

The resumption of nuclear testing by France has triggered such a wave of protests worldwide that the prosecution has an easier role than the defense. Yet, there are a number of points that should be part of this debate. We need to keep in mind a broader perspective that goes beyond current events. In this brief essay explaining the French position, I will raise seven key points that critics sometimes fail to consider.

First, the decision should not have taken the entire world by surprise. During his campaign, President Jacques Chirac never concealed his intentions in this area. In France and abroad, everyone knew of his opposition to his predecessor's policy. He had opposed the nuclear testing moratorium from its initiation in April 1992.

Second, the French negotiators at the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review and Extension Conference in New York showed great openness on the testing issue when the group, led by President Jayantha Dhanapala, took part in the debate on the three decisions later adopted by the Conference. Here again, everyone knew that the probability of resumption of testing by France was high. Of course, this knowledge did not prevent hostile feelings from arising when France actually moved to resume testing. But, it is a significant point, especially in regards to the outcome of the NPT Extension Conference. The delegations convened in New York were well aware that the "utmost restraint" concept applied by consensus to nuclear testing (on the basis of a proposal by a non-nuclear weapon state) had been adopted because they had failed to agree on any language implying a universal commitment to abide by the current moratorium or to extend it to China. Therefore, French testing should not be seen as a violation of the understandings reached at the Conference.

Third, the decision to complete French nuclear testing within a period limited to a few months and involving a maximum of seven or eight tests, was made public on June 13, 1995, in the context of a solemn French commitment to sign a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in the autumn of 1996. Those who attended the NPT Extension Conference will recall that there is no

reference to an exact date for signing the CTBT and that the parties' commitments were limited to concluding a treaty. In his announcement, President Chirac stated his intention of abiding by the commitment made, while taking a further essential step (i.e., the commitment to sign the treaty). This is clearly the essential goal, namely: the complete cessation of nuclear testing in the near future. This specifically applies to the five nuclear weapon states, which must face up to their responsibilities.

Fourth, on June 29, 1995, a few days after

President Chirac's announcement, the French delegation in Geneva declared itself in favor of an unlimited treaty, stating clearly that a complete ban was intended. This point had been under discussion for one year and could rightly be considered an indication of a sincere commitment by the nuclear powers to the CTBT.

Fifth, on the crucial subject of the treaty's scope—a major stumbling block in the CTBT negotiations—France declared on August 10, 1995, that it accepted the Australian language. Therefore, the ban would apply to any testing of nuclear weapons and to any nuclear explosion. This statement was not just a significant reversal of the position previously held by France. It also helped contribute to the successful conclusion of difficult debates on the same issue in other capitals. On the next day, the president of the United States announced that he too had chosen the "zero option." The prospects of concluding and signing a CTBT in 1996 have become much brighter as a result. The United Kingdom was prompt in announcing its support of the proposal. On this point, the French government made a difficult decision and should be credited with showing more sensitivity to international expectations than some would have the world believe. As the French prime minister repeated in early September, this decision, which is "irrevocable," will presumably be the one regarded as hav-

**VIEWPOINT:**  
**FRANCE'S LAST TESTS:**  
**A CATALYST FOR**  
**NEW POLICIES**

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ing been crucial one year from now, after a CTBT has been concluded.

Sixth, another issue of great importance to the New York negotiators was the future of the Rarotonga Treaty. After rejecting, until now, any language that might imply signing of the protocols involving France, the French government has now announced its intention of closing down or converting the Pacific test site. Moreover, its representative, Minister for Cooperation Jacques Godfrain, stated in Port Moresby that France would consider signing the protocols after the completion of the nuclear tests.

Seventh, other important developments have no doubt been accelerated by the resumption of French nuclear testing. They would probably have occurred in any case, but in a more protracted and laborious way. France is now engaged in a broad reappraisal of its defense policy, including its nuclear aspects. The fact that its future will be decided in Europe, and not just in territorial France, is now understood by all. This implies momentous consequences in defense-related fields. It represents an upheaval of the basic principles behind French defense strategy. For this to have been stated, more clearly than ever before, by a Gaullist president at the beginning of his term, says a great deal about the irreversible nature of this shift. Many consequences follow from this reorientation:

- France is gradually abandoning the solitary model that was once its image in the world, especially in the nuclear area, and is concentrating instead on a collective framework for the formulation of its future defense policies.
- France is publicizing its highly satisfactory contacts with the United Kingdom on defense issues. The two countries are actually closer than they would have been willing to admit until recently. Neither would now consider a situation where their defense interests might differ on basic issues.
- France is acknowledging the wide differences among the European Union (E.U.) members on nuclear issues. These differences are partly the result of a diversity of status regarding the NPT. Thirteen E.U. members have renounced acquiring nuclear weapons, and there is no question that this position is unambiguous, especially in the very year when the NPT was extended indefinitely. Differences also result from variations in appreciation of the purpose of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War context. This is notably the case in Germany, centrally-located through-

out the period in the part of Central Europe inappropriately called “the theater” and likely to have been the first victim of a nuclear conflict.

- France declares itself ready to discuss nuclear issues and the role of nuclear weapons in Europe with its major partners. Such concerted action is neither oriented toward sharing its nuclear weapons, which would be contrary to the intent of the NPT, nor to extend the French deterrent to those countries already covered by the U.S. deterrent. In the immediate future, its purpose is to consult with the major partners on the possible future role of nuclear weapons in the defense of Europe. As everyone knows, this issue was until now at the core of French sovereignty. This opening should not be ignored. It paves the way for a gradual reconciliation of a resolutely European foreign policy and a defense policy which is still rather nationalistic. This reconciliation can only be welcome.