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Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

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Roman Bäcker

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)

Proposed nuclear testing agreement that would impose a comprehensive test ban (CTB) on all nuclear explosions. Negotiations among the United States, the USSR, and the United Kingdom have been sporadically carried out regarding this accord since the mid-1950s.

CTB discussions were initially implemented by U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower and continued over a forty-year period. Talks have been intermittent as the priorities of both the United States and the Soviet administrations shifted and tensions flared and eased. On the way to a comprehensive test ban, incremental bans have been reached, culminating in the Partial Test Ban, Threshold Test Ban, and Peaceful Nuclear Explosions treaties.

Two recent events have significantly influenced CTB negotiations. First, because of the tedious progress made toward a CTB over the years, many nonnuclear nations in 1988 pressured for an amendment to the Partial Test Ban Treaty that would transform it into a CTB. Such a proposed amendment, which was backed by the USSR and a number of Western states, was blocked by the threatened vetoes of the United States and the United Kingdom in 1991.

Second, during the last years of the Soviet Union, nuclear testing became limited, and in October 1991 a one-year test ban moratorium was implemented. This resulted in a U.S. policy enacted in August 1992 that established a nine-month moratorium and then severely limited both the number of nuclear tests and their yields over a multi-year period. Negotiations with the Russian Federation concerning a CTB continue, and the moratorium continued during the Clinton administration despite repeated Chinese testing of nuclear devices.

Criticisms of a CTB focus on the inability of the United States to maintain the reliability of its nuclear

weaponry and to develop new generations of such. Concerns over verification of Russian compliance also exist.

On October 13, 1999, the U.S. Senate voted predominantly along party lines, with the Republicans being in the opposition, and failed to ratify the treaty by a vote of 48 to 51. Ratification would have required a two-thirds majority, or 67 votes. The opposition claimed that the treaty did not provide adequate verification and would harm the security interests of the United States. Some critics claimed that the vote was a reflection of Republican resentment over a series of victories by President Bill Clinton. Other critics claimed that Clinton and his administration had mishandled the issue and should have withdrawn the treaty in the face of what appeared to be certain defeat. International reaction was negative. British prime minister Tony Blair and German chancellor Gerhard Schröder had specifically appealed for the U.S. Senate to ratify the treaty. After the Senate rejection of the treaty there were warnings from Russia of the possibility of a new arms race.

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SEE ALSO Arms Control Treaties and Agreements; Partial Test Ban Treaty

Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)/Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Agreement and then organization dedicated to cooperation and security. The idea of holding a European conference on peace and cooperation was originally a Soviet move in the early years of the Cold War. In the 1960s détente provided a basis for the European conference, which was arranged by Finnish initiative in 1975. The Helsinki Accords produced by the conference ironically did not prevent a peaceful change of the postwar status quo but, on the contrary, justified and made possible a