

SIGNING CTBT A SUICIDAL ACT

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For the last few weeks, several indicators have been pointing towards an impending compromise on Pakistan's nuclear policy. President Clinton's expected visit to South Asia seems to be the Trojan horse. Now the foreign minister's briefings to the National Security Council and the cabinet have brought the cat out of the bag. It has become quite clear that all promises of "national consensus" and "never surrendering to outside pressure" have crumbled to dust. Pakistan's present regime is preparing to do what the Nawaz government had already agreed to do under US pressure.

It is all the more alarming that the army leadership is becoming instrumental in this abject surrender and unpardonable compromise on national security. The indications are that Pakistan is ready to sign the CTBT even before India does—and before any concrete and just solution to the Kashmir problem is worked out. If the people of Pakistan and its religious and political leadership do not promptly challenge this *volte face*, Pakistan's nuclear capability will be in jeopardy and its sovereignty at stake.

The test ban treaty is not an independent treaty. It is part of a four-dimensional nuclear regime whose cornerstone is the NPT—a treaty based on discrimination between the five nuclear weapon states and the rest. Pakistan, like India and Israel, is a nuclear state and entering into the CTBT without an acknowledgment of this fact will be self-contradictory as well as a recipe for ultimate denuclearisation.

America is on the verge of accepting India's right to "minimum nuclear deterrence". Nine rounds of negotiations between Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott have led the US to understand not only "India's minimum nuclear deterrent" but also "the level of minimum deterrent will change according to India's own perception of its changing security environment". (Reuter report in The News, London, December 23, 1999). This amounts to virtual acceptance of India as a nuclear power.

What are the conditions on which Pakistan is negotiating signing of the CTBT? All talk of national consensus is turning into meaningless prattle. The National Security Council does not represent the people of Pakistan and has no mandate to compromise on such vital national matters. No fresh national debate has taken place. During the last few years people belonging to all shades of opinion have rejected signing of the CTBT and the previous government was censured on apprehensions of surrendering on this count. The debate in the now suspended National Assembly was inconclusive and a majority of members had opposed it. All parties conferences, held from time to time, have categorically opposed the signing of this treaty.

Even the incumbent foreign minister in his earlier writings criticised moves that could weaken Pakistan's minimum nuclear deterrence. What has happened in the last two months to change the position? To think that the treaty stops only from conducting new tests and would not affect our nuclear capability is, to say the

least, an illusion. Tests are necessary for the maintenance of deterrence because deterrence is not a static phenomenon. Fresh tests are necessary for any upgrading, weaponisation, miniaturisation and movement towards thermonuclear deterrence. Therefore, regular upgrading of minimum deterrence is crucial to the security of the country. This fact has been accepted by experts and acknowledged in an article co-authored by the foreign minister with Agha Shahi and Zulfikar Ali Khan (The News: October 5). In the article they said:

"Obviously our defence forces will have to be upgraded in proportion to the heightened threat of preemption and interception. Minimum deterrence has been and should continue to be the guiding principle of Pakistan's nuclear pursuit. Of course the minimum cannot be defined in static numbers. Without an agreement on mutual restraints, the size of Pakistan's arsenal and its deployment pattern have to be adjusted to ward off dangers of preemption and interception. Only then can deterrence remain efficacious."

Minimum deterrence cannot be effectively maintained without the capacity and the opportunity to upgrade capabilities in response to changing security environments. That is why the American Senate has refused to ratify the CTBT. America, therefore, has no moral or legal position to pressure us. Moreover, the treaty also opens the door of physical inspection and intrusive monitoring by a West-controlled team. Without making the world accept our nuclear status, our

right to upgrade our minimum deterrence, and without forcing India to resolve the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the UN resolutions and the wishes of the Kashmiri people, it would be suicidal to abdicate our right to upgrade our deterrence by signing the CTBT.

Surrender on this count would foreclose all possibilities of upgrading and relative positioning. It will open our nuclear facilities to direct inspection, besides the non-intrusive monitoring that is already taking place. It would be the first step towards ultimate denuclearisation and constant blackmail. If nuclear capability is to be defended, as it must be, this is high time to resist all external pressures and say No to the United States and its president. If Mr Clinton does not come to Pakistan during his forthcoming visit to South Asia, it would be a failure of his foreign policy and not of Pakistan's. Let him face his predicament. Pakistan must not surrender its vital security interests.

If the present leadership succumbs to this US pressure, it will not only compromise on matters of national sovereignty. It will also derive a wedge between the army leadership and the people. Public confidence and trust in the army on security matters will be badly shaken. May Allah guide our leadership and keep it away from inflicting this ignominy on the nation. Signing the CTBT would be worse than the Kargil debacle and the consequences would be disastrous.

The writer is chairman of the Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad and a former senator