

ACA | Arms Control Association

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TO: Friends of the CTBT

FR: Daryl Kimball, Executive Director

RE: Toward Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Entry Into Force—a view from Washington

Now more than ever, the CTBT is critical to the success of global nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament enterprise. By banning the “bang,” the CTBT limits the ability of established nuclear-weapon states to field more sophisticated warheads and makes it far more difficult for newer members of the club to perfect smaller, more easily deliverable warheads.

Achieving entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) depends on leadership, not only from the United States but also from other governments supportive of the Treaty.

Prospects for Ratification in the United States

In the United States, the political conditions are more favorable for the ratification of the CTBT than at any time since the Treaty was opened for signature. As a result of the 2008 election, roughly 60 Senators already likely support the CTBT. With strong and smart Presidential leadership, securing the necessary 67 Senate votes for ratification in before the end of 2010 is possible.

During the presidential campaign, Barack Obama pledged to “reach out to the Senate to secure the ratification of the CTBT at the earliest practical date and...then launch a diplomatic effort to bring onboard other states whose ratifications are required for the treaty to enter into force.”

In his April 1 joint statement with Russian President Dimitry Medvedev, President Obama “underscored the importance of the entering into force the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty [and] confirmed his commitment to work for American ratification of this Treaty.”

Nevertheless, given opposition to the CTBT from key Republicans and the lack of any meaningful discussion of the treaty since 1999, Senators will need to be briefed on the CTBT-related issues and their questions and concerns must be addressed thoroughly, respectfully, and consistently. This requires high-level, coordinated campaign for the Treaty led by the White House and key members of the cabinet, carefully organized Senate hearings, and smart, bipartisan leadership from SFRC Chair John Kerry, and the support of key Republican Senators including Richard Lugar and John McCain.

In my view, achieving U.S. ratification will be a one to two year endeavor. While it is important to get started early, getting to 67 won’t happen immediately. The Senate has not thought seriously about the CTBT in a decade. A substantial number of Senators and staff are totally unfamiliar with the subject.

It is also important not to push Senators to come to a judgment on the CTBT too soon since that may lead some key Senators who voted “no” in 1999 (like Lugar and McCain) to reiterate their opposition.

Therefore, during the first half of 2009, the administration should state its intention to secure CTBT ratification, organize its CTBT team; update and build its case for the CTBT; line up support from opinion leaders; and begin discussions with key Senators.

The second half of 2009 should be focused on understanding the views and concerns of potential Republican supporters, working with the SFRC and other committees to plan for hearings; and begin hearings on technical issues.

By early 2010, the administration should initiate more intensive, high-level lobbying of key Senators; work with the Senate to prepare the resolution of ratification; build public support for the CTBT; and, if the votes are there, hold a final series of hearings and schedule a vote, ideally before the May NPT RevCon.

Winning over new, uncommitted Senators and changing the minds of some who voted “no” in 1999 will require direct Presidential engagement and “new” evidence that gives them reason to reconsider and support the CTBT. It will also require definitive rebuttals to opposition allegations.

First, it is important to note that the United States already bears most CTBT-related responsibilities but has denied itself the political and security benefits of ratification. Such a situation is self-defeating since there is neither the need nor any political support for renewed U.S. testing for any reason.

Second, the administration must address lingering concerns about the verifiability of the CTBT by documenting how and why the international monitoring system, on-site inspections, and transparency measures provided for under the CTBT, combined with U.S. intelligence capabilities, can effectively detect and deter militarily significant cheating. It must be made clear that the IMS is more than capable right now to support the verification and monitoring mission.

Third, the administration must reinforce the fact and present new evidence that the United States already has the technical capabilities to maintain confidence in the safety and reliability of its existing nuclear-weapon stockpile in the absence of nuclear test explosions.

Some CTBT critics will allege that the U.S. nuclear stockpile cannot be maintained indefinitely without testing or without new warhead production (such as President George W. Bush's costly plan for new, so-called reliable replacement warheads, a.k.a. RRW). The RRW approach is technically unnecessary, is not cost effective, and in our view would undermine one of the core purposes of the CTBT: to halt qualitative improvements to nuclear weaponry. Obama has not included funding for RRW in his proposed 2010 budget and has pledged "not to authorize the development of new nuclear weapons."

To reassure Senators concerned about the viability of the U.S. stockpile in the absence of testing, the administration and Senate supporters of the CTBT will likely seek appropriate and timely ways to provide a strong commitment to: a) provide the resources and scientific tools that are necessary to maintain and extend the life of existing warheads; and b) ensure that the program is executed in a manner that avoids unnecessary modifications of legacy warheads that could undermine confidence in their reliability.

Fourth, CTBT critics will argue that the Treaty's tough entry into force requirements mean that it will never likely come into effect. This must be countered with strong signals and evidence that U.S. ratification will lead to positive action by China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Egypt, Iran and other key CTBT hold-out states.

The Important Role of the Friends of the CTBT Group

To keep the CTBT high on the U.S. agenda and to press China and other hold-out states to either sign or ratify the CTBT, it is essential that governments publicly reiterate the vital importance of CTBT entry into force at the highest levels and through their bilateral contacts with the leaders of the remaining Annex 2 states.

To help put the CTBT over the finish line, we also strongly urge that like-minded pro-CTBT states work together to develop a common diplomatic strategy to persuade the remaining states that must sign and/or ratify the treaty to do so and to announce their intentions to execute that strategy at the September 23-25 Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT in New York. A select group of Foreign Ministers from Friends of the CTBT states should meet with U.S. Secretary of State Clinton in New York in September to discuss the strategy. Today's meeting provides an excellent opportunity to launch such an effort.

The next one to two years may represent the best opportunity to secure the future of this long-awaited and much-needed treaty. It is time to get to work.

