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Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

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Why is in news? Putin signs law revoking Russian ratification of nuclear test ban treaty

President Vladimir Putin signed a law **revoking Russian ratification** of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, according to a decree published on a government website.

Russia says the aim is to restore parity with the United States, which has signed but never ratified the 1996 treaty, and that it will not resume testing unless Washington does.

The move, though expected, is evidence of the deep chill between the United States and Russia, whose ties are at their lowest level since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis over the war in Ukraine and what Moscow casts as Washington's attempts to stymie the emergence of a new multipolar world order.

Putin had requested the change to "mirror" the position of the **United States, which signed the CTBT in 1996 but never ratified it.**

Though it **has never formally come into force**, the CTBT has made nuclear testing a taboo – no country except North Korea has conducted a test involving a nuclear explosion this century.

Consequences arise after Russia's withdrawal:

Global Disarmament: It would be a **big setback** to the Nuclear disarmament movement.

Nuclear Arms Race: This move would **enable Russia to build and deploy more nuclear weapons** which would result in a dangerous arms race.

Russia-Ukraine Crisis: The present Russian decision has aggravated the missile attacks against each other and escalated the crisis further.

Russia-West Relations: The Russian decision wants to pressurize the West by sending an ambiguous message strategically by putting all the blame on the US, this will **further erode Russia and West ties.**

Global Politics and Security: Now, many countries like North Korea, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, and China may go for further proliferation of nuclear weapons without any scrutiny.

Undermining Future Agreements: If Russia revokes its ratification – Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, it will leave the world without a common starting point for future efforts.

Evolution of CTBT:

The **United States conducted the world's first successful nuclear weapons test** in July 1945. Four years later, the Soviet Union tested their first nuclear weapon. These tests triggered a decades-long arms race between the two superpowers.

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Between 1945 and 1996, more than 2,000 nuclear tests were carried out — 1,032 of them by the United States and 715 of them by the Soviet Union, according to the UN. Britain carried out 45 tests, France 210 and China 45.

The **1963 Limited Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (LTBT)** was one of the first such attempts. It **prohibited nuclear testing in the atmosphere, outer space, and underwater**, but **underground tests were still permitted**.

To tackle the limitations of LTBT, a comprehensive test ban was discussed during the negotiation of the **Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty in 1968**. However, **no agreement was reached** on the issue.

Six years later, the US and Soviet Union agreed to sign the **Threshold Test Ban Treaty (TTBT)**, which **established a nuclear “threshold”** by banning the two countries from conducting tests that would **produce a yield exceeding 150 kilotons** (equivalent to 150,000 tons of TNT).

The mutual restraint imposed by the Treaty reduced the explosive force of new nuclear warheads and bombs, which could otherwise be tested for weapons systems. The TTBT was **not intended as a substitute for a comprehensive test ban**.

A major breakthrough **only came after the Cold War ended around 1990** and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

As the geopolitical tensions simmered down, the UN took advantage of the situation and adopted the CTBT, which put a blanket ban on the explosive testing of nuclear weapons, on **September 10, 1996**, and it opened for signature on September 24, 1996.

CTBT:

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is a treaty **banning all nuclear test explosions anywhere in the world**.

The Treaty was negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in 1994 and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

It was opened for signature in 1996.

The Treaty has been signed by 184 nations.

India has not signed the treaty.

The CTBT obligates countries that sign and ratify “not to carry out any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion.”

Objectives:

The CTBT has been seen as an essential step toward nuclear disarmament for over four decades.

The Treaty is intended to stop the qualitative nuclear arms race.

The CTBT aims to prevent further horrendous health and environmental damage caused by nuclear test explosions once and for all.

It curbs the development of new nuclear weapons and the improvement of existing nuclear weapon designs.

As of August 2011, 36 of these States have **ratified** the Treaty. Eight States still need to do so: **China, North Korea, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan and the United States**.

India, North Korea and Pakistan have not yet signed the Treaty.

All three have also undertaken tests after 1996; India and Pakistan in May 1998 and North Korea six times between 2006 and 2017.

The CTBT has therefore **not entered into force and lacks legal authority.**

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO):

The organization **promotes the Treaty** so that it can enter into force.

It **establishes a verification regime** to monitor adherence to the Treaty.

The verification system is built around a network of over 325 seismic, radionuclide, infrasound and hydroacoustic (underwater) monitoring stations.

The organization was founded in 1996. It is headquartered in **Vienna**. It employs a staff of roughly 260 from the CTBT's Member States.

India's refusal for signing CTBT:

India **advocated a test ban years before it came into being.**

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made the first call for an **“immediate standstill” agreement** on nuclear testing between the United States and the former Soviet Union as early as 1954.

However, this call was sabotaged by the nuclear weapons states (NWS) on the ground that it was “difficult to evolve a fool proof verification system”.

It was again at India's initiative that the item **“Suspension of Nuclear and Thermo-Nuclear Tests”** was included in the agenda of the UN in 1959.

Post the 1964 Chinese nuclear test, an Indian debate began on the pros and cons of advocating a test ban and nuclear disarmament.

Subsequent developments including China's attainment of ballistic missile capability and America's attempt to intimidate India during the course of the 1971 War only reinforced Indian security concerns.

India's Stand on CTBT:

India's decision to **not sign the CTBT** is **primarily based on national security considerations.**

India views nuclear weapons as a **deterrent against potential security threats from neighbouring countries**, especially Pakistan and China.

India also feels that signing the CTBT would **undermine its national security and strategic autonomy**, as it would constrain its ability to conduct nuclear tests.

India's decision is **rooted in its desire for equitable and universal nuclear disarmament**, as well as its national security concerns.

India's is **neither a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT)** nor to the CTBT because it believes its present format to be discriminatory.

Conclusion:

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Efforts continue to encourage the ratification of the CTBT by all countries and to promote its entry into force. The CTBT is seen as an important step in preventing nuclear proliferation and advancing global efforts for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.