

the non-proliferation regime would be better served by focussing on the spread of fissionable materials rather than on a treaty commitment to a comprehensive test ban which no longer has the arms control significance that it had in the early 1960s.

PURE ARMS CONTROL LOGIC, HOWEVER, DOES NOT DRIVE THE TEST BAN question. For the non-nuclear weapon states continued testing is a political issue. It is the most flagrant symbol of the nuclear profligacy of the "have" states (meaning essentially the US) who, determined to modernize their arsenals, are unwilling to foreclose potential future nuclear options. The test ban, therefore, has become a good faith issue: if the nuclear weapon states really want the Non-proliferation Treaty, they must show that they care by taking serious measures to achieve a comprehensive test ban.

This linkage between the CTB and the NPT will be argued again in January 1991 when the Conference to amend the Partial Test Ban Treaty reconvenes in New York. Urged on by Parliamentarians for Global Action, an international group currently chaired by Canadian Liberal MP Warren Allmand, a number of the signatories of the 1963 Treaty have acted on the Treaty provisions which require the depositary states – the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union – to call an amendment conference. The proposed amendment is very simple – to make the ban on test explosions total rather than partial.

To many supporters of the NPT regime, the amendment conference is a further example of the wrong way to go about arms control. It is bad enough to hold one treaty ransom to another, as in linking the future of the non-proliferation regime to the comprehensive test ban. Now, in the amendment conference, another valuable treaty is undermined by resorting to the fiction of an amendment which amounts in reality, to a new treaty.

In these circumstances, US policy in New York could easily turn the amendment conference into a multi-million dollar charade. As one of the three states that negotiated the Partial Test Ban, the US has a veto on amendments. In political terms, there is simply no prospect that US policy on testing will change dramatically before January. What is the point, therefore, in convening a conference which cannot succeed in its principal purpose and which could be easily turned into a mere rhetorical show if, at the outset, the United States called for an immediate vote?

IF THE WORST IS NOT TO HAPPEN IN NEW YORK, Canada and other states need to address two key questions. The first, and more important one, is to settle on a policy which, over the next several years, might help to soften the dispute about the comprehensive test ban, and so improve the prospects for the continuation of the NPT regime. The second is to turn the amendment conference into a more constructive meeting than it seems to promise at present.

Looking ahead to the 1995 NPT Review Conference, there can be no doubt that current Canadian policy places a higher value on the non-proliferation regime than on the achievement of a total test ban. But if it is the case, as now appears, that the one is politically threatened by the failure to achieve progress in the other, then the Canadian government will need to move beyond its rather lame current position whereby it supports a step-by-step approach (no time frame indicated) to a comprehensive test ban.

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How the Non-proliferation Treaty and Nuclear Weapons Testing are Linked

The Non-proliferation treaty was opened for signature in 1968. When it was being negotiated, the nuclear weapon states were under pressure to match the undertaking of the non-nuclear states not to acquire nuclear weapons, with some recognition of their own obligation to halt the arms race. The result was Article 6:

"Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

Since the Treaty came into effect, Article 6 has been the focus of debate between the two classes of states party to the Treaty – the nuclear weapon states and the non-nuclear weapon states. The linkage between Article 6 and progress towards a comprehensive test ban is made in the Preamble to the Treaty, which recalls the determination expressed by the Parties to the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty,

"...to seek to achieve the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time and to continue negotiations to this end..."

This preambular statement combined with Article 6 has led the non-aligned states to point to a comprehensive test ban as the single most important indication that the nuclear weapon states are keeping their side of the bargain.

The most plausible way to do this is to support a very low yield threshold test ban. When the US government talks of a step-by-step, "ratcheting down" approach to a CTB, the great danger is that the next steps down will be both politically and militarily insignificant. Reducing the current threshold of 150 kilotons to 100, for example, will have no significant effect on the US nuclear programme, and will cut no ice with those who plan to support the Mexican position in 1995. Instead, a significant reduction in testing is required which could plausibly be achieved by 1995. While the precise threshold is open to discussion, the threshold chosen must show boldness. This suggests that Canada should declare its support for a threshold around five kilotons, accompanied by a quota on the number of annual tests. Not the least of the strengths of this position is that considerable independent scientific support can be marshalled in support of the claim that the threshold could be verified.

This policy would do little to constrain the ambitions of the near nuclear states – but then, neither would a CTB. On the other hand, it would severely constrain the modernization programmes of states that already have nuclear weapons, and it would encourage further political reviews of the testing issue. Would it satisfy the non-nuclear states? Perhaps only a total ban could do that, but a low threshold would force the non-aligned to reassess their position. Regional security is enhanced by the NPT, which, despite its inequities, does benefit the non-nuclear powers. It would be foolish for them to undermine the protection afforded by a non-proliferation regime if there were significant progress towards a CTB, just as it is foolish now for the US to prejudice its fundamental interest in non-proliferation by its intransigent approach to nuclear weapon testing.

A POLICY WHICH LOOKED AHEAD TO 1995 WOULD ALSO HELP AT THE amendment conference. To avoid a destructive meeting, the amendment conference can best be used not to corner the United States, but to air the issues surrounding the linkage between the NPT and the CTB. There

will be, moreover, a significant difference in the composition of the conference in New York. A number of the threshold states – India, Israel, South Africa, Brazil and Argentina, for example – are parties to the partial test ban treaty where they are not to the non-proliferation treaty. While this may complicate life in New York, it provides an unusual opportunity to discuss proliferation problems with the states most likely to acquire nuclear weapons in the future.

Paradoxically, the broad range of issues covered by the 1990 Review Conference convincingly demonstrated that the non-proliferation regime is more important than a comprehensive test ban. But that is why it is necessary to take steps to curtail nuclear weapon testing. Following the failure of the Geneva Review Conference, the Western states, Canada included, will not relish the prospect of the impending amendment conference, but they cannot now dismiss it or simply assume that it has no bearing on the future of the NPT. Nor is it sufficient to argue that a CTB is no longer as important as it once was. If the gavel is not to fall on another failure to reconcile the differences between the nuclear haves and have-nots at the 1995 Review Conference, a renewed effort is required now to salvage the upcoming amendment conference in New York. □