

9. NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING: THE PARTIAL TEST BAN TREATY AMENDMENT CONFERENCE

BACKGROUND

In 1958 the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom initiated negotiations on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapon Tests. Despite some progress in these negotiations, the prospects of an agreement diminished after the U-2 affair and the failure of the 1960 summit, and the conference adjourned in 1961 having failed to reach agreement. However, drawing upon the experience of the negotiations, after the Cuban missile crisis in 1963, the three parties negotiated and signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT).

The 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty banned nuclear weapon tests in all environments except underground. It is open to signature for all states and, as of January 1991, has been signed by 118 states including Israel, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina and India. Neither China nor France have acceded to the Treaty but, over time, both have restricted nuclear weapon testing to the underground environment.

The PTBT is of unlimited duration. However, the Preamble notes that the "Original Parties" (the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom) sought "to achieve the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time" and were "determined to continue negotiations to this end." This intent was recalled in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) which came into force in 1970. The Preamble to the NPT recalled the determination of the PTBT parties "to seek to achieve the discontinuance of all test explosions of nuclear weapons for all time and to continue negotiations to this end."

Two further treaties were negotiated between the Soviet Union and the United States which imposed further limits on underground testing. The Threshold Test Ban Treaty (TTBT) limited the size of underground tests to 150 kilotons while reaffirming once again the goal of a comprehensive test ban, and the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty (PNET) established a similar limit on non-weapon nuclear explosions. These treaties, which came into force in 1976, were not open to signature by other states.

In 1979, during the latter stages of the Carter Administration, trilateral negotiations on a CTB appeared close to agreement, but faltered in face of increasing domestic opposition in the United States and the weakening position of the Carter Administration. In 1982, President Reagan decided not to resume negotiations on a CTB until improved verification procedures had been developed to monitor the 1976 Treaties.