

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to you today to express our grave concern with reports that a resumption of explosive nuclear testing is under consideration by the Trump administration. It has been nearly 30 years since the establishment of a nuclear testing moratorium in the United States, and Americans have been safer for it. Especially in the midst of a global pandemic, a resumption of testing is both unjustified and destabilizing, and opens the door to an expensive arms race. We staunchly oppose resurrecting the era of worldwide nuclear testing, especially in light of the unnecessary risks such actions would pose to the American people. The decision to resume nuclear testing is not one that should be taken lightly.

First, being tough on Russia and China means doing everything in our power to ensure that the global moratorium on explosive nuclear testing remains in place. Russia and China have neither the supercomputing technology of the U.S. Stockpile Stewardship Program, nor have they conducted the number of sophisticated explosive nuclear tests that we have. Thus, the United States currently maintains the technical advantage over Russia and China so long as nuclear explosive testing is not resumed. We should not open a door that would allow foreign nations to openly conduct nuclear test explosions.

Second, the Department of Energy's lab directors certify every year that nuclear testing is not necessary to verify the credibility of our nuclear stockpile. It is also well-known that the type of test that can be ready within months, a so-called "simple" test, is unlikely to provide additional technical value. Our lab directors have publicly assessed that through the supercomputers in our stockpile stewardship program, the United States now knows more about our nuclear stockpile than we did during the era of testing. A simple test would only be a dubious geopolitical negotiating tactic, as interagency discussions allegedly concluded.¹

Third, resuming explosive nuclear testing could impose immense costs upon American taxpayers. The costs of any single "simple" test are currently unknown, unplanned, and unfunded, and reprogramming of funds to support these efforts would likely impose a burden on an already thinly stretched National Nuclear Security Administration. In the event that the testing launches

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/trump-administration-discussed-conducting-first-us-nuclear-test-in-decades/2020/05/22/a805c904-9c5b-11ea-b60c-3be060a4f8e1_story.html

the United States into an arms race with Russia and China, Americans will have to pay Cold War-levels of additional nuclear weapons expenses. The midst of a pandemic—which has brought the global economy to its knees—is no time to engage in such a game of nuclear brinkmanship. Furthermore, the cost to Americans will not just be financial, but one that directly relates to their health and welfare. Communities such as in Nevada and Utah are still coping with the aftermath of nuclear testing during the Cold War. The United States is still paying for the civilian and veteran victims of U.S. nuclear testing. Members of these communities have already spoken out against the resumption of nuclear testing.²

Finally, in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from one arms control agreement after another, we are gravely concerned about the United States' go-it-alone approach and the consequences for our relationships with our friends and partners. The strength of the United States lies within the institutions and relationships we have built over decades of engagement. These networks of agreements and partnerships are how we ensure the safety and maintain the security of our constituents. The United States coordinates with allies around the world not because we are beholden to others to act, but because when like-minded nations that value global peace and security stand together, *we are stronger together*. There is no indication at all that our allies, who have ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and have regularly upheld the global moratorium in international forums, have any appetite for either the systematic destruction of the arms control framework or the resumption of nuclear testing by world powers.

In light of the previously stated concerns, we ask that you brief us on the following questions, in a classified setting if necessary:

- Has the State Department supported a decision to resume explosive nuclear testing? If so, what is the strategic benefit to the United States compared to the potential costs of doing so?
- Has the State Department evaluated the impact of the U.S. resuming nuclear testing? This includes an evaluation of the potential proliferation impacts on other nations; on the behavior of non-ratifying CTBT states, including China and North Korea; as well as an assessment on the likelihood of nations resuming open nuclear testing?
- Has the State Department assessed the potential reaction of our partners and allies, including those that possess or previously possessed nuclear weapons?
- Has the Department reviewed, with its interagency partners, the potential costs and benefits to resuming explosive nuclear testing? If so, what are the potential costs to the Department and interagency partners? How will such activities be funded?

We look forward to receiving your responses promptly.

Sincerely,

² <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2020/05/26/utah-downwinders-denounce/>



AMI BERA, M.D.
Chairman of the Asia, the Pacific, and
Nonproliferation Subcommittee

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CC: The Honorable Dan Brouillette, Secretary of Energy