

7. COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN

Background

In the late 1950s The United States and Britain began negotiations with the Soviet Union on a Comprehensive Test Ban (CTB) on all forms of nuclear weapons testing. Although these efforts failed to produce a CTB, they did result in the Limited Test Ban Treaty which was signed by the three countries in 1963. The Limited Test Ban prohibits testing in the atmosphere, underwater or in outer space and has since been signed by 111 other countries, but not by France and China. The Threshold Test Ban Treaty, limiting underground nuclear tests to 150 kilotons, was signed in 1974 by the Soviet Union and the United States, but has not been ratified by the United States Senate. Similarly the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty of 1976, which established special provisions for peaceful nuclear explosions, has not been ratified by the US Senate. Despite the failure to ratify, the signatory states have undertaken to comply with both treaties. Trilateral negotiations on a CTB were re-opened by the Carter Administration in 1977, and substantial progress was made in developing a draft treaty. However, in the wake of strong opposition in the United States, and the political turmoil involved in the negotiation and ratification debate on the SALT II Treaty, little more of substance was accomplished in the negotiations, which ceased under the Reagan Administration.

On 6 August 1985 the Soviet Union began a unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing to last the five months until the end of the year, or longer if the United States would join in. The Soviet Union has extended the moratorium three times despite continued American nuclear tests. The present extension will last until 6 August 1986 by which time the Soviet Union will have refrained from nuclear weapons testing for an entire year. The United States has said that a CTB is a long-term goal but has refused to enter