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The Washington Post

October 6, 1999, Wednesday, Final Edition

## Test-Ban Treaty: Let's Wait Awhile

John Deutch; Henry Kissinger; Brent Scowcroft

**SECTION:** OP-ED; Pg. A33

**LENGTH:** 814 words

The Senate is scheduled to vote Oct. 12 on whether to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The treaty has many strong supporters and equally vociferous opponents who are committed to its defeat next week. We believe, however, that the treaty's supporters and opponents are both wrong.

While we are no fans of the CTBT, our purpose here is not to argue its merits and defects. Our point is more straightforward. The simple fact is that it is premature for the Senate to vote on the CTBT -- at least during the life of the present Congress -- because the treaty is not coming into force any time soon, whether or not the United States ratifies it. This means that few if any of the benefits envisaged by the treaty's advocates could be realized by such action. But if we act now, there could be real costs and risks to our security interests, including our nonproliferation objectives.

Supporters of the CTBT claim that it will make a major contribution to limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. But even the treaty's advocates concede that for this objective to be achieved, at least the key countries that are of proliferation concern must agree to accede to the treaty. Indeed, the treaty wisely requires that each of 44 specific countries sign and ratify the document before it enters into force.

But only 23 of those countries have done so thus far. For example, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Syria have not yet acted. Many of these countries may never join the CTBT regime, and U.S. Senate ratification, early or late, is unlikely to have any significant impact on their decisions. For example, no serious person should believe that rogue nations such as Iran or Iraq will give up their efforts to acquire nuclear weapons if only the United States ratifies the CTBT.

The United States should take advantage of this situation to delay a vote on ratification, without prejudice to eventual action on the treaty. This would provide the opportunity to learn more about such issues as movement on the ratification process by the required 44 countries, technical progress in the Department of Energy's Stockpile Stewardship Program, the political consequences of the India/Pakistan detonations, changing Russian doctrine toward greater reliance on nuclear weapons, and continued Chinese development of a nuclear arsenal.

We do not minimize the threat posed by the spread of nuclear weapons. On the contrary, U.S. efforts to combat proliferation of weapons of mass destruction not only deserve but are receiving the highest national security priority. It is clear to any fair-minded observer that the United States has substantially reduced its reliance on nuclear weapons. The United States has also made or committed to dramatic reductions in the level of deployed nuclear force.

Nevertheless, for the foreseeable future, the United States must continue to rely on nuclear weapons to help deter certain

kinds of attacks on this country and its friends and allies. In addition, several countries depend on the U.S. nuclear deterrent for their security. Their lack of confidence in that deterrent might lead to the further spread of weapons of mass destruction by increasing incentives for them to acquire their own nuclear or other weapons-of-mass-destruction capabilities.

As a consequence, the United States must continue to be certain that its nuclear weapons remain safe, secure and reliable. But the fact is that the scientific case simply has not been made that over the long term the United States can ensure the nuclear stockpile without nuclear testing. The United States is seeking to do so by means of an ambitious effort called the Stockpile Stewardship Program. This program attempts to maintain adequate knowledge of nuclear weapons physics indirectly by computer modeling, simulation and other experiments. We support the kind of scientific and analytical effort that is reflected in the Stockpile Stewardship Program. At this point, however, success is far from ensured.

In light of the uncertainty, and in the absence of any compelling reasons for early ratification, it is unwise to take actions now that constrain this or future presidents' choices about how best to pursue our nonproliferation and other national security goals while maintaining the effectiveness and credibility of our nuclear deterrent. Accordingly, we urge the Senate leadership to reach an understanding with the president to suspend action on the CTBT, at least for the duration of the 106th Congress.

John Deutch was undersecretary of defense for acquisition and technology, deputy secretary of defense and Director of Central Intelligence in the first Clinton administration. Henry Kissinger was secretary of state to Presidents Nixon and Ford. Brent Scowcroft was national security adviser to Presidents Ford and Bush.

**LOAD-DATE:** October 06, 1999

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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