

Complete the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty: Pressures for a Resumption of Testing

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Basic Notes, 5 September 1996



British American Security
Information Council

United States

Republican Platform, 12 August 1996

“To cope with the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the United States will have to deter the threat or use of weapons of mass destruction by rogue states. This in turn will require the continuing maintenance and development of nuclear weapons and their periodic testing. The Clinton Administration’s proposed Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty is inconsistent with American security interests.”

Kyl-Reid amendment proposed, June 1996

In June 1996, Senators, Jon Kyl and Harry Reid introduced an amendment to the 1997 Defense Authorization Bill to make it lawful for the President to conduct an underground nuclear detonation after September 30, 1996 if the Congress concurs with the President that such a test is in the national interest . The Senate voted by 53 to 45 to table (ie. kill) the Kyl-Reid amendment, but similar initiatives are possible in the future.

Department of Defense, June 1995

On 19 June 1995, The Washington Post reported that the Department of Defense was considering resuming underground nuclear testing, following the French announcement of a resumption of nuclear tests. Defense Secretary, William Perry stated: “The Defense Department has not taken a final decision on which alternative we’ll support.”

US position under Bush

The US opposed a nuclear test ban because it considered satisfactory verification impossible and that testing was needed to ensure weapons reliability and effectiveness and to develop new weapons, CTBT would discourage arms reductions as larger and more weapons would be needed to offset concerns about reliability.

RUSSIA

Valeriy Manilov, Russian Security Council, April 1995

“We are faced with a very serious problem of verification and development of actually assured, most effective mechanisms of ensuring, in particular, the safety of munitions that have already become obsolete. Doing so without conducting tests would be problematic.” Cited in the Arms Control Reporter.

Viktor Mikhailov, head of Russian atomic energy department, 1992

It is better for everyone to agree on a limited number of tests instead of a complete ban, because otherwise we might lose the level of [expertise] we now possess. Russian atomic energy director, Viktor Mikhailov, quoted in The Washington Post 5.2.92

United Kingdom

Rear Admiral Irwin, UK MoD Spokesperson, 1994–1995

“We would very much like to do nuclear tests for some time, but the fact of the matter is that we are probably not going to be able to do so.” (16 March 1994)

“It is a technically difficult area, trying to simulate the extreme conditions that a nuclear weapon goes through in its critical and supercritical phases. The best technique to do that is underground testing.” (29 March 1996)

UK Government, 1991

As long as we need to retain nuclear weapons to deter war, we will need to conduct nuclear tests to ensure our remaining nuclear weapons are safe, reliable, and up-to-date. (UK MoD spokesperson quoted by the Associated Press, 29 November 1991).