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Announcement of Treaty on Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes (PNE Treaty)

The United States and the Soviet Union have signed the Treaty on Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes to complement the treaty limiting nuclear weapons testing. The treaty, the result of intensive negotiations since October 1974, permits for the first time American observers inside the USSR to verify an arms control agreement. This is a valuable precedent for future arms control.

The treaty limits peaceful nuclear explosions (PNEs) to yields of 150 kilotons -- the same limit placed on nuclear weapon tests by a companion treaty signed by the United States and Soviet Union in July 1974. These limits were made the same in recognition of the fact that

even after some 25 years of design and testing, nuclear explosives intended for peaceful applications and explosives for weapon applications remain indistinguishable.

The PNE Treaty is also accompanied by an agreement that all testing of nuclear explosives -- even those intended for peaceful application -- will be carried out at weapon test sites, and so will be considered as nuclear weapon tests.

The earlier treaty on the Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapon Tests -- or Threshold Test Ban Treaty -- did not cover underground nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes; but called for negotiating a separate agreement to govern such explosions. The treaty signed today fulfills the three basic U.S. criteria that were specified:

- Peaceful underground nuclear explosions must not provide weapon-related benefits precluded by the Threshold Test Ban Treaty.
- This must be adequately verifiable.
- The treaty must be consistent with existing obligations, in particular the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963.

Specifically, the latest treaty prohibits any indi-

vidual nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes of a yield greater than 150 kilotons, any group of individual explosions of a total yield exceeding 1.5 megatons (1500 kilotons), and reaffirms compliance with the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963.

The present PNE Treaty sets out detailed arrangements for verification, and specifies information to be furnished by the party carrying out the explosion. On-site observation to verify compliance is allowed, for determining that individual shots in all group explosions having total yield exceeding 150 kilotons, do not in themselves exceed the 150-kiloton ceiling. In addition, observers may be permitted on the basis of consultation between the parties for group explosions having total yields between 100 and 150 kilotons. The observers will be allowed to bring and use their own equipment for verification. The number of observers and their specific rights and functions are linked directly to the total yield and number of individual explosions in a group.

The Treaty provides for a Joint Consultative Commission to establish a forum for the exchange of information, to ensure efficient implementation of the agreement, and to consider compliance questions should they arise.

The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 prohibits nuclear weapon testing in the atmosphere, under water, and in outer space. In that same treaty, the parties further agreed not to carry out any nuclear explosion for any purpose in any environment, including underground, that would cause radioactive debris to be present outside the borders of the country in which the explosion takes place. Under the terms of the present PNE Treaty, the parties reaffirm their commitment to conduct peaceful nuclear explosions in compliance with the 1963 treaty.

Both the PNE Treaty and the Threshold Test Ban Treaty will be sent to the Senate for ratification.