

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Battle over nuclear technology

The U.S. State Department, the CIA, and others are brandishing "economic neocolonialism" against Brazil's technological future.

Following President Fernando Collor de Mello's election last December, the so-called "universalist" faction inside Brazil's Foreign Ministry, Itamaraty, has resurfaced under the auspices of the President's brother-in-law, career diplomat Marcos Coimbra. This faction has advocated modifying Brazil's foreign policy toward an unconditional realignment with the free-trade administration in Washington. Thus the renewed pressures, through the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. State Department, for Brazil to sign the anti-technology Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Encouraged by the weakness of the Carlos Menem government in Argentina in defending its own technological achievements, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker intends to take advantage of the 50th meeting on the treaty—to be held in Geneva, Switzerland in August—to force similar concessions from Brazil. Following his meeting with Brazilian Foreign Minister Francisco Rezek in Washington in May, Baker sent a high-level delegation to Brazil headed by the U.S. representative to the International Atomic Energy Commission, Richard Kennedy.

On May 23, Kennedy gave a press conference at which he scorned the Brazilian Constitution for failing to offer "guarantees" against use of nuclear technology for anything but peaceful purposes. The Constitution's restrictions, said Kennedy, are "for internal consumption" only.

President Collor has been forced to respond to such explicit attempts to

intervene in Brazil's internal affairs. In a speech at the Foreign Ministry on May 25, the President protested the unjust treatment Brazil has received at the hands of its old World War II ally: "We hear that our access to those extraordinary instruments of high technology used to combat our structural ills depends on a certificate of good behavior from a small club of countries self-endowed with the role of supreme judges of international scientific ethics."

José Luis de Santana Carvalho, the president of the National Nuclear Energy Commission, responded to Kennedy's visit by telling the daily *O Globo* that the State Department's deployment was "economic neocolonialism" intended to prevent the country's technological advances. "It is due to the constitutional restrictions" which Kennedy had protested, said Santana Carvalho, "that we are developing independent technology."

This latest State Department offensive was preceded by pressures from the CIA and the Carnegie Endowment to get the Collor government to sign the NPT. On April 18, *O Globo* reported that CIA chief William Webster had told a meeting of the World Affairs Council in Boston that the nuclear development of "certain" Third World countries "poses serious dangers to the interests of the United States."

The Carnegie Endowment issued a study, entitled "Nuclear Exports: The Challenge of Control," which accuses Brazil, Argentina, Pakistan, India, and Iraq of dealing in "contraband" to expand their capacity to build

nuclear weapons. This provoked widespread repudiation, above all from the higher ranks of the Brazilian Armed Forces, which have been historically linked to the country's advanced technology projects. Air Force Minister Brig. Socrates de Castro Monteiro declared, "The Brazilian program is clear. Brazil doesn't need permission for its development." Navy Minister César Flores described Carnegie's charges as total lies.

Despite this unanimity within Brazilian military circles and the nationalist scientific community, elements within Brazilian diplomatic circles have indicated a willingness to "reevaluate" everything, including those aspects of national sovereignty on which Brazil has been crystal clear in the past. In this sense, they are playing with fire.

This division was clear in President Collor's own speech; even while defending Brazil's sovereign right to technology, he asserted that it was time to take up "universalist" diplomacy once again. This term is generally understood to refer to the most oligarchical grouping within the Foreign Ministry, those who endorse British free-market liberalism and have let it be known that they are prepared to "reevaluate" the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In line with this, the Brazilian press has lately revealed that Foreign Minister Rezek will be traveling to France, to urge that country to sign and ratify the Tlatelolco Treaty, a milder and less restrictive version of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Brazil is a signator to the Tlatelolco Treaty, which nonetheless cannot be enforced until signed by all nations with interests in the region.

State Department envoy Richard Kennedy had publicly urged Brazil to undertake precisely such a role with the non-signators.