



## “Resumption of Nuclear Testing”—Not So Fast!

By

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On October 29, 2025, President Donald Trump announced on Truth Social that he “instructed the Department of War to start testing our Nuclear Weapons on an equal basis.” This statement, made just before a high stakes meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, marked a dramatic shift in American nuclear policy and raised immediate questions about intent, capability, and strategic signaling.

For advocates of renewed nuclear weapons testing, stop packing for the journey to the Nevada National Security Sites (NNSS). No mushroom cloud or subterranean detonation is soon to take place. Anti-nuclear protestors should also stay home.

The truth is less exciting. No real changes will happen “immediately” that “light up the sky and shake the ground.” This is not to say that the announcement had no effect. In fact, the statement was indeed monumental and incredibly significant.

Contrary to public perception, the US has never ceased testing its nuclear weapon systems. What has changed since the 1992 self-imposed moratorium on high-yield explosive testing is the nature of those tests.

Before 1992, the US conducted 1,054 nuclear weapon test explosions. The country detonated 839 of those warheads [underground](#), mostly at the then-named Nevada Test Site, where the last halted test, [Icccap](#), still stands as a memorial to the explosive testing days.

Several scientists involved in Icccap acknowledge that, owing to the extensive preparations undertaken, such as instrumentation, computational simulation, analysis, and test rigging, the most significant insights were gained from the limited number of unsuccessful tests. In other words, there is still great confidence in the performance and reliability of the American nuclear arsenal. It is this kind of “testing” to which President Trump’s declaration is likely referring.

Since 1992, testing has been through proxy systems that simulate a nuclear explosion’s unique energy output and then uses the results to validate physics models on advanced computer systems, known as physics-based modeling. This approach provides a way to validate the physics and predict the performance of a nuclear explosion under conditions that were never known in an underground test.

Scientists continuously conduct these tests, improving and refining them as added details are learned. They often report that scientists know much more now than possible from explosive testing.

Despite the president’s directive that testing “will begin immediately,” experts agree that resuming full-scale nuclear explosive testing is a complex and time-consuming endeavor. According to the Arms Control Association, it would take at least 36 months to prepare the Nevada Test Site for contained underground detonations.

This includes environmental assessments, infrastructure upgrades, and political approvals. This does not mean that explosive testing is impossible, but it represents a clear change in policy and a national effort to move nuclear weapons to the forefront of national strategy through an active nuclear explosive testing program.



The phrase “on an equal basis” is particularly provocative. It implies that nations like Russia and China may already be conducting nuclear explosive tests or at least advancing their capabilities in ways that challenge the spirit of the [Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty](#) (CTBT). Either of these should sound alarms and rightly must elicit a response.

The president has chosen precisely the response as outlined in the National Institute for Deterrence Studies’ (NIDS) [Dynamic Parity report](#), where a response matches the activities of adversaries, giving them the option to continue expanding their nuclear capabilities, knowing how America will respond, or cease and return to the table to negotiate for a more stable relationship.

The announcement of an “immediate” resumption of (explosive) testing is monumental because of its effect on deterrence. In his international policy book, [The Necessity of Choice](#), Henry Kissinger writes that deterrence is the (mathematical) product of will and capability. Few would question that the US has a nuclear arsenal and delivery systems that can cause incredible damage and harm. However, there is [growing criticism](#) and concern that the US lacks resolve to deploy its nuclear weapons even if an existential crisis arises.

Without clear signals of resolve, adversaries may doubt American willingness to act, weakening deterrence. This declaration supports that resolve without making a direct threat to any adversary. It simply puts them on notice.

Whether President Trump’s message leads to actual detonations or remains symbolic, it marks a turning point in American nuclear policy. It also aligns with the *Dynamic Parity* framework advocated by Curtis McGiffin and Adam Lowther, which calls for symmetrical deterrence and strategic clarity.

President Trump is demonstrating resolve, assuring allies, and highlighting American commitment to nuclear deterrence. The path forward should prioritize modernization, transparency, and diplomacy—not a return to the destructive rituals of past decades.

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