

CTBT
Prospects of making its Global Benefits Permanent
Text of presentation of Gen. Assad Durrani at the 2012 Moscow Nonproliferation Conference

Frankly, the prospects do not look very bright; and for good reasons. Let's start with the least important one: it is a treaty that does not even exist. From amongst the mandatory signatories; two have not signed (India and Pakistan); three have, but not ratified (US, China and Israel). And there is little chance that the situation would change anytime soon.

Indeed, there are more substantial grounds for this “pessimistic” prognosis.

Like any other supranational structure- the UN, WTO, NPT, and many others- the CTBT too is construed primarily to protect the interests of the more powerful states. We may call this phenomenon “discriminatory” if we like, but in real life, it is the natural corollary of what we all do to maintain an advantage and rationalise it by any number of good or bad arguments. Creation of the UNSC may be justified to prevent chaos in the international system, but then it is also a fact that it provides certain immunity to the P5. The WTO may profess fair rules for all but would eventually favour more efficient and developed economies.

On nuclear related matters, this gamesmanship may well have started with the big powers banning biological and then chemical weapons that were the “poor man's response” to the former' nuclear prowess. NPT grants monopoly to the original sinners. FMCT, by granting immunity to existing stockpiles of fissile material puts the late starters at a permanent disadvantage. CTBT' underlying principles are no different.

Before calling for a “comprehensive ban”, the big powers carried out hundreds of nuclear explosions to learn as much from them as possible. France conducted a series of tests in quick succession before signing. The “bad faith” becomes all the more palpable when the proposed treaty excluded controlled reactions in nuclear reactors and inertial confinement fusion experiments (zero-level-tests). These are obviously beyond the capacity of technologically less capable nations.

To appease the security related concerns of lesser powers, some opt-out clauses have been thrown in. Accordingly, a signatory country might have the right to conduct a test if its security environment warranted one. Well, we all know that it is easier for the US to wriggle-out or ignore commitments than for, for example, Iran. One also knows that favourites like Israel and India would be given preferential treatment to help them circumvent rules of the game. All the same, instead of moaning and groaning about an “unfair world”, states have learnt the art of making good use of the so-called uneven playing field. In fact, even countries who already enjoy an edge, create additional space to serve their vested interests.

US may have made all the right noises but has yet to verify the CTBT (the first security related treaty in 80 years that it has not). Russia has ratified but the US remains sceptical since that provides it one more argument to continue hedging. China too has made all the right commitments, but even after 12 years is awaiting ratification by the National People's Conference. That in turn provides India a plausible cause not to come on board. But of course India also has more substantial grounds for its nuclear posture.

India's initial stand that pre-dates it overtly going nuclear in May 1998 was sound: P-5's commitments to eliminate Nuclear Weapons were indeed suspect. A former foreign minister of India, IK Gujral, had wisely advised that "the CTBT must truly be comprehensive and not leave any loopholes that would permit nuclear weapon states to continue refining and developing their nuclear arsenals at test sites and in laboratories." Both the Indian principles and positions provide Pakistan with an array of arguments for not signing the treaty.

Linkage with the Indian nuclear status is a security and political compulsion for Pakistan. A number of other developments in India have also helped Pakistan defend its policy. India's Cold-start Doctrine (CSD) and acquisition of BMD capability (regardless of their effectiveness), projected launching of a nuclear submarine, and lately granting the country NSG waivers (that makes India the only non-NPT country to trade in nuclear material) are all good grounds for Pakistan to maintain its present stand of not signing the treaty.

It also incurs on Pakistan additional benefits. Its "unilateral" moratorium- that it shares with India- notwithstanding, it retains the option to test if it becomes technically necessary; to develop tactical weapons in response to the CSD, for example. And before one forgets; after signing this or any other NPT related agreement, a country is subjected to UN inspections, with all the racket that accompanies or follows them.

(And that reminds me- if Iran ever became serious to acquire nuclear weapons, computer simulation would not suffice. To ensure quality of weapon, a hot test would be necessary.)

Is CTBT then doomed to fail? Not, if we really want to save it.

A paradigm shift of the entire gambit: Arms Control, Disarmament, NPT and related issues; utopian though it may sound, would be required. In the meantime:

- *States/parties to the CTBT should continue to work together; send high-level emissaries to key countries that have not yet signed or ratified the treaty in order to facilitate and encourage their support for the CTBT.*
- *Leaders and governments of remaining CTBT hold-out states should reconsider and recommit themselves to the ratification of the CTBT.*

- *They should also maintain their nuclear testing moratoria, fully support the work of the CTBTO Preparatory Commission, and announce that they will refrain from the pursuit of new types of nuclear weapons, which requires testing to validate the weapons' integrity.*
- *Each signatory to provide adequate financial, political, and technical support for the continued development and operation of the CTBTO.*

To conclude: the CTBT alone will not stop proliferation, but further nuclear proliferation cannot be checked without CTBT's entry into force.