https://www.acdn.net/spip/spip.php?article465

Nuclear Proliferation : France with a leading role

Is Brazil resuming its progress towards the Bomb?

- Homepage - News - News Articles -

Publication date: Monday 10 November 2008

Copyright © www.acdn.net - All rights reserved

French text on line since 1 September 2008 - English translation slightly abridged.

An announcement was made on 28 August 2008 by Brazil's Minister of Defence, and reached France next day thanks to the attentive ears of the submariners, who published it in "Le portail des sous-marins". We published it too, and now wish to place it in perspective and see what it will mean, because the official statements reported by "Le Portail", on both sides of the Atlantic, are far from revealing all the reality.

"For decades Brazil has envisaged the building of a nuclear-powered submarine, and launched the project officially in 1979. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced in 2007 a budget of 540 million dollars for the project and for uranium enrichment.."

Nuclear weapons, never? Never say never.

Consider this worrying statement:

"The submarine - which the chiefs hope will be ready by 2020 - would be the first nuclear sub in Latin America. Brazil does not have nuclear weapons."

To write this is to ignore the fact - which perhaps the editor does not know - that "for decades" the Brazilian Army have wanted to possess nuclear weapons, and that, thanks to help from an unspecified foreign country that provided fissile material (let's hope that for once it wasn't France) Brazil was to have carried out its first nuclear test in September 1990. If today Brazil still has no nuclear weapons, that's due to President Fernando Collor: in August 1990 he discovered by chance that the nuclear arms programme which the civilian government had theoretically interrupted in 1985 had been continued secretly by the generals. He succeeded in stopping it at the eleventh hour and having it dismantled later. It seems true to say, then, that Brazil was a month away from having the atomic bomb.

Now that is hard to prove because the test did not occur, but it does seem clear that Brazil wishes to have the Bomb again when that becomes feasible. Not that it is needed for security. But because in today's world, the Bomb gives status and power over others. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council all have nuclear weapons and, despite solemn undertakings to renounce them, showed until recently not the slightest intention of doing so (an exception is a speech by Gordon Brown in January 2008, which has yet to lead to anything). We can understand how the leaders and generals of a young, strong, dynamic power like Brazil are dreaming of acquiring these weapons for themselves - if only to make others take seriously its candidacy for a seat on the Security Council and for a share in conducting the world's affairs...

A pretext that doesn't stand up

Reports of Brazilian *"oil reserves recently discovered off its coasts"* are very timely when it comes to justifying the resumption of a nuclear programme:
"Brazil has begun a strengthening of its defense capacity for fear that its oil reservers - estimated at 55 billion barrels - and the potential wealth of Amazonia might become the target of other countries."

Copyright © www.acdn.net

To increase defense capacity to combat foreign covetousness is a plausible motivation. But to need a NUCLEAR sub for the patrolling of offshore oil is a ridiculous pretext - scarcely less ridiculous than the desalination project which was given by President Sarkozy as reason for selling a nuclear reactor to Gaddafi of Libya (who hadn't even asked for one). Between now and 2020, how will Brazil's oilfield be patrolled? If the five classical subs it has now (diesel-powered) can do the job, why couldn't they do it after 2020? Surely not because of a shortage of diesel! After all, they would be securing an ample flow of that fuel from the undersea oilfield! And even if Brazil would be short of subs in 2020, why would an ordinary Scorpene not be satisfactory?

The answer is inescapable: because Brazil has a bigger project. The acquisition of nuclear technology and materials serves both to reactivate the project of a nuclear-(powered) sub and to develop a facility for uranium enrichment (the kind of facility the West wants to deprive Iran of, precisely because any state possessing one can go on to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium). This programme is not something to tell tourists and the public about. But once you have a nuclear-powered sub, why would you turn down the chance of the nuclear-armed one? It is perhaps not easy to progress from the one to the other, but Brazil is obviously one of the world's powers that is skilled enough and tempted to do so.

Brazil is currently one of the states-parties of the Treaty of Tlatalolco, the agreement that makes Latin America, from Mexico to Patagonia, one of the three or four militarily denuclearised zones on the planet, i.e. officially nuclear weapons free. Even if a nuclear-powered submarine is not in itself a nuclear weapon, the mere fact of Brazil introducing one into the region would cast suspicion on its longterm intentions and would be a serious blow to the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

At the same time, South America would be at risk from the nuclear itch that affects much of the world. And when the risk of proliferation will have become extreme, there will naturally be some leaders who view it as an imperious (and imperial) reason for waging one of those "pre-emptive wars" for which "advanced capitalism" has discovered and tested the recipe in Iraq, and which produce wonderful opportunities - first for the military-industrial firms and then the military-secuirty firms, and then the companies specializing in rebuilding devastated countries. All that will give the victor the chance to rule and subjugate the countries - Brazil for example - that will have become very competitive internationally and will also serve as sources of increasingly precious energy and primary resources in a context of world shortage.

The role of France

"Speaking in Rio late in August 2008, the Minister of Defense Nelson Jobim explained that the modernization of Brazil's defense required a massive transfer of technology from France - and that this was essential if Brazil is to have a nuclear submarine.

In February 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy had announced that France would transfer to Brazil the technologies needed for building a classical submarine of the Scorpene class. This would serve as a model for the building of a nuclear submarine, according to Brazilian decision-makers."

Once again, France is dispersing her military and nuclear technology in all directions, at the risk of provoking future wars. For Nicolas Sarkozy to be doing this is not surprising now that he has grabbed the controls of France's nuclear machine. It is more surprising from the French submariners. It is true that on the possible day when Brazil's subs (conventional or nuclear) confront the USA, or Argentina, nobody yet knows what side France will be on. It is true also that in the meantime the French submariners and engineers can dream of visiting their Brazilian colleagues, thanks to this beautiful cooperation project.

Copyright © www.acdn.net

All the same, remember that during the Falklands/Malvinas War it was a French-made Exocet that sank a Royal Navy ship with the loss of hundreds of British sailors. And that some French personnel are still the victims of the effects of the 1991 Gulf War - a war whose origins certainly include the sale of the "Osirak" nuclear reactor to Saddam Hussein, a deal signed in 1975 by Jacques Chirac, who was then Prime Minister.

France's leaders - of all parties - seem to have learnt practically no lessons from the history of the 20th century, notably its military history. This is inevitable since with very few exceptions they all worship at the shrine of the nuclear ideology. It is certainly inevitable for our military leaders, and just about everyone else. Our submariners ought to take note, however, even those who man our attack subs and ballistic missile subs. They are told that the fascinating devices of destructive technology and power on which they serve are useful for maintaining peace. That is a falsehood. Those submarines contribute to destabilizing the relationships between peoples, and their crews are at risk of becoming, one day or other, the victims of a tragic accident or an absurd war - or else the agents of a crime against humanity.

ACDN

Copyright © www.acdn.net