear weapons conven-

tion, but the US has not. Representative Woolsey has called for US support for the convention by introducing House Resolution 479 on June 18, 1998. [Ed. note: The text of the Model Nuclear Weapons Convention may be found on the Web at <http://www.ddh.nl/org/ialana>.]

I continue to work in every way I can to support the abolition of nuclear weapons. I just can’t bring myself any longer to work unreservedly for ratification of what I consider to be a hypocritical and dysfunctional formulation of a so-called CTBT. •

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nuclear blasts, in addition to raising regional tensions to new levels and provoking Pakistan to follow suit, have unfortunately undermined India's credibility and long-standing leadership for nuclear disarmament. The tests also confirm early suspicions that India's CTBT negotiating posture in 1996 was designed in part to avoid Indian participation in the CTBT and to leave India unconstrained to preserve its nuclear ambitions, which date back to the time of China's first nuclear test in 1964. Since its first nuclear blast in 1974, India has sought to maintain its "nuclear option." With the ascendancy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India has exercised that "option" and declared itself a nuclear weapon state. The BJP has thereby repeated many of the mistakes of the nuclear weapon states (NWS) that India has so steadfastly pointed out over the decades.

To be certain, there are elements of the Indian government's critique of the original nuclear weapon states' policies that are right on the mark—particularly their failure to take aggressive, tangible steps toward nuclear weapons elimination since the end of the Cold War and the danger of the development of new nuclear weapon types through the US's sophisticated stockpile stewardship program. Global condemnation of the South Asian tests is warranted, but becomes hypocritical when expressed by the governments of the original nuclear weapon states.

The problems identified by India and by the nuclear abolition movement, however, are not caused by the CTBT, which was—and still is—particularly inconvenient for India's nuclear ambitions. Nor will the problems of continued possession of nuclear weapons and the development of new nuclear weapons by the US and the other NWS be solved by opposing the CTBT in its current form. The current impasse on nuclear disarmament, as typified by the stagnant START process, cannot be broken simply by demanding commitments to a disarmament schedule in a test ban treaty from government leaders of nuclear weapon states who do not accept the concept of nuclear disarmament and who can just barely tolerate the test ban.

The source of these nuclear dangers is the continued existence of and reliance on nuclear weapons by the eight nuclear weapon states, as well as by US allies in Europe and East Asia that operate under the US nuclear umbrella. So long as nuclear weapons exist, most nuclear weapon states will regrettably try to "steward" their stockpile of nuclear weapons and maintain a capa-

bility to develop and build more, regardless of whether there is a test moratorium or a CTBT. Beyond ratification and implementation of the CTBT, which will help prevent new nuclear dangers from emerging, nuclear abolitionists must focus on changing the continuing reliance on nuclear weapons and their preservation by building a diverse and effective opposition to security regimes that involve nuclear weapons.

### The CTBT Is Still Valuable

From its inception in the 1950s, the nuclear test ban has been pursued in order to curb nuclear arms races by preventing the field testing of new and more deadly nuclear bomb types. The CTBT was first proposed to cap the US-Soviet arms race. (Soviet president Gorbachev declared a unilateral test moratorium in 1991; at the urging of antinuclear activists, the US Congress suspended testing in 1992 and President Clinton extended the US moratorium in 1993, initiating at the same time a costly program to enhance the US nuclear laboratory facilities to "maintain the safety and reliability" of the nuclear stockpile without test explosions—a program known as "stockpile stewardship." Clinton declared a "zero-yield" ban in 1995.) In more recent times, the CTBT has also been pursued because it might head off "regional" nuclear arms races. The 1996 CTBT agreement endorsed by the UN and signed by 150 nations aims to "prohibit nuclear weapon test explosions and all other nuclear explosions" and would significantly help curb new nuclear bomb work.

But in early 1996 India announced that unless the nuclear weapon states agreed to pursue nuclear disarmament according to a time-bound framework, it would not support the treaty. India repeated arguments made by US NGOs that the "stockpile stewardship" program gave the US weapons development capabilities that made a ban on nuclear explosions "discriminatory." India therefore sought further restrictions on weapons experiments as part of the CTBT.

When IPPNW co-president Victor Sidel and I arrived in Geneva in February, 1996, as part of an IPPNW/PSR delegation to meet with CTBT negotiators, India's proposals were threatening to ruin the chance for an agreement. Together we tried to make the case that the perfect should not become the enemy of the good: that CTBT talks should be

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finalized and efforts to achieve nuclear weapons abolition and to end dangerous stockpile stewardship programs should be redoubled. That prescription is as valuable today as it was two and one half years ago.

As President Kennedy said of the CTBT 35 years ago: "No treaty ...can provide absolute security.... But it can ... offer far fewer risks than an unabated, uncontrolled, unpredictable arms race." Because the CTBT can still help prevent a renewed US-Russian arms race and a new South Asian arms race, we should still work hard to ensure its prompt ratification and entry into force. Falling short of this goal can only provide aid and comfort to nuclear weapons proponents worldwide and leave open the possibility that the progress achieved toward a test ban—both real and symbolic—will be lost.

### Next Steps in Support of Abolition

To reinforce the CTBT's effect on constraining qualitative improvements of nuclear weapons, US activists must develop a more effective campaign to achieve deep reductions in the scope and cost of the stockpile stewardship program. We should also press the U. S. and the other nuclear weapon states to adopt policies that prohibit the design, development, or production of new and/or modified nuclear warhead types.

Simultaneously, we must help revive the dormant disarmament process. This requires much more than the recitation of lists of excellent nuclear risk reduction proposals at international conferences. More than anything it requires the cultivation of new, creative, and courageous political leadership that can initiate a multilateral discussion and negotiations aimed towards nuclear weapons elimination. Stronger leadership from the US government is vital, but US action is unlikely to emerge without sustained pressure from non-nuclear states from diverse parts of the globe.

India, before its 1998 tests might have been capable of such leadership, but has now squandered its moral authority. New prag-

matic leadership must come from groups such as the New Agenda Coalition [see "Eight Nation Initiative to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, pg. 68]. With sustained work from this core group and with strong support from NGOs around the world, we can help to build consensus among the nuclear and the non-nuclear states about a road map toward a nuclear weapon free world that should include:

- speedy implementation of START II and START III reductions (without waiting for parliamentary approval). including taking nuclear forces off hair-trigger alert;
- a ban on the production of weapons-usable nuclear materials;
- further deep reductions in the arsenals of all declared and undeclared nuclear weapon states;
- more effective barriers to the transfer of sensitive nuclear weapons technology and materiel, including strengthening the safety and security of Russia's nuclear complex.

As many non-nuclear states have proposed, a key part of this process would be the initiation of discussions and later negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament (or an equally appropriate forum) on the framework, political conditions, and verification mechanisms needed for the final elimination of nuclear weapons.

The CTBT has always been—and remains—a vital step on the road toward this larger goal.

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