

U.S.S.R. are currently seeking to carry out their part of the bargain by curbing their strategic arms race, but so far without much success. A prohibition of underground testing would, however, be a major step towards preserving strategic stability and curtailing the "vertical" proliferation of nuclear weapons through further sophistication and qualitative improvement. It could also facilitate decisions by some "near-nuclear" states that are hesitating to ratify the NPT to do their share in stopping the "horizontal" proliferation through the acquisition of nuclear weapons by non-nuclear powers. A CTB would also be an invaluable non-proliferation measure in its own right, since it would effectively prevent those non-nuclear-weapons states that adhere to it from developing nuclear weapons through testing. Conversely, if unrestrained underground testing by the two major nuclear powers continues, the future viability of the NPT will be jeopardized.

Time for restraint

Thus, weighing the risks and the benefits, it seems clear that the time has come for prompt restraint measures and for serious negotiations to begin immediately on a CTB. For is a solution not waiting to be taken up? Surely, in order to bridge the verification gap, an underground test ban agreement might combine seismological monitoring facilities and international seismic data exchange, perhaps with some variant of "verification by challenge" or inspection by invitation, supplemented possibly by a few obligatory on-site inspections. Surely such a system should constitute sufficient deterrence to any would-be violator.

If national security continues to be advanced as the main justification for the alternative course of continuing the nuclear arms race, it is legitimate to ask, how much national security is enough? So much "overkill" capacity is already available to both super-powers that restraints on qualitative improvements in their strategic systems through an underground



test ban could hardly detract from the respective deterrent capabilities. Now, later, is the time to begin to call a halt to creating further nuclear "overkill" and to start the journey that is so much more promising for peace toward the fulfillment of the NPT and the PTB and toward "discontinuation of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time".

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