

This Day in History... October 7, 1963

JFK Signs Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

On October 7, 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the Soviet Union and United Kingdom.

The dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan ended World War II but began the nuclear age. The US, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union continued to develop and test more powerful weapons.

In 1959, radioactive elements were found in milk and wheat in parts of the United States. Soon experts became aware of the health risks of radioactive fallout and began calling for testing regulations. The United Nations Disarmament Commission brought together representatives from the three countries involved in testing, plus France and Canada, to negotiate an end to testing.



1964 UN stamp honoring the treaty.



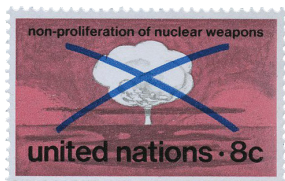
2017 stamp issued for JFK's 100th birthday.

The US and USSR agreed to stop tests during the talks. In spite of their promise, the Soviets resumed their testing in 1961, including exploding the largest nuclear bomb in history. America began testing again the following April.

During the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the US and Soviet Union came very close to nuclear war. President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev decided to reopen negotiations. As President Kennedy said, "It is insane that two men, sitting on opposite ends of the world, should be able to decide to bring an end to civilization." Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev then discussed a nuclear test ban in a series of private letters.

Official negotiations began on July 15, 1963, and an agreement was reached 10 days later. Both nations agreed to the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which forbid testing in the atmosphere, in space, and underwater. Though it came short of banning nuclear weapons, it was a first step. Those signing the treaty agreed to work to end the nuclear weapons race with a final goal of complete disarmament.

The next day, President Kennedy delivered a 26-minute televised address on the agreement. On August 5, 1963, representatives from the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, and the US signed the final agreement.



The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons went into effect in 1970. It prohibits nations with nuclear power from giving nuclear weapons to nations that do not already have them.

Next the agreement went to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. It was eventually approved by the Senate on September 24 and the Soviet Union the next day. President Kennedy then signed the treaty on October 7 before it went into effect three days later on October 10, 1963.

Thirty-three years later, the UN adopted the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Prohibiting all nuclear tests, it was signed by 71 nations but never ratified by the US.



In December of 1966, the UN General Assembly called upon all states possessing nuclear weapons "to suspend nuclear weapons tests in all environments," especially outer space.

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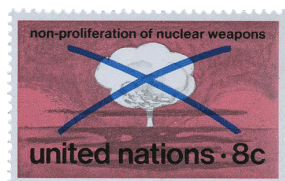
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