

# Arms Control Treaties

Source: Los Alamos National Laboratory

## **Nuclear Arms Treaties**

Developed to help win World War II, the atomic bomb quickly came to be seen as a weapon of mass destruction. Capable of doing far more damage than conventional chemical explosives, atomic bombs altered the nature of warfare and seemingly gave man the capability of destroying himself. As a result of this destructive potential, arms control treaties became an increasingly important means of controlling the development and proliferation of atomic bombs.

## **The Origin of Arms Control**

Beginning with The Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, diplomats and politicians in the early 20th Century fashioned treaties under international law to limit and reduce the number of offensive weapons. The 1922 Five-Power Naval Limitation Treaty, for instance, limited the size of the battleship fleets of the world's major naval powers. Other treaties, such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, sought to eliminate war altogether.

## **Limited Test Ban Treaty**

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union negotiated and argued over arms control. One of the earliest United States proposals to the United Nations, the Baruch Plan, was rejected by a Soviet Union intent on developing its own nuclear capability. In 1955 a United Nations subcommittee that included both the United States and Soviet Union began to negotiate a treaty to end nuclear testing. In 1963, the "Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water," also known as the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT), was signed and ratified by the world's nuclear nations. The LTBT did not eliminate nuclear tests conducted underground, which would continue until 1992.

## **SALT**

Beginning in the early 1970's and continuing to 2002, the United States and the Soviet Union/Russia worked with mixed success on six strategic arms control agreements. In 1972, the first of these treaties, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), was signed. SALT I was the first treaty to limit strategic nuclear weapons. A second SALT treaty was signed in 1979, but was not ratified by the United States in protest to the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan.

## **START**

Early in his first term, President Ronald Reagan promoted a new set pact known as the Strategic Arms Reduction Threat (START). The START I treaty, which was ultimately signed in 1991, provided for deep cuts in delivery vehicles as the primary mechanism to limit the number of nuclear warheads. A follow-on treaty, START II, signed by both countries in 1993, was not ratified because of issues related to ABM amendments. A third START treaty, agreed to in principle by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, was never negotiated because of the unresolved status of START II.

## **SORT**

In 2002, Presidents Bush and Putin signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT). SORT provides for reduction of the stockpile of weapons held by the United States and Russia to 1,700-2,200 warheads each. SORT has yet to be ratified by the Senate or the Russian DUMA.

Although, the nuclear weapon arms treaties have met with mixed results over the years, they do represent an ongoing dialog about the future of nuclear weapons.