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New Threat to the CTBT

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The CTBT is under a new threat. The 2020 U.S. Compliance Report charges that “Russia has conducted nuclear weapons experiments that have created nuclear yield and are not consistent with the U.S. ‘zero-yield’ standard,” and may also be guilty of a violation of the 1990 Threshold Test Ban Treaty. The Report claims that China may be guilty of similar activities. Similar charges have been circulating in the U.S. for years, but this is the first time a “finding” has been made by the U.S. Intelligence Community. The fact that U.S. charges of non-compliance by Russia resulted in the Trump administration’s withdrawal from both the INF Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty indicates that this situation needs to be resolved urgently. No evidence is presented for these charges and the International Monitoring System has not reported any relevant evidence of such activities. This problem has at least three aspects. These are the treaty obligation found in Article I, the obligation found in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties and the voluntary testing moratoria being undertaken by many countries. This issue may recede a bit under President Biden, but still must be cleaned up.

Promotional text

This oral presentation discusses the charge in the 2020 U.S. Compliance Report that Russia, and perhaps China, are violating obligations related to the CTBT. This poses a serious threat to the CTBT itself. The relevant obligations are discussed, along with possible solutions.

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