

Backing up nuclear disarmament

Who could have imagined the possibility of an inter-Korean Summit this year, let alone one between the United States and North Korea? Recent news that North Korea may suspend nuclear tests and dismantle its test site is a startling about-face, given the country's multitude of missile and nuclear weapons tests over the past decade. Those incidents increased tensions at a time when questions were being raised about the instruments, approaches, and mechanisms that nations collectively strive to use to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction. At the end of this month, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) will convene a symposium in Vienna to emphasize what brings real security to the world—negotiated agreements that are effectively verifiable and credibly enforceable. These include the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The issue is not whether such current institutions and instruments are failing, but rather, preserving their integrity and building further trust in and around them.

It goes without saying that the global political landscape is changing. That is precisely why an immovable global disarmament and nonproliferation architecture, based on instruments including the NPT and the CTBT, constitutes a firm foundation for a future of peace and security.

The NPT entered into force in 1970 to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and promote peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Some say it is under strain, with North Korea's recent testing activities and events in the Middle East adding to the tensions. If this is so, it is not because of a fatal flaw in the instrument itself, but because not enough has been done to maintain and secure

its entire chain of responsibilities—of which the entry into force of the CTBT is an essential part.

The CTBT, a legally binding global ban on nuclear explosive testing by anyone, anywhere, was opened for signature in 1996. It is not in force only because a provision in the treaty requires ratification by a list of 44 states before this occurs. Eight nations have yet to ratify: the United States, China, Iran, Israel, and Egypt—all of which have at least signed, and contribute to the buildup of the CTBT verification regime—along with India, Pakistan, and North Korea.

The CTBT is a fine example of science and technology in action for global peace and security. The treaty establishes a global international monitoring system with hundreds of facilities that are already gathering and transmitting data to a control center at CTBTO headquarters in Vienna, meaning that no nuclear explosion goes undetected. This monitoring system is crucial to future denuclearization in North Korea. The CTBTO's confirmation of a nuclear test by North Korea on 3 September 2017 once again showed how the treaty's verification regime is already working for the benefit of the international community. But the only way to secure this benefit for all time is to bring the treaty into force. Adherence to the treaty by all parties concerned

is the only way to overcome the trust deficit that is a real impediment to progress on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and to building trust and confidence in the Middle East.

Hard-won treaties like the CTBT and NPT, with their intricate webs of responsibilities, cannot be easily replaced. Let's put these instruments back on track. Diplomacy, backed up by rigorous science-based verification tools, remains the key to unlocking real security. Let's not rethink that.

—Lassina Zerbo



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