

Washington's Identity Crisis

Contemplating the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

by Robert G. Torricelli

There are always moments in our lives we suspect we will always remember, those times that punctuate our activities and our experiences. Several nights ago, on the eve of the Senate's consideration of this treaty, President Clinton, sitting in the residence, reminded some of us that the last time the Senate rejected a treaty was in 1920, the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty called for the establishment of a League of Nations. The United States, as reflected by the Senate, was so traumatized by the First World War, so anxious for the creation of a time that it would never visit again, that it drew all the wrong lessons from the First World War. As a consequence, it defeated the Treaty. A Treaty that was, in Woodrow Wilson's words, "the last hope of mankind."

We now find ourselves in this debate 80 years later. Yet having emerged from the cold war, the trauma and sacrifices of generations in dealing with that enormous national struggle, I fear that, once again, we are drawing all the wrong lessons. Essentially, it is the belief of many of my colleagues that the arms control regimes of the last forty years were successful; that the bipartisan foreign policy from Eisenhower to Clinton, based on a concept of nonproliferation and arms control regimes, could provide real security for the United States; and that seeking security in arms races and technological military dominance was illusory.

It is extraordinary that, during this debate, we demonstrate a lack of confidence in arms control regimes or believe the United States is better defended outside of these treaties because that is such a contradiction with national experience.

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In the last forty years, the United States, from Eisenhower to Nixon, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Bush, and Reagan, has ratified START I and II, SALT I and II, the ABM Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Nonproliferation Treaty, the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Open Skies Agreement, and the Outer Space Agreement, and signed the Missile Technology Control Regime. The nation is profoundly more secure because of each and every one of those treaties and regimes.

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Every Senate and each president at a moment in history faced the same judgment we face today. Are we better off by allowing other nations and ourselves to develop weapons outside of these regimes or should we have confidence in our ability to verify and be more secure within their limits?

It appears the Senate may, for the first time in a generation and for the second time in this century, believe that it is better to reject a treaty negotiated by an American president and operate outside of its regime. It is a profound decision with enormous consequences. The simple truth is, arms control regimes have enhanced the security of the United States; indeed, they have enhanced the security of all nations.

Since 1945, despite their development, possession, and deployment by a variety of nations, nuclear weapons have never been used in a hostile environment. It may be the first or certainly the longest period in human history that weapons were developed and not used. Indeed, nations have even gone to war with each other or been in severe conflict and not used these weapons. It is the ultimate testament that arms control works to protect national security.

I would understand if the leader of the Iranian parliament or the North Korean Supreme People's Assembly were to rise in their respective chambers and argue passionately against this treaty. They would have their reasons. The treaty will allow the United States to maintain the preeminent nuclear stockpile in the world, having the only effective means of continuing to test its weapons by simulation, while the treaty would make it difficult for those nations to continue to develop and modernize their nuclear arsenal. Their opposition would be rational. Our opposition is irrational.

It would be understandable if members of the National People's Congress in Beijing would rise in indignation against China becoming a signatory to the treaty. The thought that China, a great power, possessing eighteen missiles capable of delivering a weapon, now on the verge of developing important new and dangerous technology both to deliver these weapons and to miniaturize them to threaten a potential adversary in the United States or Russia or Europe, would join this treaty would be troubling to them.

The Chinese, by entering into this treaty, would be unable to test those weapons, making it difficult to know their effectiveness or their reliability. Their opposition would be understandable; it would be rational. Ours is not.

This treaty is an endorsement of the international military status quo, and at this snapshot in time in the life of this planet, the military status quo is that the United States is the preeminent military power with an abundance of weapons, sophistication of weapons, delivery of weapons. If this current arrangement and distribution of power is to be preserved for a generation, it means that every nation is accepting American preeminence. By their endorsement of this treaty and their signature of this treaty, extraordinarily, every other nation seems to be willing to accept that preeminence, ironically, except us. We would reject the treaty and allow other nations at a relative disadvantage to test, develop, or deploy effective weapons.

There are several important consequences in the defeat of this treaty the Senate needs to consider: first, the damage, not necessarily militarily, but diplomatically to

the leadership of the United States. This country has recognized for more than fifty years that the only real security of this country is an alliance based principally on the foundation of NATO rested on the credibility of American political leadership.

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The defeat of this treaty will put us at variance with the leaders of Germany, France, and Britain, who even on this day have appealed to the Senate to endorse this treaty. France and Britain have communicated their strong desire. They have reminded us that they have made changes in their own doctrine, and their own weapons choices, based on this treaty. They have also reminded us that if we defeat this treaty, we are in some measure separating not simply our judgments but our future planning and security from our traditional allies—the foundation of our international alliance system of our security. It will cause damage to our credibility and our leadership that will not be easily repaired.

Second, defeat of this treaty, for all practical purposes, is an end to our efforts, undertaken on a bipartisan basis for a generation, on nonproliferation. It is a practical end to our nonproliferation efforts because it sends a message to each rogue regime, every nation that possesses the capability to develop nuclear weapons, that there is this new sense of legitimacy in them doing so, because the United States has rejected a treaty that would have contained this threat. The United States will lose credibility with nations, like India and Pakistan, when we argue that they should not test again or deploy weapons.

Third—perhaps most profoundly and immediately—it will lead to the possibility of the testing and the development of the technologies that China has obtained from the United States, through espionage or other means, and allow them to develop a full capability.

There is a final factor. The Senate has convened to debate the question of a treaty on a comprehensive test ban. But it is not the only treaty that is at issue. The defeat of this Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty will certainly mean that the START agreement pending before the Russian Duma will never be adopted.

Our chance, with a stroke of a pen, to destroy thousands of Russian nuclear warheads, potentially aimed at the United States—the greatest single threat to the security of this nation under changed political circumstances—will never be destroyed. We debate one treaty, but we are deciding the future of two.

Earlier in this day debates centered on procedures and hearings, whether or not the treaty was fully considered. I serve as a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. I, too, must express my profound disappointment, as a representative of the State of New Jersey, and as a member of that committee, of not being given the opportunity to fully debate, to consider, to hear witnesses on what potentially could be the most important vote I will ever cast as a senator.

People of good judgment might be able to differ on the merits of this treaty, but no one can defend that an issue of this profound importance to the life of this country

did not receive the consideration it deserved or senators within the comity of this institution were not given the due consideration to learn, debate, and be heard.

Because I believe, however, this issue is so important—while I am convinced of its merits and the need for immediate ratification—I end much as I began with that memory of 1920.

Most of us are probably convinced the Senate made the wrong judgment on the League of Nations, setting the world on a dangerous downward spiral of confrontation, having come to the false conclusion that America would be secure alone behind her oceans, that in isolation somehow we would find peace. It was wrong.

But in truth, if the moment could be revisited, President Wilson, while right on the issue, should have been less proud, more willing to meet his adversaries, and given them extra consideration on the treaty. While I profoundly believe President Clinton was right to endorse this treaty and to urge its adoption, I urge him to do the same today.

Let us make it unequivocally clear that the president of the United States, upon being told by the director of the CIA that he cannot provide complete assurances that any unexplainable explosions of any source within Russia or China—by our national technical means—will cause the United States, unless explanations and inspections are made immediately available, to abrogate the treaty.

Second, the president make abundantly clear that any refusal to allow inspections, even if not absolutely required by the treaty, because it is in the national interest, would cause us to abrogate the treaty.

Third, the president commit the United States immediately to develop a national technical means to distinguish between different forms of explosions and small-level nuclear testing, and a program begin immediately.

And fourth, that if, indeed, as I believe is provided in the treaty, this president is informed by lab directors that they can no longer assure the safety or the operational capability of our weapons, we will abrogate the treaty.

Let that be clear to the Senate and to the American people, let there be no question. And if there is no question on those issues, then there is no argument against this treaty.

I can remember as a boy asking a history teacher why it was, if history occurred as a continuum, from generation to generation through the centuries, history was written in chapters and in volumes, which both began and ended? And I remember she told me: Because that is how it occurs.

We are between the volumes of history. If this Senate is to decide that the bipartisan commitment to arms control as an element of national security for the last forty years has been an error, we are ending not only a chapter but a volume of the military and diplomatic history of this country, we are entering into a very uncertain future, for our security is dictated only by what weapons are designed, deployed, and used—a lawless time that is not safer than the twentieth century, but where the twenty-first century will be profoundly less safe.

It will be a time in which, I believe, members of this Senate will have difficulty looking in the eyes of their children and their children's children explaining how there

was a brief moment when we could commit all the nations of the world not to test these nuclear weapons and therefore as a practical matter to be unable, by many nations, to deploy them or ever to use them—and we lost the moment.

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You may feel confident in your vote today; it may make political sense. You may be convinced of your own rhetoric, but you will never ever—if one of these weapons is ever used in a hostile environment; if one of these rogue regimes, from North Korea to Iran, ever tests one of these weapons—you will never look your own children in the eye with confidence in your judgment or feeling that you served them or your country.

I have not been in this institution long, but long enough to know this treaty does not have enough votes to be ratified.

The president of the United States, recognizing the enormous potential diplomatic damage of its defeat and the consequences militarily of sending a message to other nations that there will be no further proliferation efforts or control on testing, has asked, as the commander in chief, the elected representative of the American people, that this vote not occur. What have we come to as a Senate, if the president of the United States makes such a request in the interest of our national security and our diplomatic position in the world and we turn a deaf ear? If you cannot do good by voting for this treaty, do not do harm by defeating it. Allow the moment to pass. At least allow the world to live with an ambiguous result rather than a definitive conclusion to our national commitment to arms control.

We vote on this treaty, but, indeed, we vote on whether to ratify or reject a national strategy of a generation and whether arms control will continue to be part of the security of the United States and our strategy of dealing with potentially hostile nations. It is not a judgment I would have had to mark the beginning of the twenty-first century. It shows a profound failure to learn the lessons of the twentieth century, but it is what it is. At least we should be able to lose this moment and go on to debate and make judgments another day.

