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Trends. Nonratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: The Logic of Illogic

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Since the recent nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, there is growing consensus among leaders in the United States Senate that the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) should not be ratified. Part of this may deal with lifting a finger to the domestic political winds, but a larger part may be based on strategic illogic.

The advocates of nonratification maintain that the CTBT is unverifiable. Yes, the treaty is not 100% verifiable. Very low-level tests can be missed, although the value of these tests for weaponization is generally thought to be very low as well. And what security-related treaty that eventually comes down to assessing political intent could be 100% verifiable? However, the treaty mandates an international monitoring system and upgrades of the system, a global network of seismic sensors, that apparently did detect the presence of nuclear testing--India's and Pakistan's. The treaty also provides the vehicle for short-notice, on-site inspection to assess allegations that a nuclear test has occurred. The bottom line: a competent security analyst does not recommend rejecting an imperfect security system leaving nothing in its place, but rather putting the system in place while continuing to upgrade it or until it is replaced with another.

Advocates of nonratification also maintain that the CTBT is ineffectual. To some of these advocates, ineffectual is merely synonymous with unverifiable and is part of a rhetorical device to doubly damn the CTBT. To other nonratification advocates, ineffectual is synonymous with lacking deterrent features--not preventing nuclear testing. This is an interesting argument, given that it stems from nuclear testing by two political actors--viz., India and Pakistan--that have not signed, let alone ratify, the CTBT. Moreover, the CTBT is not yet in force. Illogic indeed.

Then again, the advocates of nonratification may have a logic to their illogic. They may have a not-so-hidden agenda of reinitiating U.S. nuclear testing. Advocacy of CTBT nonratification then would become logical, although to opponents of nuclear testing, the fruits of still other illogic. (See CTBT Prototype International Data Centre, <http://www.pidc.org:65120>; Drell, S.D. (June 2, 1998). Reasons to ratify, not to stall. The New York Times, p. A21; Fact Sheet: White House on Purpose of Test Ban Treaty, <http://www.usia.gov/abtusia/posts/SF1/wwwwhotd.html>; Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty Organization, Vienna, <http://www//ctbto.org>; United States Department of Energy CTBT Research and Development Program Home Page, <http://www.ctbt.rnd.doe.gov/ctbt/index.html>.) (Keywords: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, CTBT, India, Logic, Nuclear Weapons, Pakistan, Security.)