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Brazil Should Act on Nuclear Transparency

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Although Dilma Rousseff failed to secure an absolute majority in the first round of Brazil's presidential election, she seems certain to beat her rival Jose Serra in the run-off voting on Oct. 31 to become Brazil's first female president. As current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's hand-picked successor, Rousseff represents policy continuity, and her likely victory shows the degree to which Brazilians are happy with the track their country is on. Yet one disturbing issue has been largely overlooked by both domestic and international commentators during the election campaign: Since 2004, Brazil has refused to grant inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog, full access to its nuclear facilities, in violation of Brasilia's obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Lula has justified this stance by arguing that Brazil has no intention of seeking nuclear weapons. Not only does the country's constitution forbid them, but Brazil is also a signatory to both the NPT and the Treaty of Tlatelolco banning nuclear weapons in Latin America.

Even taking Lula at his word, the fact that Brazil even allows such a discussion to take place negatively affects its reputation. If Brazil really has no intention of developing nuclear bombs, why does it not simply play by the international rules?

The motivations for Brazil's policy remain a mystery to outsiders. One would think that as a democracy located in one of the most peaceful regions on earth, and as a country that seeks greater global influence, Brazil would be a vocal supporter of the NPT. Instead, Brazil's stance unnecessarily triggers global suspicion and damages its national interests. Brazil has argued that by refusing the IAEA greater access to its nuclear facilities, it merely seeks to protect commercial secrets from the agency's inspectors. But this justification is unconvincing, since the U.N. inspectors have an excellent record of keeping these secrets.

Brazil's next president should instead take a clear stand in support of nuclear transparency by reopening all of Brazil's nuclear facilities to the IAEA. Only that will put an end to the uncertainty that is undermining Brazil's credibility and its ability to realize its foreign policy objectives — including obtaining a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council.

The Brazilian government has historically been critical of the nonproliferation regime, characterizing it as an attempt to freeze the international power structure and contain emerging powers such as Brazil. After reportedly pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program in the 1970s and 1980s, Brazil shifted gears, becoming a responsible stakeholder by signing the NPT in 1998.

However, in 2004, Brazil took the unusual step of not allowing the IAEA's inspectors free access to all of the country's nuclear facilities, which constitutes a violation of its obligations under the NPT. At the time, some Brazilian officials called signing the NPT a mistake, characterizing the treaty as an effort by the "established nuclear powers . . . to fortify their oligopoly of power" — comments that caused consternation and anxiety abroad. Since then, Brazil has assumed an even more obstructionist stance: During the 2010 NPT Conference, Brazil was one of the least-constructive members in discussing issues such as improving monitoring by IAEA inspectors, and has refused to sign the Additional Protocol that would allow more intrusive IAEA inspections and oversight. Brazil has also rejected proposals to make the Additional Protocol the default inspection regime for NPT signatories.

Certainly the Non-Proliferation Treaty has its weaknesses, as its critics rightly argue. Yet despite its flaws, the treaty has helped limit the number of nuclear weapons states, and is at least part of the reason that no nuclear bomb has been used in an attack since its signing. Rising powers such as Brazil and India resent the fact that the NPT does not reflect changes in the international distribution of power that have occurred since it was signed. For instance, Brazil

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will soon become the world's fifth-largest economy, but is subject to the inspection regime required of non-nuclear weapons states. By contrast, France, as a nuclear weapons signatory, maintains the strategic advantages that come with its treaty-protected status, despite a relative decline in global economic and diplomatic reach.

That has led some Brazilian strategists to advocate for reserving the right to develop nuclear weapons. But that rationale is fundamentally flawed for two reasons. First, the nuclear inequality institutionalized under the NPT is still preferable to the anarchic equality that would result from a world in which many more states possess nuclear weapons. Second, nuclear weapons are no longer a requirement for great power status. Brazil is at no disadvantage compared to India, for instance, despite the latter having developed nuclear weapons. To the contrary, Brazil could conceivably use its status as the only BRIC member without nuclear weapons to play a leading role in the quest for global disarmament.

Toying with the nuclear weapons option, on the other hand, is likely to destabilize the region, significantly harming Brazil's national interests and undermining its efforts to emerge as a leader in the 21st century global order. Whether Rousseff or Serra ultimately wins the election, Brazil's next president should take action to end all speculation about Brazil's nuclear program. That would allow Brazil to dedicate its time and energy to assuming a global leadership role in more meaningful areas such as poverty reduction, climate change, and the democratization of global governance.

Oliver Stuenkel, 20 OCT 2010, [World Politics Review](#)

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