

NUCLEAR TESTING: A TERRIBLE IDEA WHOSE TIME IS NEVER

Written by John Hallam

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PEOPLE FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

HUMAN SURVIVAL PROJECT

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RESUMED NUKE TESTING WOULD CAUSE OTHERS TO TEST, WRECK GLOBAL ARMS CONTROL FRAMEWORK

According to an article in yesterdays Washington Post,

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

picked up by a number of other news outlets (notably the Guardian, the Hill and the Daly Mail), some influential people (unnamed) in the Trump administration were or are, actively considering that the US should resume nuclear testing.

The US last did a full-scale nuclear test in 1992 before starting a self-imposed moratorium. China and France both tested as late as 1995 before observing their own moratoriums.

According to the Post, the matter came up at a meeting of senior officials representing the top national security agencies May 15, following accusations from administration officials that Russia and China are conducting low-yield nuclear tests — an assertion that has not been substantiated by publicly available evidence and that both countries have denied.

A senior administration official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the sensitive nuclear discussions, said that demonstrating to Moscow and Beijing that the United States could “rapid test” could prove useful from a negotiating standpoint as Washington seeks a trilateral deal to regulate the arsenals of the

biggest nuclear powers.

The meeting did not conclude with any agreement to conduct a test, but a senior administration official said the proposal is “very much an ongoing conversation.” Another person familiar with the meeting, however, said a decision was ultimately made to take other measures in response to threats posed by Russia and China and avoid a resumption of testing.

A resumption of testing would shred what is left of an arms control framework that the Trump administration has already done much to trash, with the scrapping of the INF treaty, the imminent expiry (Feb 2021) of the New START treaty, (with seemingly no intent to renew it), and the scrapping of the Open Skies Treaty.

Others (Kimball, Hans Kristensen) have already pointed out the blindingly obvious: Far from intimidating Russia and China, a US test would likely open the floodgates to resumed Russian and Chinese testing. In that context it would also be highly probable that India and then Pakistan would resume testing..

Trump's statements that the US is prepared for a nuclear arms race in which it would 'spend Russia and China into oblivion' (it is more likely that Russia and China would cause the US to spend itself into oblivion), suggest that what would follow would be a renewed nuclear arms race including significant nuclear testing.

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The dream of a world in which the further development of nuclear weapons was on hold and in which it would be held in check by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) would dissolve.

Ultimately the entire nonproliferation framework would be likely to dissolve, and with it the structure of the NPT as the world reverted to a nuclear free-for-all.

That an uninhibited nuclear arms race in which the US 'spends others into oblivion', at a time when it is unable or unwilling to protect its population from a virus, is more than breathtaking.

The world needs to tell the United States that a course of action such as this would be, truly, a terrible idea whose time is never.

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