

THE AMBIGUITIES OF BRAZIL IN THE NUCLEAR AREA AND THE ARGENTINE "STRATEGIC PATIENCE" (2002-2010)

As ambiguidades do Brasil na área nuclear e a "paciência estratégica" argentina (2002-2010)

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RESUMO

Este artigo aborda as ambiguidades do Brasil no tocante à área nuclear durante os governos de Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Para tanto, o texto recorre a discursos de importantes políticos e integrantes das instâncias governamentais, de modo a analisar o posicionamento errático de Brasília ante os compromissos assumidos com a Argentina desde o Acordo Quadripartite (1991) e a fundação da Agência Brasileiro-Argentina de Contabilidade e Controle de Materiais Nucleares (ABACC). Outras categorias de fontes utilizadas são artigos de jornais – brasileiros e internacionais – e arquivos confidenciais vazados pela organização não governamental WikiLeaks. Finalmente, busca-se avaliar o papel da ABACC como instrumento de sustentação da “paciência estratégica” argentina no âmbito da sensível área nuclear.

Palavras-chave: Cooperação nuclear, Governo Lula, ABACC, *Paciência estratégica*, Relações Brasil-Argentina.

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the ambiguities of Brazil regarding the nuclear area during the administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. To do so, the text uses the speeches of important politicians and members of government bodies to analyze the erratic positioning of Brasília in the face of the commitments made with Argentina since the Quadripartite Agreement (1991) and the founding of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC). Other source categories used are newspaper articles – Brazilian and international – and confidential files leaked by the non-governmental organization WikiLeaks. Finally, it is sought to evaluate the role of ABACC as an instrument to sustain the Argentinian “strategic patience” within the framework of the sensitive nuclear area.

Keywords: Nuclear cooperation, Lula administration, ABACC, strategic patience, Brazil-Argentina relations.

In 2010, Juan Gabriel Tokatlian suggested that Argentines should use the term "strategic patience" to refer to Brazilian ambiguities in the nuclear area¹. The author's proposal was quite clear: it was a question of responding to Brazilians in kind since the concept had become so trivial that portions of the business sector, the press, and even Itamaraty reproduced it with a recurrence sometimes exaggerated.

In short, "strategic patience" can be defined as the mixed feeling of complacency and fatigue that is adopted in relation to third parties². The idea is that bearing with worries and losses in the present may allow you to reap good rewards in the future. In the case of Brazil, the expression was basically associated with the effort to highlight the Argentine protectionist practices and their erratic neglect of the commercial commitments in force.

The Tokatlian provocation, in turn, reverses the poles of the situation. The author assumes that Brazil would have failed to share a common view with Argentina on the military dimension of nuclear energy. Although the two partners had succeeded in building a zone of peace, Brasilia's stance in that area began to show signs of instability throughout Lula da Silva's two terms.

In this sense, this article aims at demonstrating that the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), founded in 1991, had an essential role in avoiding that the Brazilian ambivalence did not hinder the relations with Buenos Aires, ensuring the permanence of the atmosphere of mutual trust between the partners. To this end, the text uses speeches by important politicians and members of governmental bodies, to analyze the erratic positioning of Brasilia in relation to the commitments made with Argentina. Newspaper articles and confidential files leaked by the non-governmental organization WikiLeaks were also used as research sources of another kind.

Controversies before the inauguration of Mr. Lula da Silva

At the end of 2002, some experts were skeptical about the idea that integration policies would automatically generate the internalization and consolidation of the culture of friendship (RUSSELL & TOKATLIAN, 2003, p. 90). Although many points of divergence between Brazil and Argentina had been overcome during the 1980s and 1990s, the partnership between the two countries suffered from persistent remnants of rivalry and the resurgence of old issues that seemed to be resolved through agreements and cooperation initiatives.

It is important to remember that Mercosur went through a period of severe stagnation in the late 1990s, accentuated after the devaluation of the Real in 1999. The Brazilian crisis had begun in 1998, a few months after the Russian crisis. The context of instability forced President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to abandon the fixed exchange rate regime, causing the loss of two-thirds of the currency reserves in a few months (RAPOPORT, 2011, p. 232). The devaluation of the real surprised the Argentine government since it was not consulted or even warned in advance about

the decision that would be taken by Brasília. Although indirectly, a crisis was triggered in Argentina, affecting its relationship with Brazil.

In the wake of the crisis, growing popular discontent led to the fall of Fernando de la Rúa in 2001. The changes in the political field did not prevent the severe recession and the uncontrollable deficit. The situation was aggravated by the stance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and international lenders that have hampered the normalization of the economic situation by speculating on the increase in Argentine public debt.

Diego Ramiro Guelar, secretary of *International Economic Relations and Cooperation of the province of Buenos Aires* and former ambassador to the European Community, to Brazil and to the United States, made great efforts to attempt to rebuild Mercosur. To meet this goal, Guelar proposed four main lines of action: (i) eradicate hunger; (ii) protect the environment; (iii) fight against drug trafficking and (iv) advance the issue of nuclear cooperation. Linked to these last field of action, the ABACC was considered the “*only supranational institution*” existing. Guelar suggests “*to Mercosur it*”, placing it under the control of the Mercosur Council, with a program of energy generation, use in the medical area and joint presence in international forums dealing these issues³.

However, the rise of the Workers’ Party (PT) to power was accompanied by a reorientation of Brazilian policy, including ambivalences regarding the nuclear sector, with somewhat disconcerting positions for relations between Brasília and Buenos Aires.

On September 13, 2002, three weeks before the elections, the then PT candidate for the Presidency of the Republic, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, gave statements in a meeting organized by ESG in Rio de Janeiro. At that time, Lula defended compulsory military service and criticized adherence to the NPT:

This treaty would only make sense if all the countries that already have nuclear weapons gave them up. Now, why does a citizen ask me to disarm myself, to keep a sling, while he keeps a cannon pointed at me? What is the advantage that I take? Brazil will only be respected in the world when it is economically, technologically and militarily strong.⁴

Six former ministers of the military regime participate in this meeting: Aureliano Chaves (Mines and Energy and vice-president between 1979 and 1985); Alfredo Karam (Navy); Carlos Tinoco (Army); Leônidas Pires Gonçalves (Army); Ivan Mendes (National Information Service); and Gibson Barbosa (Foreign Affairs). It is well to remember that this military group has always stood against the NPT.

Reactions to Lula’s statements soon had an impact, even among some of his political supporters. Fernando Gabeira, who at the time was a federal deputy for the PT, uttered:

It is of no interest to Brazil to develop such technology. It does not have nuclear weapons because it has made a choice to develop them is to shift away from the center of its foreign policy, which is the defense of peace.⁵

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso took the opportunity to declare in a veiled criticism to Lula that he did not understand why certain candidates were "bragging" about the model of the military government⁶. Cardoso's Foreign Minister Celso Lafer reacted from New York, recalling the importance of Brazil's position on the issue since the 1980s until it culminated in the creation of ABACC: "Without these understandings there would be no Mercosur, which Lula and his party rightly defend."⁷

Lula's statements were also condemned by the competing candidates, namely: Anthony Garotinho, for the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), and José Serra, for the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). José Goldemberg, former Secretary of Science and Technology of the government of Fernando Collor, said: "Thanks to the non-proliferation treaty there is denuclearization of the world today"⁸.

The climate of the elections stimulated discussions on the topic, especially in newspapers. The physicist Luiz Pinguelli Rosa, one of the main PT collaborators in the energy field, argued that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should be reviewed because it was in crisis. According to Pinguelli Rosa, the NPT "is asymmetrical. It gives some armed countries the right to remain so, and others, who have no weapons, have to undertake not to develop them."⁹

A few weeks later, Pinguelli Rosa himself recoiled when he recalled that nuclear weapons were banned for three reasons: The Federal Constitution of 1988¹⁰, the Treaty of Tlatelolco and the NPT itself. He felt then that the new administration should support the Coalition for a New Agenda¹¹.

PT deputy Paulo Delgado sought to justify Lula's position, claiming that he had only criticized the United States' decision not to eliminate its arsenal, as provided for in the NPT. He also recalled that, at the initiative of the PT, the treaty had been duly approved by the Congress with an interpretative clause that allowed Brazil to revise its vote if the non-accession of nations with nuclear weapons provoked an arms race.

Amid the negative repercussions surrounding his statements, Lula said in his first official speech as president-elect that he was committed to the terms of the NPT. In a preventive manner, the PT also issued a note responding to the accusation of the candidate defeated to the Presidency¹², José Serra, who had hinted that Lula would favor the development of nuclear weapons.

The theme regained visibility when Roberto Amaral, minister of Science and Technology, in an interview with the BBC Brazil, said that Brazil should dominate all technologies, including that of the atomic bomb. The minister's statements corroborated a few days later at a press conference, had repercussions abroad and provoked a deep discomfort in Brasilia¹³.

According to Rodrigo Mallea, the commitment to denuclearization was the result of a gradual historical process, and not merely a consequence of the arrival of a specific administration to power. Thus, cooperation is a deeper phenomenon that results from three political-diplomatic coincidences, crowned by an element of a technical-scientific nature: (i) both countries rejected the NPT, (ii) Brazil and Argentina sought to reduce international suspicions about the development of nuclear weapons, (iii) the two

neighbors sought a mutual guarantee mechanism capable of generating trust outside the NPT frameworks - the ABACC -, (iv) the common interest of scientific communities to strengthen academic ties of cooperation. In this context, the role of the ABACC as an institutional arrangement and formatted as State policy was fundamental (MALLEA, 2012, p. 159).

Andrea Oelsner (2007) contributes to the debate by considering regional peace as a necessary - although not sufficient - condition for friendship between States. The author argues that peaceful relations would be enhanced by liberal-democratic regimes, although other types of domestic organization - including the military, as in the Brazilian-Argentine case - can avoid war and even initiate a dynamic process of “mutual trust-building”. Thus, “democracy is not a sine qua non for the maintenance of a zone of negative peace.” (OELSNER, 2007, p. 27).

Analyzing the case of Argentina and Brazil, it is clear that the two partners were immersed in a process of building a plural security community, which would imply solidarity, mutual sympathy and the formation of a common identity. In this process, Oelsner highlights the role of ABACC as one of the institutions that collaborated directly to structure this deeper level of mutual partnership between their respective bureaucracies and societies.

In this same line of reasoning, Julio César Carasales (1997, p. 124-130) points out that the trust between the *policymakers* of both countries is strengthened by the fact that they suffer similar external pressures due to their status as non-NPT countries, besides having the same problems in acquiring equipment and technology abroad. For this reason, Brasília and Buenos Aires articulated their work in international forums.

Carasales lists a number of factors conducive to consolidating mutual trust: budgetary motivations - stopping the rivalry and the climate of competition with the neighbor would result in resource-saving - the equivalence of nuclear programs - even if they were not identical - and symmetry in the accounting and control - with no side yielding more than the other. To this, an element considered exceptional is added, because in Carasales's view, in the last century and a half the two countries treated themselves as rivals, but practically never as enemies. Furthermore,

The only war between the two took place in 1826-28 and ended with the creation of a buffer state. Uruguay. Since then the bilateral relationship has had ups and downs but never came to war. (CARASALES, MADERO & COHEN 1992, p. 130-131)

However, there is a question in trying to understand the changing profile of Brazil: why did the Lula administration express a flexible narrative about the NPT that was not accompanied by Kirchnerist Argentina?

Julio Cesar Carasales points to two factors that motivated the behavior disparity between the two countries. The first element refers to the fact that, in Argentina, “the military never directly intervened in the nuclear activities” (CARASALES 1997, p. 100-119). In Brazil, on the contrary, there were even “parallel” or “autonomous” nuclear

programs carried out by the three armed forces. Military technical schools were also pioneering in physical and mechanical engineering activities, which is why the Brazilian nuclear community has never been monolithic. With the possibility of disagreement among sectors of civil society, many government policies in this area become the topic of interesting debates. This explains why the approval procedures in Congress is much more time consuming than in Argentina. The Quadripartite Agreement, for example, was ratified by the Argentine parliament in little more than six months after its signature on December 13, 1991. In Brazil, it took a year and a half.

The second variable is nationalist sentiment and the pretension of being a great power. This kind of ambition drives the desire for tangible and intangible power resources that legitimates the desire for power. Thus, nuclear development would be one of the possible strategies to join the *small committee* of the great powers, gaining prestige and leveraging the Brazilian candidacy to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

Knowing that the controversial declarations in this area were not exhausted with the speech of September 13, 2002, the Lula administration had to return to the subject several times to justify itself before the international community and its neighbor.

The era of the ups and downs (2003-2006)

After the inauguration on January 1, 2003, André Singer, a spokesman for the Presidency of the Republic, would come out with some frequency to declare that the Lula administration would only seek to develop research in the nuclear area for peaceful purposes. On January 7, 2003, the Ministry of Science and Technology (MTC) released a note reaffirming its position against any activity related to the production of nuclear weapons. In this sense, the text highlights the role of ABACC:

Under the Quadripartite Agreement for the Application of Safeguards, all Brazilian nuclear installations are subject to international safeguards of the ABACC and the IAEA, including installations operated by military organizations such as the Navy Technological Center in São Paulo (CTMSP), the Aeronautics Institute of Advanced Studies (IEAv) and the Technological Center of the Army (CTEx).¹⁴

The content of the text reminds that the activities of the nuclear sector in Brazil addressing the areas of health, industry, environment and agriculture were developed in the Research Institutes linked to the MCT/Nuclear Energy National Commission (CNEN), Nuclear Energy Research Institute (IPEN), Dosimetry and Radioprotection Institute (IRD), Nuclear Energy Institute (IEN), Nuclear Technology Development Center (CDTN), Northeast Regional Center for Nuclear Sciences (CRCN) and at the companies Nuclear Industries of Brazil (INB), and Nuclebrás Heavy Equipment (NUCLEP), also linked to the MCT/CNEN, covering the areas of R&D and products and services at different levels and in different levels and in different fields of nuclear energy, aiming at its application and its safe use.

In Argentina, the statements of the Minister of Science and Technology Roberto Amaral caused great repercussions in the media. The newspapers reproduced the content of the minister's interview with the BBC, which was also available on the ministry's own website:

The journalist said: "The word 'strategic' has already been associated with the idea that Brazil needs to master the technology necessary to eventually produce even the nuclear bomb, (the idea) that technology must reach that point even when there is no intention to produce the bomb in the immediate horizon. Do you share that idea?" Amaral's Answer: "I share it, I share it. We are against nuclear proliferation, we are signatories to the non-proliferation treaty, but we cannot give up scientific knowledge. We shall renounce the production of military artifacts, but we cannot renounce any scientific knowledge".

The journalist insisted: "Does that include knowledge for making the atomic bomb?" Amaral's Answer: "It includes all knowledge. The knowledge of the genome, the knowledge of DNA, the knowledge of nuclear fission. All knowledge. We want to know everything that is possible."¹⁵

In this context, President Eduardo Duhalde was compelled to express himself:

We were talking during a cabinet meeting (...) "There will be no statements from the Argentine government or any of its officials. It is a subject to be seen what was said and whether it will be ratified or rectified by the authorities of the Brazilian government. On this subject, we are on hold".¹⁶

A few hours after these statements, Foreign Minister Celso Amorim stressed that "*Brazil is not interested in using this technology for the manufacture of nuclear weapons or bombs*", and Amaral himself was forced to explain himself, evoking the existence of the ABACC and the constitutional ban on the non-peaceful use of nuclear energy. However, the response itself did not sound very incisive, when he stated that "We are against the nuclear option; we are a country that defends peace, but we want that Brazil dominates all possible fields of science."¹⁷

At the same time, the world was embroiled in the US threats against Iraq and the crisis with North Korea, motivated precisely by alleged weapons of mass destruction. Argentine President Duhalde admitted having discussed the issue at a cabinet meeting but declined to make any public statements. Meanwhile, the IAEA asked the Brazilian government for clarification.¹⁸

The Argentine newspaper *Clarín* feared that statements by Lula and his minister could irritate ultraconservative groups in the US Congress, which had already sent a letter to President George Walker Bush due to some of Lula's positions during the election campaign¹⁹. A few days later, Amaral tried to circumvent the situation by saying that everything had been "a misunderstanding" and reaffirming that Brazil was

a signatory to international agreements against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, besides being in favor of the exclusively peaceful use of that technology.²⁰

Despite the contradictory statements, the partnership between Brazil and Argentina advanced, resulting in the signing of the "Buenos Aires Consensus", on October 16, 2003. It is a generic text aimed at deepening the strategic partnership between countries and a formal statement of opposition to the liberal prescriptions of the Washington Consensus.²¹

In November of that year, Brazil announced that it would accelerate the construction of its nuclear-powered submarine and that it would invest in the production of enriched uranium. Without expressing major concern, Renato Carlos Sersale di Cerisano, then *Director of International Security, Nuclear Affairs and Disarmament of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs* and member of the ABACC board, stated:

The construction of an atomic submarine was an already known fact and depends on its own national defense program. We are not worried about progress in this regard, because we have a whole mechanism of control and verification of nuclear materials.²²

Sersale emphasized that the ABACC was internationally recognized as a model of cooperation and that the US government itself had requested, in Laudatory tone, that that experience was widespread in South-East Asia. José Mauro Esteves dos Santos, Secretary of the ABACC, highlighted the union and commitment of the work developed by the Agency, stating that

This was reflected in October 2003, when the governments of Argentina and Brazil, in the Joint Declaration of Presidents Néstor Kirchner and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, emphasized the importance of the Agency.²³

This climate of relative optimism was eventually dissolved by new turbulence. On December 28, 2003, *The New York Times* published a story by Larry Rohter in which he argued that Brazil would resist the unrestricted access plans of international inspectors at nuclear fuel production sites.²⁴ Like an epidemic, the news spread to other newspapers, such as the *La Nación* and *The Wall Street Journal*. The British *Financial Times* asserted that "the leftist government of Brazil" would suffer growing international pressure in this area.

In response, the MCT issued a note endorsed by the Defense and the Foreign Affairs ministries, in which they affirmed that Brazil had always fulfilled its commitments in international agreements, conventions and treaties and that:

Because of these commitments, all nuclear materials present in all Brazilian facilities have been under international control by ABACC and IAEA for 10 years, which inspect them unrestrictedly and regularly, including unannounced inspections.

These inspections are carried out through specific procedures negotiated and agreed with the two agencies, preserving our technological and commercial interests, and it is always evident that Brazil is respectful for the work that these Agencies and other UN agencies do for world security.²⁵

However, the text does not state clearly whether Brazil would accept the IAEA's next inspection, stressing only that it would be negotiated considering two main aspects.

First, the fact that Brazilian centrifugal technology, developed by IPEN, should be protected because it was superior to the American and the French since it does not revolve around a mechanical axis, but levitated sustained by an electromagnetic field around a magnetized shaft. Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, secretary of Strategic Affairs of the Presidency of the Republic, categorized Brazilian technology ultracentrifuges as "the most efficient in the world"²⁶, although experts disputed this. However, at that time, only six countries enriched uranium on an industrial scale by the modern and economical method of ultracentrifugation for electric energy production: China, Russia, Japan and Urenco - a European consortium formed by England, Germany and Holland.

Secondly, the INB would enrich uranium by less than 5%. The submarine demanded a percentage of 20% and the bomb of more than 90%. That is, the fear of the IAEA was seen as unreasonable.²⁷

However, some parliamentarians - even from the PT, like the deputy João Alberto - spoke out criticizing the Brazilian government resistance to the inspections.

In April 2004, the government was forced by the press to speak once more. On the front page, the *Washington Post* published a story signed by Peter Slevin, in which he accused Brazil of impeding IAEA inspections of the new commercial uranium enrichment plant to manufacture nuclear fuel at the INB, which were being built since 2002, in Resende, in the state of Rio de Janeiro.²⁸

At the occasion, John Cirincione, director of the Nonproliferation Project at the *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, one of the leading non-governmental peace organizations in the United States, said:

If Brazil has decided that it wants to develop nuclear technology, it is essential that the international community can know how this is being done. (...) I do not know if Brazil intends to produce nuclear weapons. But certainly, Brazilian officials have been sending in recent times disturbing messages that this is an option that cannot be ruled out in the long run. (...) There is no reasonable economic reason for Brazil to produce its own enriched uranium, and we can no longer have in the world countries searching for technologies to obtain status in the world order.²⁹

Wade Boesie, research director of the Arms Control Association, followed the same line: "If Brazil wants to be seen and respected as a country with responsible nuclear technology, the government has to accept inspections from the international community. Resisting them would be a bad example".³⁰

James Goodby, an ex-negotiator of the US nuclear program, warned in a *Washington Post* article that the rules should apply equally to opponents and friends: "If we do not want enriched uranium in Korea and Iran, we do not want it in Brazil either."³¹

The fears of the international community are hypothetically justified, given that the existence of such a power plant reduces the time between a possible denunciation of all agreements and treaties already signed by a country and the eventual fabrication of nuclear artifacts, "making nuclear weapon on short notice".

To this strategic-military concern, another of an economic order can be added: the emergence of a new competitor in the billionaire world market for nuclear fuel. At that time, Brazil had the sixth-largest uranium reserve in the world³², but it had to send the material abroad to be enriched. The nuclear- powered submarine would depend precisely on energy autonomy³³.

The Brazilian government reaction was vehement, considering the accusations "unacceptable" and "baseless". Foreign Affairs Minister Celso Amorim has criticized the interests of some US agencies, such as non-governmental organizations. According to him, the way to conduct these inspections is always negotiated and he states:

The country has sought to find ways to ensure that our use of nuclear energy is entirely for peaceful purposes and guarantees the possibility of having its own technology in this sector, which is so important economically, and there is no reason why Brazil stay out of it.³⁴

On the following day, the Foreign Affairs Ministry issued a very hard note, criticizing the press's position and emphasizing the role of the Constitution, the ABACC and the IAEA and international treaties (Tlatelolco, TNP, CTBT) as instruments guaranteeing the peaceful purposes of its nuclear program.³⁵

In the Brazilian government's assessment, comparisons with states that conceal nuclear activities are unacceptable, since the country only intended to ensure that the adopted procedures respected the application of effective control of the nuclear material used and preserved the technological secrets of Brazil, as well as interests. Thus, when Brazil discusses the norms for inspections, it is precisely reaffirming its peaceful intentions, otherwise, it would not allow them to happen - and they were already occurring in the thirty-five units in the country, and the 36th in Resende was not even ready.

In this context, Foreign Minister Celso Amorim took advantage of a ceremony at the Argentine Embassy to once again highlight ABACC as the major guarantee that the Brazilian nuclear program was already well guarded. Marco Aurélio Garcia, the special adviser to the Presidency of the Republic for International Affairs, reinforced: "who wants to make a bomb in Brazil? Neither the government, nor the opposition, nor the right, nor the left, nor the academy, nor the military, nor the media. Nobody is crazy."³⁶

In the press, however, the contradictions continued. According to a report by *IstoÉ* magazine, the government was divided between a sector willing to "to fight and keep

Resende's production secret," and another, willing to give in to the pressures of the Bush administration³⁷.

José Goldemberg, Secretary of Science and Technology in the Collor government - and later Secretary of the Environment of the State of São Paulo - relativized the issue of industrial espionage and affirmed that the government's stance on hindering inspections was a strategic mistake. It was, according to Goldemberg, a "whim that is creating an international problem for Brazil".³⁸

The supposed interest of other powers in appropriating the technological advance of Brazil seems to me a half paranoid thing. They have no need to do so, because magnetic suspension technology is well known, and competent engineers could apply it if they wish.³⁹

Perhaps the best response in this debate was that of Admiral Alan Arthou, director of the Navy Technological Center in São Paulo (CTMSP), where the technology was developed: "the centrifuges can produce at a price that is less than or equal to the market price. If it is better or worse than others, no one can say. Nobody knows mine, just as I do not know the others."⁴⁰

It is important to remember two questions here: First, the uranium enrichment process corresponds to approximately 35% of the cost of the transformation of the ore into nuclear fuel, and secondly, the kilogram of natural uranium cost US\$ 40 at the time, but after the enrichment, it cost US\$ 1,500. Thus, Brazil could make a huge saving of resources. Until then, the uranium extracted from the Caetité mines in Bahia was transformed into a *yellow cake* and then shipped to Canada, where it was modified to form the gas and then enriched in Europe by the consortium Urenco, formed by companies from Germany, the Netherlands, and England. Back in Brazil, it was converted to powder, pressed into pellets and packed into the rods used as fuel in the nuclear plants.⁴¹

In this sense, it is good to remember that Argentina had also suffered the same accusations in the 1970s and 1980s. The reasons were very similar: the announcement of entry into the lucrative enriched uranium market⁴². In addition to the economic issue, the American nuisance also seemed to stem from other factors, such as Brazil's proximity to with Russia and Ukraine in the space area, opposition to the FTAA, criticism of the Iraq war, and the investee in South-South cooperation.⁴³

On April 19, 2004, Carlos Feu Alvim, who alternately held the positions of Deputy Secretary and Secretary of the ABACC, from its founding until 2002, published an article in *Correio Braziliense* denouncing that Brazil was now the "target" in the international pressure mechanism for the signing of the NPT Additional Protocol. The latter would authorize the IAEA to conduct a visual examination of the centrifuges used to enrich uranium⁴⁴.

Still, Alvim demanded caution in the reactions, for this was not the moment "neither for bravado nor for submission." In Alvim's view, it is the ABACC who first develops the

panels that cover the centrifuges in Resende - which Vice Admiral Othon Luiz Pinheiro da Silva calls the French male *urinal*, by showing the legs and the upper part of the person but conceals the essential.

Alvim believed that behind this new policy of the IAEA was the administration of George Walker Bush, whose goal was to limit "access to uranium enrichment to countries that already dominate the nuclear cycle. A criterion to establish this distinction could be to possess or not a commercial plant." (ALVIM, 2004, p. 35)

In the midst of all these debates and dilemmas, the publication in May 2004 in the *Folha de S. Paulo* of a note by Juan Pablo Lohlé, ambassador of the Argentine Republic to Brazil - a position in which he remained for eight years, between 2003 and 2011 - reaffirming the role of ABACC in the mutual trust between the two neighbors and in the consolidation of Mercosur. It highlights again the central role of ABACC as a troubleshooting tool in the Brasilia-Buenos Aires axis, as well as in support of the two countries before external pressures against their sovereign interests.⁴⁵

Despite the pressures, it is clear that it was not in the interest of the United States to enter into frontal conflict with Brazil on this issue. US Undersecretary for the Western Hemisphere, Roger Noriega, was concerned to state that the United States had "full confidence" in Brazil and that there was no doubt about the country's peaceful intentions in the nuclear area⁴⁶. A few months later, US Secretary of State Colin Powell, at a press conference with Celso Amorim, ended any controversy by declaring that Brazil was a "solid candidate" for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, and that it could not be placed in the same category of countries as Iran or North Korea⁴⁷.

In spite of the clear position of the US government, other news in the press impelled the Brazilian government to defend itself against the accusations. On October 22, 2004, the prestigious US magazine *Science* published an article titled "The Brazilian Nuclear Puzzle", written by Liz Palmer and Gary Milhollin, researchers at a nongovernmental organization in Washington, Project Wisconsin Nuclear Weapons Control.⁴⁸

According to the article, the complex of the facilities under construction of the INB would have the capacity to produce nuclear warheads. The text further argues that the Brazilian government would have copied the equipment of the European uranium enrichment company, Urenco, which is why it did not sign the additional protocol of the NPT. The authors also argue that by avoiding IAEA special inspections, Brazil motivated countries like Iran to do the same.⁴⁹

In response, the MCT said it was "perplexed" by the allegations. According to Odaír Dias Gonçalves, a professor and president of CNEN, a member of the Board of Directors of Nuclebras and the Board of Governors of INB, the text signed by Liz Palmer and Gary Milhollin was a "new type of noise" caused by "hidden interests", only to complicate Brazil's negotiations with the IAEA. After all, the INB would not be able to enrich uranium to 90%, the minimum percentage of concentration for a nuclear bomb.

Gonçalves, however, did not rule out the possibility that the centrifuges were bought from Karl-Heinz Schaab, an employee of Germany's *Man Technologie AG*, who

developed centrifuges for Urenco and ended up arrested and extradited, accused of selling projects to Iraq.⁵⁰

Finally, the INB began to function in the testing phase in August 2005 and was officially inaugurated in May 2006. The controversy surrounding the INB came to an end when the factory started producing on a commercial scale and the inspection routines began to be negotiated, with the permission for unannounced inspections at its facilities.⁵¹

The return of ambiguities (2009-2010)

The inauguration of the INB marks a period of relative cooling of the polemic involving the nuclear issue. However, the organization of the visit of the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, revives the distrust and the antagonistic feelings towards the Brazilian nuclear program. After all, the Iranian regime was accused by the IAEA of hiding nuclear activities in sensitive areas for almost two decades, violating its commitments to the NPT, which is why the UNSC has applied economic sanctions against Tehran.

Ahmadinejad's arrival in Brazil in November 2009 came a few weeks after Vice President José Alencar made an extremely controversial statement. Alencar, who had also been Minister of Defense, argued that Brazil should have nuclear weapons as a "deterrent" and to "give more respect" to the country.

The nuclear weapon used as a deterrent is of great importance for a country that has 15 thousand kilometers of borders to the west and has a territorial sea and now 4 million square kilometers of the area is of the pre-salt sea.⁵²

José Alencar's statements came a month before the presentation of the National Defense Strategy and, unhappily, on the same day that the UNSC unanimously approved a resolution aimed at containing the spread of nuclear weapons in the world. The issue of non-proliferation was the order of the day on the international agenda.

As far as the END is concerned, nuclear energy has received a lot of attention, stating that the country would not accede to the Additional Protocol to the NPT. Documents revealed by WikiLeaks reveal that, in fact, there was at the time a "quasi-consensus" in Brasília regarding non-adherence to the Protocol. According to the telegrams revealed, the only Brazilian employee favorable to membership was the director of the Division of Disarmament and Sensitive Technologies of Itamaraty, Santiago Mourão⁵³. In addition, the telegrams shed light on a power and influence dispute between the Ministry of Defense and the Itamaraty. Vice Admiral Othon Luiz Pinheiro da Silva and Minister Nelson Jobim were particularly adamant.

The tensions between Nelson Jobim and the IAEA were evident when the latter wanted to interview the physicist Dalton Barroso, who had published a book with the formula to reach W-87, one of the most powerful American nuclear warheads⁵⁴. On September 5, *Jornal do Brasil* published an article entitled "The Explosive Brazilian

Discovery," in which he announced that the "revolutionary doctoral thesis" of physicist Dalton Ellery Girão Barroso - defended at the Military Engineering Institute (IME) had as its theme the numerical simulation of thermonuclear detonations.

Later turned into a book, "The physics of the nuclear explosives" happened to be sold online. The disclosure of the survey deeply irritated the IAEA, which even raised the hypothesis that the data revealed in the book were secret and could only have been developed through laboratory experiments. It was almost confirmed that Brazil could develop – or even be developing – an atomic bomb.⁵⁵

The IAEA warned that such secret information could serve international terrorism, requiring compulsory recall of the book – that by the date of closure of that article⁵⁶ remains available on several *websites*.

The Brazilian discontent occurred mainly in the military area, due to the IAEA's interference in the academic activities of the IME. In this context, divergences between military and diplomats have become explicit. In the name of national sovereignty, Jobim assumed a position of greater confrontation with the IAEA, whereas Celso Amorim preferred to temporize, adopting a more conciliatory position.⁵⁷

Faced with this impasse, Senator Eduardo Azeredo (PSDB), president of the Senate Foreign Affairs and National Defense Commission, announced the convocation of the Defense and Foreign ministers to explain the situation. The PSDB was the largest opposition force to the PT, being common the habit of exploiting loopholes in foreign policy to denounce government actions (GAVIÃO, 2015). Nevertheless, Azeredo took a moderate position, considering the IAEA's concern to be understandable, but also treating as a matter, of course, the fact that these sensitive issues were the subject of academic studies. In the press, the newspaper *El País* reverberated the uncomfortable situation between Brazil and the IAEA.

It is not the first time, not only in military circles, but also in the government and Congress, the thesis that Brazil, called to be a world power, could one day count on the atomic bomb like other countries, or at least with the possibility of building it. This is also not the first time that the IAEA is concerned about Brazil's progress in this regard.⁵⁸

The clash with the IAEA was over. However, in March 2010, two months before the NPT review conference, Minister Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães made a disastrous statement, stating that the signing of that treaty was "a mistake":

At the initiative of the Americans, the Non-Proliferation Treaty was negotiated in 1968. Signed first those who held the armament. The United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, which became entitled to nuclear weapons. The remaining countries had no such right. These powers have made their nuclear weapons ever more sophisticated and have made a huge effort to prevent other states from developing nuclear weapons. Thus, in the industrial field, you cannot develop

technologies for peaceful purposes, on the pretext that they could be used for military purposes.⁵⁹

Luiz Felipe Lampreia, Fernando Henrique Cardoso's former chancellor, at the time of the signing of the NPT, reacted forcefully:

As anyone minimally informed on the subject knows, the uranium enrichment rate required to power nuclear power plants is less than 10%. Yet for making nuclear weapons, the required rate is 90%. Which of the two hypotheses is Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães talking about? Brazil needs to have "autonomy" to reach the goal of 90%, that is, to have the capacity to manufacture atomic bombs?⁶⁰

The internal debate was further fueled by a report from the well-known German magazine *Der Spiegel* entitled: "Is Brazil developing the bomb?" Signed by Hans Rühle, former director of planning of the German Ministry of Defense between 1982 and 1988, the article had repercussions on specialized publications and periodicals in the region. In his analysis, Rühle is exhaustive: "[It is] highly probable that Brazil is developing nuclear weapons".⁶¹

According to Odair Dias Gonçalves, there existed in Brazil a "certain authoritarian culture [in the nuclear area] and of little transparency that comes from the military era". In fact, nuclear weapons have always been a fetish for some military figures. Even "to this day they would very much like [to make the bomb]". (oral interview, PATTI, 2014).

A few weeks later, Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães manifested himself again, this time much more emphatically, casting doubt even on the role of the IAEA inspectors:

Well, inspectors are formally officials of the IAEA, but in reality highly qualified technicians, that were usually nationals of developed countries, naturally imbued with the "justice" of the existence of a nuclear oligopoly not only military but also civil, and they are always ready to collaborate not only with the IAEA, but also with the authorities of the countries of which they are nationals. (...) to accept the Additional Protocol and the internationalization of uranium enrichment would thus be a crime against the homeland.⁶²

In response, Senator Eduardo Azeredo renewed his criticism, recalling that former Minister of Science and Technology, Roberto Amaral, defended in 2003 the manufacture of a nuclear device for research purposes. In Azeredo's view, the sum of the Lula government's polemics was squandering Brazil's trust capital in the nuclear area. In view of this, the country gave way to the emergence of suspicions and doubts, such as those raised by the magazine *Der Spiegel*.

Senator Arthur Virgílio (PSDB) said it was "naïve if we imagine that the President of Iran, the dictator of Iran, does not think about building nuclear artifacts."⁶³ Former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso also increased the PSDB infantry by stating

that "presidential demagoguery is nothing more than an outburst of a dazzled ego that disrespects the facts and even the dignity of the country"⁶⁴.

While the Brazilian political atmosphere was contaminated by this kind of confrontation between situation and opposition, Barack Obama convened in Washington the first international summit on nuclear safety in history - coincidence or not, one month from the VIII Review Conference of the NPT. It was attended by 47 countries, with the main objective of dealing with nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation. During his address, Lula highlighted the Brazilian commitment from three levels: (i) bilateral, with the guarantees offered by ABACC; (ii) regional, through the Treaty of Tlatelolco; (iii) multilateral, through the Quadripartite Agreement. On the other hand, he took the opportunity to reaffirm his critical positions:

Brazil is ready to actively cooperate for a safer world where, in parallel to the elimination of all nuclear arsenals, fissile materials, and nuclear facilities are protected.⁶⁵

Lula's speech seems to have angered Barack Obama, who in his final speech extolled the achievements of other Latin American participants - Argentina, Chile, and Mexico -, solemnly ignoring Brazil⁶⁶.

On the Argentine side, it was feared that the rapprochement between Brasília and Teheran, as well as the opening of a Brazilian embassy in North Korea, would force the country to revise its commitments in the area of nuclear proliferation - walking dangerously toward the atomic bomb.

Although it has not become public, the fear expressed by Buenos Aires can be identified in a leaked telegram by WikiLeaks. Dated December 24, 2009, the text reports the contents of a meeting that had taken place two weeks after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Brazil. The meeting was between the American embassy's political advisor Alex Featherstone and Gustavo Ainchil, head of the Department of International Security and Nuclear and Space Affairs (DIGAN) of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also participated his vice-director Alberto Dojas and the employee Lorena Capra. According to members of the Argentine government, Lula, confident of his "immense popularity", had adopted a "risky" foreign policy:

Yellow lights had been set off in Argentina, Ainchil said, by these developments as well as by comments by a variety of former officials and academics sharing some frustration that Brazil was prohibited from joining the other BRIC countries as an equal in terms of nuclear weapons capabilities.⁶⁷

Ainchil even acknowledged that there was a climate of "relief" in Argentina with the proximity of the end of the Lula administration. He also considered that the best policy would be to encourage Brasília to cooperate with the international non-proliferation regime without exaggerating the pressure:

Ainchil also said that Argentina took comfort in the certainty of a presidential transition in Brazil in 2011. Although he emphasized Argentina's respect for President Lula, he suggested that Lula's unmatched popularity and his late-in-the-term detachment from political considerations had allowed him to become a risk-taker in foreign and defense policy. Any successor, Ainchil speculated, would shy away from such controversial policies in his or her first years, perhaps retrenching on the Iran relationship and becoming more cooperative on new nuclear confidence-building instruments.⁶⁸

The telegram also reveals that Ainchil had expressed, on another occasion, serious suspicions about the work of Brazilian Defense Minister Nelson Jobim, which had imposed a new rhythm on military purchases, aggravated by the fact that:

(...) that while ABACC and the IAEA both had access to civilian and military facilities where nuclear materials were in use, they did not enjoy the broader and short-notice access envisioned under the AP. Under current arrangements, Brazil shielded certain nuclear technology, such as centrifuges, from Argentine inspectors, while taking elaborate measures to demonstrate that nuclear fuel and materials were fully accounted for in the process.⁶⁹

Leonam dos Santos Guimarães considered Gustavo Ainchil's concerns as an "isolated posture" and recalled that only the constitutional charters of Brazil and New Zealand prohibit the non-peaceful use of nuclear energy in the national territory. Ainchil's views did not reflect those of the Argentine government, which cooperated patiently and amicably with Brazil within the framework of ABACC⁷⁰.

For obvious reasons, the governments of Argentina, Brazil and the United States did not comment on the facts revealed by Wikileaks, although the negative repercussion in the press was not negligible. In Brazil, for example, the *Estadão* published a headline titled "Argentina feared Lula's nuclear ambition"⁷¹, while in Argentina the newspaper *La Nación* boasted that the archives revealed, "that Brasilia would have violated an atomic treaty signed between both countries"⁷².

The epistemic community remained relatively absent from the debates. In Brazil, the most vehement manifestations in the press were linked to the name of José Goldemberg, known for his militancy in favor of signing the Additional Protocol of the NPT. In Goldemberg's view, the Lula government was making decisions that were contrary to Brazil's permanent interests in approaching Iran and expressing skepticism about the NPT⁷³. The physicist asserted that the "great international credibility" conquered by the two countries with the model established by the ABACC was being diluted by a "narrow and retrograde nationalism" that cast doubts on Brazil's real intentions (GOLDEMBERG, 2010).

In an interview on June 25, 2010, Goldemberg denounced a "return to the times of the dictatorship". The argument was that Lula's direct assistants were against the

Additional Protocol with the leniency of the president, who refused to reproach them: "Lula's silence encourages mistrust that Brazil intends to make nuclear weapons to exercise its sovereignty. Brazil wants the bomb." The physicist also strongly suggested that the constitutional ban on the use of nuclear services and facilities was fragile and could be reversed with a new Constituent Assembly:

(...) If any government ever decides to change the Constitution, it will set no precedent. The 1988 Constitution is the eighth since Independence and accumulates 62 amendments. By comparison, the US has had the same constitution since 1776, with only 27 amendments, and England does not even have a written constitution. When pressing Brasília to sign the Protocol, the powers should be looking carefully at our constitutional history.⁷⁴

Some Argentine academics spoke about the WikiLeaks revelations. Professor Federico Merke of the University of San Andrés considered that they show the degree of uncertainty and patience that exists among Argentine officials and analysts: "Brazil is not seen as a country that will soon have the bomb, but as a State that does not stop making its nuclear program transparent".⁷⁵

The Lula administration, by emphasizing the demand for the disarmament of the nuclear powers as a basic condition for non-proliferation and, on the other hand, by investing in the maximum improvement of Brazilian nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes, has transformed the nuclear program not only into a strategic instrument but also in a symbolic resource of autonomy and national development.

Merke lists four elements that generated distrust and undermined the international legitimacy of Brazil at that moment: (i) José Alencar's statements, which were not eloquently denied; (ii) the refusal regarding the Additional Protocol, which indicates Brazil's residual resistance to non-proliferation; (iii) the concealment of the centrifuges, which "does *not cease to arouse restlessness*" in a country like Brazil, which is part of the select group of eight States with the capacity to enrich uranium; (iv) the construction of two submarines powered by nuclear propulsion.

On the other hand, Merke agrees to show that there are commitment and responsibility of Brazil with ABACC and with the IAEA. The statements about the "Brazilian bomb" would be, hence, bravado and conjecture that are not consistent with the behavior of the country:

In fact, our work aims to point out these inconsistencies that undermine Brazil's international legitimacy. But from this to suppose that Brazil "goes for the bomb" implies a cognitive leap that leaves aside the Brazilian diplomatic tradition, the attachment for sovereignty, the nature of a region without interstate conflicts, the double inspections of the ABACC and the IAEA, and the intense socialization of nuclear standards to which Brazil has been exposed. (MERKE, 2012, p. 147).

Conclusions and convergences: the role of Argentina

In this situation what would be the role to be played by Buenos Aires? Still, according to Frederico Merke, Argentina is part of the solution:

Argentina does not proliferate, it does not have hidden nuclear programs, it does not restrict the inspections of the IAEA and it is in favor of putting pressure on Iran. Neither is it a state that is willing to flirt with terrorist groups and its facilities are not at risk of falling into their hands. (MERKE, 2012, p. 152)

Other experts express some concern. Juan Gabriel Tokatlian argues that Argentina and Brazil should resume the dialogue in a broad way, in order to restore the nuclear issue as a structure of friendship woven between the two countries, just as it prevailed throughout the 1980s. An area as sensitive as this should never be a condition of a hindrance, but a stimulus to bilateral approximation. In this context, Tokatlian understands that the ABACC is efficient enough to ensure non-proliferation, and only needs to be reinforced with new commitments.

Rut Diamint, a professor at *Universidad Torcuato Di Tella* with a vast and privileged curriculum in the area of security⁷⁶, shows skepticism: “*I do not believe Brazil thinks about the atomic bomb. But if it seeks, in case it is necessary to establish itself as a global power, it wants to have the capabilities required to do it.*”⁷⁷

There is a clear desire shared by all agents to overcome mutual mistrusts. Many interpret the meeting between presidents Lula and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in March 2010 as the starting point of a process of overcoming mutual suspicion, given that at that meeting the two presidents re-emphasize bilateral collaboration in the nuclear area. The goal was to create a binational company, in addition to leverage projects of multipurpose reactors for the production of medical isotopes and for scientific research. Provisions were made for the increase of the exchange of technicians and researchers for the short term.

The ABACC model, hitherto based on the “cooperate to prevent” setting, evolved into the “cooperate to do” imperative, as it becomes clear with the declaration on nuclear cooperation signed at the San Juan Summit in 2010.

The decade of 2000, in the opinion of Roberto Russel and Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, can be divided into three moments in the perceptions of the Argentine elites on the place of Brazil. The first chronological landmark, beginning with the 2001 crisis and ending in 2003 with the end of Duhalde’s administration, was still of suspicion in a context of a serious national crisis. The second, which extends until 2006, is characterized by ambiguous perceptions. The third, as of 2006, is the beginning of a long cycle in which Argentine perceptions about Brazil are more “positive than ever, and ‘asymmetrical interdependence’ between the two parties is a recognized condition in Argentina, not devoid of the value of the natural suspects of the weakest in a bilateral relationship.” (RUSSELL; TOKATLIAN, 2011).

It could be added that, between 2009 and 2010, some controversial statements surfaced and re-heated debates and suspicions – including the subsequent leakage of confidential documents by WikiLeaks. Despite the potentially conflict-prone atmosphere, ABACC has mastered its delicate role, preserving mutual trust:

The GOA [Government of Argentina] officials emphasized that as long as Brazil maintained its acceptance of safeguards and transparency under the IAEA and the Brazil-Argentina Agency for Accountability and Control (ABACC), they were not overly concerned.⁷⁸

In the end, it is concluded that the concept of “strategic patience” must be interpreted from two angles. It is true that in the commercial dimension it predominates on the Brazilian side, but it cannot be ignored that Argentina was also “strategically patient” with Brazil, especially when Brasilia expressed its ambiguities and contradictions in such a sensitive area as the nuclear.

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