

10-29-2004

BRAZIL STANDS FIRM ON INSPECTIONS, IAEA BACKS DOWN

NotiSur writers

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/la_energy_notien

Recommended Citation

NotiSur writers. "BRAZIL STANDS FIRM ON INSPECTIONS, IAEA BACKS DOWN." (2004). https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/la_energy_notien/159

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin American Energy Policy, Regulation and Dialogue at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiEn: An Analytical Digest About Energy Issues in Latin America by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

BRAZIL STANDS FIRM ON INSPECTIONS, IAEA BACKS DOWN

Brazil appears to have won a months-long stare-down with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding full access to its nuclear-energy program. IAEA inspectors arrived at a Brazilian nuclear-development site on Oct. 19 with the understanding that they would be permitted to see less than they had been bargaining for. Putting a best face on the limitation, an agency spokesperson in Vienna said the inspectors would not need total access.

The IAEA, in backing down, is treading a fine political line in giving Brazil some slack on much the same issue it is pressing Iran on. Brazil took the opportunity to emphasize its persuasive powers with official comments that the agency had become "more flexible." Seeking to offset the statement, IAEA spokesperson Melissa Fleming said, "We will not compromise on our fundamental technical requirements that will allow us to ensure there is no diversion of nuclear materials out of that plant."

Protecting industrial secrets

Brazil's argument for resisting has been that it cannot allow the inspectors to see the hulls of centrifuges where uranium is purified because it has developed technology that is 30% more efficient and 25% more cost effective than that used in US enrichment plants. The issue is the risk that the Brazilian technology might be stolen. At the heart of the new technology is an electromagnetic technique that reduces friction. Thus, the three inspectors entered the Resende plant northwest of Rio de Janeiro under restrictions.

Far from being chastised for its attitude by the US, Brazil, an outspoken, though lately inconsistent, champion of nonproliferation, recently got a boost from US Secretary of State Colin Powell. On a visit to Brazil in early October, Powell said he is confident Brazil has no plans to develop nuclear weapons. At stake for Brazil is UN permission to begin operating the plant to enrich uranium.

Powell softens threat from US right

Powell's statement also somewhat mitigates previous statements from the US characterizing Brazil as part of a Latin "axis of evil," along with Cuba and Venezuela. Henry Hyde (R-IL), chair of the House International Relations Committee, used that phrase in describing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva as a "pro-Castro radical," while Constantine Menges, former US President Ronald Reagan's security director for Latin American affairs and former National Security Council member, said this "new axis" is linked to Iraq and Iran. The significance of Menges' statement is that holdovers from that administration, Otto Reich and Elliott Abrams, have had key roles in the current US administration's Latin American policy.

Science and Technology Minister Eduardo Campos said in an exclusive interview with *Folha de Sao Paulo*, "We want the IAEA safeguards. We want to facilitate their work, but we want to do so in an alternative manner--something that wasn't in our previous proposal, nor full visual inspection."

An unnamed Brazilian official said that Brazil proposed in September that the agency could inspect the tubes leading to and from the centrifuges, but that the machines themselves would be shielded from view by panels, approximately 2 meters in height, that surround them. The panels would be lowered slightly to reveal the tubes.

Brazil's stated use for the plant is to enrich uranium to low--less than weapons grade--levels to produce electricity and free the country from the need to import the fuel for power generation. Brazil is the world's fourth-largest producer of uranium, well able to supply its own needs and to export the refined product.

A world power needs nukes

But the country also has more far-reaching global aspirations. It is seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and officials have expressed the belief that being a potential nuclear power would strengthen their position. In January 2003, then minister of science and technology Roberto Amaral, Campos' predecessor, said Brazil could not afford to renounce any form of scientific knowledge, "whether the genome, DNA, or nuclear fission." The Lula administration distanced itself from the statement, but Lula had said, addressing the question just months before Amaral's statement, "If someone asks me to disarm and keep a slingshot while he comes at me with a cannon, what good does that do?"

Brazil's 1988 Constitution forbids nuclear weapons, but that prohibition has not diminished speculation that a nuclear arsenal is in Brazil's future. A recent *Science Magazine* article said that the Resende plant "will have the potential to produce enough 235U to make five to six implosion-type warheads per year. By 2010, as capacity rises, it could make enough every year for 26 to 31 and by 2014 enough for 53 to 63." The article claims that even if the plant produces only fuel-grade uranium (3.5%), more than half the work toward making the weapons-grade product (90%) will already have been done, giving Brazil the power to make nuclear weapons before the world can react.

While acknowledging there is little evidence that Brazil actually intends to become a nuclear power, the article points out that, if Brazil is allowed to proceed, IAEA will have no grounds to deny equal treatment to Iran, to which the same dynamics apply. Under the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by which IAEA is bound, there is no legal ground for treating the two countries differently.

Brazil responded energetically to the prestigious magazine article with a statement to the press that it would lodge a diplomatic complaint with the US regarding the assertion of nuclear capability. Science Minister Campos also objected to another innuendo in the piece, that Brazil had not developed the technology at all but rather was trying to hide its origin. The article stated, "In 1996 Brazil arrested Karl-Heinz Schaab, a former employee of Germany's MAN Technologie AG, a firm that developed centrifuges for the European enrichment consortium called Urenco." It said that Germany wanted Schaab to prosecute him for selling centrifuge

blueprints to Iraq and that there was evidence he was helping Brazil as well. "It follows that, if the IAEA inspectors were to see the Brazilian centrifuges, they might discover that Urenco's design data had been transferred," said the article.

Brazil's Comissao Nacional de Energia Nuclear (CNEN) called the article "provocative, and with obscure purposes behind it." A statement from Industrias Nucleares do Brasil called the story "speculative."

The speculation, however, was not altogether without some basis in fact. The Brazilian navy has admitted that Schaab, who had lived for years in Brazil eluding German authorities, had worked on "ultrasecret" projects for the military. Nor was there anything particularly original in Science's analysis. Writing in The New York Times in June, Brent Scowcroft noted, "Once enrichment capability exists, a major barrier to producing a nuclear weapon virtually vanishes. The IAEA condemnation is an indication that the world may be on the verge of a major breakdown of the nonproliferation regime, to say nothing of a huge new source of instability in a critically important region."

Scowcroft was alluding to Iran as well as to Brazil with that observation, but on the specific issue of Brazil's nuclear efforts, he wrote, "Put simply, the way Brazil is dealt with could prove to be one of the keys to dealing with the Iranian nuclear problem, either by persuading Tehran to abandon its nuclear weapon ambitions or by rallying the international community to crack down on Iran if it does not. We therefore should make the same offer to Brazil as to Iran and make clear the consequences if Brazil turns down that offer."

It would appear from Brazil's recent success with the IAEA, that Latin America's most powerful country has grown beyond the fear of "consequences." Brasilia awaits the Agency's report to determine whether it has won a battle or a war.

[Sources: The New York Times, 07/20/90, 06/24/04; The San Francisco Examiner, 07/27/04; Xinhuanet, 10/18/04; Reuters, 10/05/04, 10/20/04; BBC News, 10/20/04; Associated Press, 10/18/04, 10/22/04; Science, 10/22/04; La Opinion (Los Angeles), Notimex, 10/25/04]