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Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: Social Cognitions

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Abstract. This article explores social cognitions bearing on support for and opposition to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Advocates of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) assert that its ratification by the requisite number of signatories would vastly impede--if not totally stop--the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons. Those in opposition to the CTBT assert that its ratification by the requisite number of states would prevent nuclear weapons development and proliferation, except among rogue states and other rogue political actors. These last two entities would not comply with CTBT directives and, thus, CTBT ratification would afford these entities a competitive advantage in nuclear weapons development. Supporters and those in opposition to the CTBT are both being disingenuous.

CTBT supporters seek to counter the concerns of CTBT opponents that ratification would preclude maintaining the safety and reliability of nuclear weapons assets. They do this by emphasizing that simulations using high-tech supercomputers and sub-critical experiments (not involving nuclear explosions, but using radioactive materials in an underground environment) can adequately ensure safety and reliability. Moreover, supporters maintain that verification technology allows adequate discrimination between non-nuclear explosions, low-level nuclear explosions, and natural seismic events such as earthquakes. In addition, supporters assert that even if such discrimination fails, the value to CTBT violators--be they ratifiers, signatories, or neither of the two--for nuclear weapons development would be operationally minimal.

However, CTBT supporters do not often admit that the same methodologies useful in ensuring safety and reliability of existing nuclear weapons can also be useful in nurturing new nuclear weapons programs. They do not publicly state that a lack of evidence of CTBT violations may merely indicate that no violation has been detected, not the absence of violation. As well, supporters do not often mention that while any violation may in itself be operationally minimal, an accumulation of operationally minimal increments may become quite significant indeed.

CTBT opponents maintain that safety and reliability of nuclear weapons cannot be ensured without actual weapons testing (via nuclear explosions underground.) They also assert that verification can never be fool-proof.

However, CTBT opponents do not often admit that actual weapons testing is not a fool-proof means of ensuring safety and reliability--that, in fact, there is no fool-proof means. They also rarely admit that, at times, computer simulations and sub-critical experiments may yield safety and reliability concerns as well as or better than actual weapons testing. More often, they may hark back to an ironic and paradoxical Cold War shibboleth that (regardless of safety and reliability concerns) actual testing is necessary to establish resolve to employ nuclear weapons--a requisite to the nuclear deterrence that mitigates against nuclear weapons employment. This shibboleth, however, seems to ignore that nuclear weapons security threats may stem much more from the most primitive of delivery systems--e.g., suitcases--than sophisticated intercontinental ballistic missiles. Deterrence through the threat of nuclear

weapons employment against suitcase manufacturers and identifying the source of a nuclear device are much more problematic than deterring detecting missile trajectories approved by a national government.

Assertions that verification can never be fool-proof--while literally correct--lock CTBT opponents into a position that no defense or security treaty based on weapons or weapons-testing limitation, reductions, or outright bannings should ever be approved. But what would be left? Two other conceptual alternatives also are problematic. That no defense or security treaties should ever be signed because past, present, or future behavior can never be verified becomes a pure isolationist position in an increasingly globalized world. That only treaties that do not revolve around weapons and weapons-testing limitations, reductions, and banning should be approved assumes that this approach has security-enhancing consequences, while the converse never does.

Even if the discourse on the CTBT were based only on reason, logic, and rationality, epistemological analyses have long shown vulnerabilities in deductive and inductive variants. However, it is more likely that the discourse is based as well on emotional and motivational phenomena--both conscious and unconscious. With the doomsday clock still close to midnight, supporters and opponents of the CTBT still seem to be living by a different clock--one that is fueled by cognitive fallacy and psychodynamic conflict, one that beckons midnight ever closer. (See Bourne, L.E., Jr., et al. (1996). Peace and gender: Differential reactions to international treaty violations. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2, 143-149; Druckman, D. (1997). Dimensions of international negotiations: Structures, processes, and outcomes. *Group Decision and Negotiation*, 6, 395-420; Gordon, M.R., & Miller, J. (October 4, 1999). U.S. and Russia to seek ways to detect test ban cheating. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A10; Lacey, M. (October 5, 1999). Clinton kicks off campaign to pass nuclear test ban. *The New York Times*, p. A1; A10; Walker, S.G. (1995). Psychodynamic processes and framing effects in foreign policy decisionmaking: Woodrow Wilson's operational code. *Political Psychology*, 16, 697-717; Weissenberger, S. (1992). Deterrence and the design of treaty verification systems. *IEEE Transactions on Systems, Man, and Cybernetics*, 22, 903-915.) (Keywords: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Deterrence.)