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Sotomayor, Arturo C.

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CHAPTER 8

# Brazil and Mexico in the Nonproliferation Regime

## Common Structures and Divergent Trajectories in Latin America

*Arturo C. Sotomayor*

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THERE ARE MULTIPLE OPTIONS for Latin American countries to support and comply with the nuclear nonproliferation regime. At the global level, states can decide to ratify the core treaties and join their supporting institutions such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime, the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, and the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT). At the regional level, countries in the Western Hemisphere can adhere to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, also known as the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which in 1968 created the world's first nuclear-weapons-free zone in a densely populated region. Although the treaty is fully in force and has been ratified by all Latin American states, regional support for the nonproliferation regime has varied substantially over time, with some countries choosing to endorse the regime early on, and other states historically opposing it. Empirically and theoretically, it is worth exploring this variation in nonproliferation strategies, including questioning why some traditionally oppositional states changed their position over time.

Brazil and Mexico are regional, middle-sized powers, a category of states that have the ability and willingness to adopt an activist, initiative-oriented diplomatic approach to effectively engage the international system through international institutions and other nonmilitary means. As politically and economically significant states, they are able to pursue multilateral solutions and act as facil-

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itators in building coalitions, managers in their own regions, and promoters/enforcers of international norms.<sup>1</sup> Both Brazil and Mexico share these middle power attributes, having both the region's largest military forces and its biggest economies, along with the subregional influence this grants them—Brazil in the southern cone of South America and Mexico in Central America. They are both founding members of the United Nations system and have been involved in key multilateral negotiations on issues ranging from the environment and peacekeeping to disarmament.<sup>2</sup> Given these similarities, both Brazil and Mexico are likely cases in Latin America for international primacy in the nonproliferation regime. However, these two middle powers have historically behaved very differently in very different international roles, implementing different foreign policies. Nowhere are these differences more evident than in the nonproliferation regime, where each country has followed separate paths.

Brazil once had a clandestine, military nuclear program and expressed strong reservations about the nonproliferation regime, including the Treaty of Tlatelolco. In fact, Brazil did not remove its reservations toward Tlatelolco until 1994 and did not sign the NPT until 1998, a latecomer to both the global and regional nonproliferation regimes. By contrast, Mexico promoted regional nonproliferation treaties and nuclear disarmament early in the 1960s. In fact, Mexico was the first Latin American country to ever sign a full safeguards agreement with the IAEA (in 1968), based on Tlatelolco, which predated the NPT. In due course, Mexico became the leading Latin American country in disarmament circles, often pushing for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation measures in both regional and global forums. Why did these two middle powers follow such different nonproliferation approaches? Why did Mexico support the regime, while Brazil initially rejected it? Moreover, why did Brazil join the regime in the 1990s, after decades of opposition to it? Why has Mexico's support for the regime eroded in the past decade?

To examine these variations of policies toward the nonproliferation regime, this chapter assesses several hypotheses regarding the opposition to or support for nonproliferation efforts, including resource constraints and economic interests, threat perceptions, and discrimination. It concludes that several of these structural hypotheses lack sufficient comprehensive utility to explain the divergent nonproliferation strategies of Brazil and Mexico. Instead, the main argument focuses on two main, mutually reinforcing explanatory variables: U.S. influence (systemic politics) and domestic politics. Together, they account for the variation in terms of support/opposition to the nonproliferation regime. Spe-



cifically, Washington's nonproliferation policies toward Latin America alienated countries with advanced nuclear development programs, such as Brazil, demonstrating how U.S. foreign policy plays a key role in shaping policy preferences in Latin America. This is consistent with structural approaches to international relations—such as realism—which argue that major powers have an important independent effect on the behavior of states in the international system, including the structure of alliances and the balancing of coalitions, including in the developing world.<sup>3</sup> As noted realist Stephen M. Walt argues, “weak states are also likely to be especially sensitive to proximate power. Where great powers have both global interests and global capabilities, weak states will be concerned primarily with events in their immediate vicinity.”<sup>4</sup> The reality is that at the international level, Latin America's security complex is largely shaped, although not fully determined, by the U.S. sphere of influence, which includes power, statecraft, and a unique geography in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>5</sup>

While hegemonic policies restrain or empower other countries to follow certain paths, they do not by themselves determine other states' policy decisions or outcomes. Middle powers may or may not acquiesce to the hegemon's definition of security, leading to important policy variations between states with similar structures and capabilities, which can only be explained, then, by domestic politics.<sup>6</sup> In Brazil and Mexico, systemic factors provide the context for the decision-making processes while domestic politics largely determine the nonproliferation policies. In particular, this chapter focuses on the relationship between civil-military relations and proliferation motivations. In Brazil, an inward-looking domestic coalition dominated by the military (especially after the 1964 coup) assumed responsibility and control over nuclear issues. In a context dominated by Cold War politics and regional rivalry, the military determined Brazil's nuclear policies and then shaped preferences toward the nonproliferation regime. By contrast, civilian authorities in Mexico opted for disarmament and support for the nonproliferation regime in part to keep the military out of politics and away from foreign policy debates. In other words, a civilian-led domestic coalition committed itself to nonproliferation efforts to increase the cost of military meddling in Mexico's security affairs.<sup>7</sup> Since military institutions have historically played a key political role in Latin America, it is important to understand how they grappled with their civilian counterparts for control over nuclear policy at different points in time.

In drawing these conclusions, this chapter applies international relations theorist Etel Solingen's theory of domestic coalitions to a different set of domestic

actors, including the armed forces and their separate services.<sup>8</sup> If coalitions are “policy networks spanning state and private political actors,” a domestic coalitional approach assumes that these networks have state agency, undertake projects, and affect policy, even if they are constrained by international factors.<sup>9</sup> As Solingen argues, “once a certain coalition prevails politically, as a function of its size, cohesiveness, and effectiveness, its grand strategy becomes *raison d'état*. Governmental policy must now reflect the essential contours of that strategy, although the institutional context can impose limits on its implementation and even doom its viability.”<sup>10</sup> Whereas Solingen focuses her attention on how political-economy coalitions and economic strategies (inward versus outward economic policies) affect proliferation incentives, I emphasize how the armed forces and their political allies affect incentives to join or oppose the nonproliferation regime. Solingen argues that countries with inward-looking economic coalitions face stronger incentives for nuclearization and are less committed to international overtures and nonproliferation norms. By contrast, the cases analyzed in this chapter indicate that civil-military relations shape nonproliferation paths, regardless of the economic constituencies and strategies in place.

The two arguments developed in this chapter are based on two distinct levels of analysis—systemic and domestic—and can be potentially contradictory, especially when viewed through the requisite neorealist lens.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the point is not to determine which level matters most; obviously, they both do. Instead, what is more interesting and perhaps more challenging is to determine how the two levels matter, vary from country to country, and then interact to determine policy outcomes.

Brazil and Mexico provide an ideal laboratory in which to test alternative explanations of why states choose to support or impede nonproliferation efforts. First, as previously noted, the two Latin American countries are considered middle powers and, along with Argentina, are the only states in the region to have successfully developed nuclear power plants. Given their respective regional and middle power status, their support or opposition is relevant for regional and global nonproliferation initiatives. As “nuclear threshold states—those that have chosen nuclear restraint despite having significant nuclear capabilities,” they are important “partners for the reinvigorated drive toward global nuclear disarmament.”<sup>12</sup>

Second, Brazil has modified its nuclear policy from opposition and reservation to conditional support, all while enhancing its own nuclear energy projects. Such diverse trajectories provide an invaluable opportunity to analyze variation



in nonproliferation policies. Over time, important variations in the dependent variable can be observed across the region and within states, each leading to multiple observations.

Third, in Latin America, there are at least two different ways to support the nonproliferation regime, one via the NPT and the other via Tlatelolco. While both treaties reinforce each other and are mutually compatible, each provides a different set of incentives for membership (global versus regional). Finally, a historical analysis provides an ideal opportunity to use process tracing as a research method to identify the causal chain and mechanism of how and why states differ in their approach toward the regime. In that sense, this study emphasizes turning points, critical junctures, sequencing of events, and different regime trajectories to identify causal relationships.

In the following sections, I test different hypotheses about how states support or oppose the regime. I first analyze how technical and economic factors influenced nonproliferation incentives in Brazil and Mexico. The second section examines different threat perceptions and U.S. policies, focusing on how they militate against robust nonproliferation policies. The third section analyzes how domestic politics and civil-military relations shaped different nonproliferation trajectories. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how these historical cases might shed light on current nonproliferation policies in Latin America.

#### HYPOTHESIS 1: RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS

One theory for resistance to the nonproliferation regime is that it imposes economic and development restrictions to nonnuclear states. From this perspective, treaties such as the NPT ban not only the diffusion of nuclear weapons but also the dissemination of nuclear technology for development, even if it is for peaceful purposes. While the NPT does allow for the transfer of nuclear technology and materials for the development of civilian nuclear energy programs among signatory countries, in practice, however, most nuclear states have prevented nonnuclear weapons states from developing an indigenous mastery of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes by imposing a virtual embargo on suppliers for nuclear industries.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Brazil's initial decision not to accede to the NPT grew from its position regarding autonomous economic development. Available studies on Latin America's nuclear strategies consistently demonstrate that the discourse of self-

sufficiency and policies of *desarrollismo* (or autonomous development) motivated the development of Brazilian and even Mexican nuclear policies since the 1950s.<sup>14</sup> The nuclear programs in Latin America were originally conceived as a means of acquiring energy resources from the atom. Both Brazil and Mexico received their initial stimulation through the Atoms for Peace Program in the 1950s—a program conceived by the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration to assist third-world countries in developing nuclear energy (mostly through technical assistance to develop research reactors). At that time, both countries had ambitious economic programs that were focused on developing and boosting their indigenous industries. As a result, the governments of both were increasingly pressured by multinational companies and local enterprises to supply sufficient energy resources to maintain a burgeoning industry. Cities like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Mexico City were heavily industrialized areas, with increasing levels of energy consumption.

The need to develop nuclear energy was reinforced by the 1973 oil crisis. In the Brazilian case, this requirement was particularly acute. It became clear that the so-called Brazilian economic miracle of the 1960s and early 1970s relied on favorable external conditions and on cheap energy consumption.<sup>15</sup> Solingen suggests that the nuclear project in Brazil was motivated by its inward-looking economic strategy, in the form of import substitution industrialization or ISI, an economic strategy that replaces foreign imports with domestic production, with the goal of developing technology to attain self-sufficiency.<sup>16</sup> As former minister of science and technology José Goldemberg later argued, Brazil sought an indigenous technological capacity, including the production of nuclear energy, which had been “presented as a miraculous source of energy in the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union.”<sup>17</sup>

Brazil saw the development of nuclear energy capabilities as key to overcoming the country’s underdevelopment. For instance, some Brazilians envisioned using peaceful nuclear explosives to exploit the Amazon jungle. According to Brazilian diplomats in the 1970s, peaceful nuclear explosives provided “a solution to many of the serious problems which confront Latin American countries . . . such as the digging of canals, the connection of hydrographic basins, the recovery of oil fields, the release of natural gas, etc.”<sup>18</sup> This, in part, explains why Brazil was a strong opponent of the nonproliferation regime. Although the NPT explicitly allows the development of peaceful applications of nuclear explosions, in practice the nuclear weapons states considerably restricted technical and financial assistance for such peaceful nuclear explosive devices.<sup>19</sup> Hence, Brazil



and its neighbor, Argentina, perceived the NPT as an impediment to their industrialization and modernization. Both states also disagreed with the discriminatory nature of a treaty that created two types of legal obligations: one for nuclear weapons states (who were not forced to immediately disarm) and another for nonnuclear countries (banned from pursuing nuclear weapons).<sup>20</sup>

While economic reasons provided strong disincentives for Brazil to join the NPT, it is still unclear why Brazil had so many reservations about the regional nonproliferation regime, based on the Treaty of Tlatelolco. In fact, Brazil was, along with Mexico, one of the initial supporters of the regional nonproliferation regime. In 1962, Brazilian diplomats introduced a UN General Assembly resolution to discuss the establishment of a denuclearized zone in Latin America.<sup>21</sup> In 1963, then-president João Goulart signed a joint declaration of agreement with five other Latin American states—Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Mexico—to continue to commit themselves to nonproliferation in multilateral negotiations. This declaration eventually led to the negotiations that created the Treaty of Tlatelolco.<sup>22</sup>

The Latin American nonproliferation regime complements the NPT, but it does have some important differences. For instance, Tlatelolco explicitly allows for peaceful nuclear explosions. Article 18 reads as follows: “The Contracting Parties may carry out explosions of nuclear devices for peaceful purposes—including explosions which involve devices similar to those used in nuclear weapons—or collaborate with third parties for the same purpose, provided that they do so in accordance with the provisions of this article and the other articles of the Treaty, particularly articles 1 and 5.”<sup>23</sup>

Mexican diplomats introduced the article in question in order to incentivize Brazil and Argentina to join the emerging regional regime.<sup>24</sup> In spite of this enticement, Brazil—like Argentina—signed the treaty but did not ratify or adhere to it until, in Brazil’s case, 1994. According to Brazilian researcher Paulo S. Wrobel, Brazilian military authorities, who effectively controlled the government after 1964, considered Tlatelolco as a regional extension of the NPT. From Brazil’s perspective, the two treaties were developed in parallel and had apparently the same primary purpose: to act as a barrier to horizontal nuclear weapons proliferation.<sup>25</sup> Since Brazil was technically opposed to the NPT, its adherence to the regional regime had to be consistent; hence Brasilia did not become a founding member of Tlatelolco.

It thus appears that Brazil’s reservations toward the regime were more technical and political than economic. Interestingly, Mexico followed a very similar autarkic economic strategy as Brazil. Like Brazil in the 1930s and 1940s, post-



war governments in Mexico embarked on import substitution industrialization policies with considerable state involvement in the economy. In fact, it was the Mexican Revolution of 1910–20 and its aftermath that created a political regime with a corporatist system and strong nationalist, developmentalist, and populist orientations. The regime was authoritarian in nature and based on a system of single-party rule, sustained by a coalition dominated by unions, peasants, and national entrepreneurs. The regime survived through tariffs, quantitative restrictions to imports, and foreign direct investment, as well as nationalization of key sectors (including the oil sector). This ushered in a period of stabilization and growth, which lasted until the late 1970s, when the Mexican economy reached an impasse as a result of its macroeconomic policies.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of the limitations and goals of its economic strategy, Mexico was able to develop its own nuclear program while fully joining the NPT regime and leading regional nonproliferation efforts. Although less advanced and perhaps less ambitious than Brazil's nuclear capability, the Laguna Verde nuclear plant began operations in 1986, after almost four decades of nuclear research. This was only a year after Brazil opened its first nuclear plant in 1985, known as Angra 1. While many Mexican nuclear scientists received training in the United States, the IAEA provided the bulk of the technical and financial assistance to develop Mexico's nuclear capability. Surprisingly, Mexico did not develop any bilateral nuclear research agreements with Washington or any other country during the initial stage of the construction of Laguna Verde. As University of Virginia scholar John R. Redick discovered in a pioneer study of Latin America's nuclear programs, "a desire to be independent with respect to its own power supply is also noted by Mexican officials themselves as an important rationale for opting for nuclear power."<sup>27</sup>

The economic and technological restrictions imposed by the NPT certainly did not impede Mexican leaders from developing a peaceful nuclear capability. Moreover, Brazil and Mexico shared very similar economic patterns throughout the 1970s and 1980s, followed by economic growth, recession, foreign debt, and economic crisis. Hence, economic reasons are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for non-accession to the regime.

## HYPOTHESIS 2: THREAT CONDITIONS AND U.S. HEGEMONY

A second line of argument considers that differential threat perceptions militate against robust nonproliferation policies. Many states see nuclear proliferation as

a “U.S. problem,” the priority of which falls far behind the multiple security regional threats they face, none of which are addressed by the nonproliferation regime. Other states are reluctant to join these efforts, discomfited by the notion of taking political direction from Washington. In the Latin American context, the U.S. role had larger consequences on nonproliferation decisions than did differential threat perceptions.

Compared to other parts of the globe, Latin America has been relatively peaceful and exempt from external security threats. A large number of the militarized, territorial disputes in the region have rarely escalated into interstate war.<sup>28</sup> Instead, when crises have appeared to escalate, Latin American states tend to rely on a diplomatic culture that is normative and principled in its approach. This has resulted in a collective understanding that favors legal obligations among regional neighbors, based on the expectation and practice that countries from the Americas almost always engage in pacific settlement when a conflict emerges.<sup>29</sup> Given this relatively peaceful environment, realist explanations might suggest that nuclear proliferation would be a non-issue in Latin America. As one regional political observer points out, the negotiation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Latin America was relatively easy because it was a region that was already denuclearized.<sup>30</sup> In other words, Latin America appears to be an “easy case” for nonproliferation, given its nonnuclear status and the absence of malign external threats.

That at least two South American states—including Argentina and Brazil—pursued military-led nuclear programs in a relatively benign threat environment is therefore puzzling. The southern-most area of South America, often referred to as the Southern Cone, was not a contested region in contemporary international politics. While there were indeed sources of instability, these threats essentially arose from conflicts within state borders.<sup>31</sup> As Goldemberg explains, “Unlike Israel or India, Brazil has no political problems with its neighbors that might lead the military to seek nuclear weapons on security grounds.”<sup>32</sup>

Most Latin American specialists agree that Brazil’s nuclear aspirations were driven by its nuclear rivalry with Argentina, thus confirming realist arguments that competitive international environments motivate arms races and rivalries.<sup>33</sup> The Argentine-Brazilian rivalry was, for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a perennial feature of international relations in the Southern Hemisphere; their nuclear race became a subset of their larger competition for influence in the region. From a realist perspective, the nuclear competition between both countries was motivated by a desire to achieve military primacy, which



would in turn allow them to exercise regional predominance. This led nuclear proliferation experts in the 1970s and 1980s to consider Argentina and Brazil as nuclear threshold states (i.e., states with the capacity to build nuclear weapons).

However, as American diplomat Mitchell Reiss points out, Argentina and Brazil were more likely to constrain their nuclear capabilities because the two countries were “rivals, but not enemies.”<sup>34</sup> Theoretically speaking, this condition would have allowed for compliance with the regional nonproliferation regime. Argentina and Brazil indeed have an enviably limited record of going to war with each other. The last time Argentina fought against Brazil was 1825–28, during the Cisplatine War in the Banda Oriental area of present-day Uruguay. Regional threats since have not been so intense as to prompt spiraling arms races that would lead to a full rejection of the nonproliferation regime. Yet, in spite of a relatively benign threat scenario, Brazil remained opposed to the NPT and failed to adhere to the Tlatelolco Treaty for almost thirty years. Ironically, during this time, it never overtly argued that its external security environment impeded its full accession to the regime.

Brazil did, however, express concern about U.S. policies and intentions, signaling the power of U.S. policies to shape regional proliferation preferences. Historically, the United States has reacted differently to insecurity in the region, sometimes failing to intervene in regional conflicts and other times intervening with military force. As Oxford University professor Andrew Hurrell argues, “it has always been difficult to define Latin America’s security complex in a way that excludes the United States. . . . The U.S. role in the security of the hemisphere provides the perfect illustration of the old adage that intervention and non-intervention are two sides of the same coin.”<sup>35</sup>

In particular, two events affected hemispheric perceptions of the United States and shifted policies regarding nonproliferation in Latin America. First, prompted by India’s 1974 nuclear test, Washington reviewed its nuclear policy regarding the transfer of sensitive nuclear material to developing countries, eventually passing the 1978 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act, which imposed full-scope safeguards on all nuclear transfers. This contributed to a virtual embargo on suppliers for Brazilian and Argentine nuclear industries, irritating both countries in the Southern Cone and engendering suspicion in Brazil toward the United States.

The new restrictions imposed by the U.S. government specifically targeted and affected Brazil. In 1975, Brazil signed a nuclear agreement with West Germany, which would have allowed the former to explore and enrich uranium, re-

process spent fuel, and build eight nuclear plants. But Washington reacted negatively to such a nuclear deal and eventually persuaded West Germany to require full nuclear safeguards from Brazil.<sup>36</sup> The military then realized that belonging to the Western bloc did not imply integration with the developed world.<sup>37</sup> This policy strengthened Brazil's opposition to the global regime based on its discriminatory nature and reinforced its official position for non-accession to the treaty.

A second determinant event was the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War. In more than one sense, the Malvinas crisis brought dissent to the Southern Cone, because it illustrated the symbolic irrelevance of the Inter-American Defense system, a poorly integrated collection of countries, instruments, organizations, and norms, including, *inter alia*, the Organization of American States, which proved completely unable to deal with the conflict. Furthermore, the dispute represented a real threat to most countries in the Southern Cone, since it was believed that British ships carried nuclear weapons into Argentine territorial waters, a clear violation of Protocol II of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which specified that nuclear weapons states would not transfer explosive nuclear devices to the region and would not threaten to use them against the members of the treaty. (It should be noted, however, that while the United Kingdom had ratified the protocol, it did not apply to Argentina, which had not ratified the treaty.) In any case, this event also convinced Brazilian experts and military leaders that the Tlatelolco regime was, in effect, irrelevant for nuclear crises, reinforcing their reservations toward regional nonproliferation efforts.

Curiously enough, one of the most important effects of the Falklands/Malvinas war was that U.S. policies eventually freed the military establishments of Argentina and Brazil to forge closer links among themselves; Brazil recognized Argentina's sovereignty of the Falklands, and ultimately the two signed an agreement on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, marking the beginning of the Argentine-Brazilian nuclear entente.<sup>38</sup> Their similar nuclear and military policies included a mutual opposition toward the global and regional nonproliferation regimes. Washington's policies gave Brazil and Argentina a common cause to oppose the regime itself. In this way, hegemonic policies affected regional alliances and provided incentives for opposition to the regime.

In clear contrast to Brazil, Mexico was the Latin American state most vulnerable to a potential nuclear threat, precisely due to its proximity to the United States. It has been widely acknowledged that the impact of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis made Mexico acutely aware of the risks of a nuclear war. Not only did



the crisis take place in the vicinity of Mexico—and with a Mexican ally, the revolutionary regime of Cuba—but it also attracted the East-West confrontation to the hemisphere. Historical records of that period show that Mexican decision makers were shocked to learn that Fidel Castro had invited Soviet missiles into Cuban territory, especially after the Mexican regime (led by the Revolutionary Institutional Party) had invested diplomatic energy and resources in defending Cuba at the OAS, where it had been previously suspended.<sup>39</sup> Some scholars argue that the 1962 crisis generated widespread inhibition on the use of nuclear weapons, provided strong incentives to avoid a nuclear war, and gave rise to the prohibitory norm of nuclear taboo, an underwritten understanding that nuclear weapons should not be used, especially against nonnuclear states.<sup>40</sup>

The counterargument is equally valid; the fear of annihilation could well have triggered a predisposition toward the bomb and a natural rejection toward the regime. Indeed, as a result of the crisis, Mexico discovered that it, too, was a direct target of Soviet deterrence. Soviet strategists were determined to block all economic and raw material assistance to the United States in case of a nuclear war, thus Mexican border cities and major urban metropolises (including Mexico City) were specifically targeted.<sup>41</sup> From a strictly security perspective, Mexico should have either developed its own nuclear capability to deter a Soviet attack or negotiated a set of explicit nuclear guarantees with its powerful neighbor. Canada followed this latter path, for example, under the nuclear umbrella offered via NATO. Mexico took neither of these two steps. Instead, it denounced the nuclear arms race and embarked on the seemingly impossible: nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. Mexico—along with Chile, Costa Rica, Bolivia, and Brazil—first proposed a regional nonproliferation regime in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis. A series of regional negotiations and diplomatic meetings took place in Mexico City from 1964 to 1967, at the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the neighborhood of Tlatelolco. After the treaty was opened for signature in February 1967, by 1968 Mexico was the only Latin American country to ratify it; the rest—including Brazil—changed their nuclear positions or opted not to adhere to it.

But if Mexico was the most vulnerable Latin American state to a potential Soviet nuclear attack during the Cold War era because of its proximity to the United States, why did it support nonproliferation efforts? Why not request explicit nuclear guarantees from its northern neighbor? Why did it denounce U.S. nuclear strategies and then call for disarmament? If anything, Washington's nuclear policies constituted an implicit nuclear umbrella for Mexico. At best, the

international system and U.S. influence provide the context under which policy decisions for and against the nonproliferation regime emerge, but they alone cannot account for policy variations between Latin America's middle powers.

### HYPOTHESIS 3: CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS AND DOMESTIC POLITICS MOTIVATIONS

Leaving aside the reason(s) why states pursue nuclear weapons, the decision to support the nonproliferation regime (or not) can sometimes be influenced by the decision to acquire the nuclear bomb (or not). In particular, the development of nuclear power production in Latin America has often been linked to military politics—not only because most Latin American countries have experienced previous military and authoritarian regimes, but because military potential of civil nuclear power has been evident in at least two of the three countries where nuclear energy has been successfully produced, namely, Argentina and Brazil. Consequently, it is important to assess the military's support or opposition to the regime.

Historically, the influence of the military in nuclear matters in Brazil has been especially strong. The country experienced a critical juncture in 1964, when a coup ousted President Goulart and replaced him with a dictatorial military regime. This major political event modified Brazil's support for the emerging regional nonproliferation regime as the military assumed a direct role in politics and economic development. Consequently, the changing nature of civil-military relations affected nuclear incentives. The dictatorship assumed a technical approach to Brazilian problems, supporting a new coalition of apolitical technocrats that favored industrialization and modernization. It is this new political coalition, led by the military, that reassessed nuclear issues, emphasizing the use of nuclear development "to meet Brazilian energy needs and its potential to fulfill national security requirements."<sup>42</sup> As Columbia University professor Alfred Stepan describes, the geopolitical thinking of Brazil's armed forces developed a close interrelationship between security and national development, which contributed to the military's all-encompassing managerialism over the domestic political system. In Brazil, this form of military thinking was branded the new "national security policy." The armed forces believed that, in comparison to civilians, they knew better and had the "correct" doctrines of national security and development.<sup>43</sup> Nuclear policy was no exception; Brazil's nuclear energy policy was planned and controlled by the National Commission on Nuclear Energy,



then a subordinate of the Ministry of Mines and Energy, all under military tutelage from 1964 to 1984.

Indeed, the dictatorship modified and adjusted Brazil's policy toward Tlatelolco and the NPT. According to Paulo S. Wrobel, Brazil had once been South America's champion of regional denuclearization efforts, but after the 1964 coup the new foreign policy prioritized the concept of national security. In practical terms, this meant that international treaties, such as Tlatelolco, had to be redone or questioned. Brazil thus became uninterested in international negotiations for nuclear disarmament and expressed strong reservations against the regional and global nonproliferation regimes, which included technical issues (dealing mostly with restrictions to peaceful nuclear explosions), legal considerations (such as when Tlatelolco would enter into force in Brazil), and political matters (focused most notably on the discriminatory nature of the NPT).<sup>44</sup>

In addition to developing nuclear energy, the military engaged in a parallel nuclear program, known as the Autonomous Program of Nuclear Technology (PATN), which sought to develop uranium enrichment technologies. Three branches of the military were involved: "Both the Navy and Air Force efforts were oriented toward specific military applications that fit with traditional mission orientations; the Navy sought to ensure a reliable source of fuel for nuclear-propelled submarines, while the Air Force aimed to develop a useful power supply for satellites."<sup>45</sup> The army was tasked with the development of a graphite reactor that would rely primarily on plutonium. Although there were many technical delays and each military branch faced considerable scientific obstacles, Brazil mastered the enrichment process by 1987. Of the three branches involved, the navy was the most successful in mastering enrichment technology.<sup>46</sup> The armed forces were also involved in building centrifuges to enrich uranium in an experimental center near São Paulo. Nuclear safeguards did not cover this program, which was clandestine and unknown to civilian authorities.

This in part suggests that Brazil's military services were not primarily focused on the development of nuclear weapons per se, but rather sought to have a "nuclear option" for nonweapon military applications, such as nuclear submarines and satellites.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the armed forces established a secret project to design weapons and test devices. The Solimões Project was the code name for this secret program that included nuclear weapons design and excavation of a thousand-foot-deep shaft at a military base near Cachimbo, in the Amazon jungle, to carry out nuclear testing.<sup>48</sup> The activities conducted at the base were secret until the Brazilian National Congress summoned Brazil's intelligence and

military officials to explain the spending of millions of dollars on secret atomic research. Senior military officials who testified in Congress repeatedly denied knowing of the existence of the nuclear weapons program. However, the report conducted by a bicameral legislative commission, which was made public a few weeks after President Fernando Collor de Mello took office in December 1990, revealed that the nation's former military rulers intended to build an atomic bomb. Indeed, according to Pedro Paulo Leoni Ramos, Collor de Mello's minister for strategic affairs, who testified in the bicameral commission:

everything was handled in extreme secrecy, making it difficult to rescue documents; but at a historical moment, the project was conceived within the Presidency of the Republic to enhance various autonomous programs for the development of nuclear technology. Someone or some people decided to empower these installations . . . to conceive the development of an artifact. Therefore, the development of an artifact would need to complete three phases: the very existence of fissile material, engineering design and field testing.<sup>49</sup>

José Goldemberg, who also testified as a member of the de Mello administration in his role as minister of science and technology, publicly declared to legislators that "as a result of secrecy and lack of control, clandestine activities were developed within the government, leading to the plans to build nuclear weapons."<sup>50</sup> The findings of the bicameral commission concluded with the following statements:

The testimonies of your distinguished excellences Jose Goldemberg, Minister of Science and Technology, and Paulo Leoni Ramos, Minister of Strategic Affairs of the Presidency of the Republic, were exhaustive in admitting that "at a historic moment" there was the decision, taken inside the Palace of Planalto, to build a nuclear device. The drillings performed in Cachimbo would be the proving ground of these artifacts. Brazil's civil society was completely marginalized throughout this process; it was not consulted or heard, nor was Congress informed of the Nuclear Program. Therefore, it is imperative that Congress provides the legal tools necessary to monitor nuclear activity in the country.<sup>51</sup>

The nonproliferation regime was perceived by the armed forces as onerous and intrusive for their military ambitions, demonstrating that Brazil's initial refusal to join the nonproliferation regime(s) was not solely based on economic or technical grounds, but on military and political motivations. Neither the NPT nor



the Tlatelolco treaty would have permitted the junta to develop such expertise, since the regime restrained militarized activities. The military instead opted to create, “with CNEN’s [National Nuclear Energy Commission’s] support . . . a clandestine program that was designed to produce highly enriched uranium or weapons-grade plutonium outside of IAEA safeguards.”<sup>52</sup> Brazil’s junta was committed to a militarized nuclear project and covertly sought the nuclear option.

The evolving nature of civil-military relations in Brazil explains why the country modified its opposition toward the regime. In fact, the democratization process that began in 1985 provided strong incentives to demilitarize Brazil’s nuclear project. The leading figure in Brazil’s decision to join the nonproliferation regime was President Collor de Mello, who assumed the presidency in 1990 (the first democratically elected president after 1964). A political outsider with an entrepreneurial background, Collor de Mello won the presidential election with only a slim 53 percent runoff majority against Luis Inacio da Silva (Lula).<sup>53</sup> The military perceived Collor with skepticism. In fact, the armed forces (along with conservative opposition members of Congress) were Collor’s foremost institutional opponent. As Etel Solingen explains, Collor “slashed military budgets from 6 percent in 1989 to 2.2 in 1990, denied salary raises to 320,000 military personnel, and purged officers from important bureaucratic positions.”<sup>54</sup> As a result, the presidency of Collor de Mello soon came under criticism from the military institution and from civilians who supported the armed forces.

Collor faced a nuclear establishment run by those in the military who still hoped to build a Brazilian bomb. A cabinet member of the Collor administration declared that the Brazilians “could in principle enrich uranium to very high levels and produce weapons-grade material. . . . That is why we are so concerned about putting government controls in place now.”<sup>55</sup> Therefore, Collor de Mello’s statements ruling out nuclear explosions were not enough; the president required other mechanisms to remove the control of nuclear programs from military hands.

It is in this context that nonproliferation became appealing to Brazil. The process began on November 28, 1990, when Presidents Carlos Saúl Menem of Argentina and Fernando Collor de Mello of Brazil met at the Iguacu Falls, which forms a common border between the two countries. There they signed an international agreement whereby they renounced the development of nuclear weapons and set forth a number of institutional mechanisms to assure one another that their nuclear establishments would live up to their international commitment. A safeguard agreement was negotiated under IAEA auspices. In 1991, the

two presidents met again in Mexico, where they signed the Guadalajara Accord for the Use of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes, which laid the basis for the creation of the first bilateral institution, namely, the Argentine-Brazilian Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC). ABACC is currently composed of four members, which include the presidents of the respective nuclear energy commissions and two high representatives from the respective ministries of foreign affairs, plus a secretariat based in Rio de Janeiro, the secretary of which alternates yearly between a Brazilian national and an Argentine. Under ABACC, Argentina and Brazil are to submit to the bilateral agency a complete inventory of their nuclear materials, as well as thorough descriptions of their nuclear facilities. ABACC's main task is to verify, via in situ inspections, that the information provided by both governments is accurate.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, this process formalized the accession of both Argentina and Brazil to the NPT and Tlatelolco. Brazil first acceded to the Tlatelolco Treaty in 1994 and then, under the administration of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, became a full member of the NPT in 1998.

Brazil's sudden accession to the nonproliferation regime helped ensure civilian control over nuclear programs. The creation of a bilateral institution, under IAEA auspices, promised that Brazilian nuclear policies would be subject to international scrutiny, therefore rendering it the responsibility of diplomats and other civilian decision makers, rather than the armed forces. Such a policy could not have been implemented unilaterally, prompting Brazilian civilian leaders to seek international participation in the nonproliferation regime, in order to gain leverage over the militaries that they sorely distrust.<sup>57</sup>

Through this diplomatic maneuvering, nuclear policy was de facto transferred to the diplomatic establishment, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, known as Itamaraty, a new civilian-led coalition. In the Brazilian case, Itamaraty's main role "was to soften the nationalistic stances defended by the Brazilian military."<sup>58</sup> This also granted the president the "power of appointment"; that is, the president could appoint civilians to key positions related to nuclear policy. This gave inspiration to what Ambassador Julio César Carasales has branded as "presidential diplomacy," whereby foreign policy reflects the interests and motivations of the executive.<sup>59</sup> In so doing, the president could remove the militaries from the decision making. For instance, Collor de Mello appointed José Goldemberg as his minister of science and technology, placing him in charge of the Nuclear Energy Commission. Goldemberg, a former president of the Brazilian Physics Society and of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science, was a



leading critic of the program's secrecy and military control. It was Goldemberg who proposed the designing of a civilian-administered control system, drawing on technical assistance from the IAEA. In Goldemberg's view, "Empowered to conduct regular and random visits, Brazilian and Argentine teams would be composed of independent, civilian scientists approved by the Brazilian Senate."<sup>60</sup>

Brazil's full accession to the nonproliferation regime facilitated democratization by increasing civilian leverage over the military-led coalition. The election of Fernando Henrique Cardoso to the presidency in 1994 further modified the balance between civilians and the military. In 1996, Cardoso published Brazil's first National Defense Policy and in 2000 he was finally able to establish an integrated, civilian-led Ministry of Defense.<sup>61</sup> It is in this political context of democratic consolidation that Brazil joined the CTBT and NPT in 1998, and finally participated in a NPT Review Conference in 2000, as a nonnuclear weapons state.

Still, the path toward military reform was not without obstacles, since the military bargained for reserved domains in exchange for their return to the barracks, and some commanders opposed such measures altogether. Nevertheless, the accession of Brazil to the nonproliferation regime facilitated some level of normalization in civil-military relations and contributed to an expanded civilian-led foreign policy agenda.<sup>62</sup> But as is analyzed in the next section, military remnants from the dictatorial era persist in Brazil's nonproliferation strategy.

Therefore, the international nonproliferation regime became an extension of Brazilian domestic politics, in which national leaders benefited from the ability to tie their hands by creating an international commitment that increased the cost of reversing to previous military policies.<sup>63</sup> Transferring the policymaking process to the international level also mobilized those coalitions who had the most to gain from the norms implicit in the nonproliferation regime, such as diplomats, civilian scientists, and environmentalists.<sup>64</sup> In that sense, Brazil resembles other democratizing and liberalizing states that joined the regime in the early 1990s, including Argentina and South Africa. For these states, domestic considerations and civil-military relations provided strong incentives to reverse their opposition toward the regime.

If domestic politics plays such an important role in ensuring adherence to the nonproliferation regime, what domestic motivations inspired Mexico to join the regime so early in the 1960s? Why did Mexico become a leading advocate of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation in Latin America? If Brazil's critical juncture was the 1964 military coup, Mexico's critical juncture was the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. As argued above, the crisis not only prompted a foreign

policy dilemma with Cuba, but it also triggered a national security debate about how to react to the nearby Soviet missiles. One option included a military response, but only at the expense of inviting the armed forces to contribute to the Mexican decision-making process. This would have entailed either an agreement with the United States to obtain an explicit nuclear umbrella, a request to deploy U.S. missiles on Mexican territory to protect the country against an attack from Moscow, or the development of military nuclear capabilities. These options, however, represented too much for a political regime that had based its stability on the exclusion of the armed forces from the single-party system. Indeed, Mexico had been able to guarantee civilian rule and stable civil-military relations by co-opting the military's political behavior, in exchange for which the armed forces were given the autonomy to decide upon promotions, doctrine, strategy, and military operations. This eventually guaranteed a depoliticized military that was servant to the party.<sup>65</sup> The option of securitizing and militarizing nuclear issues in Mexico was thus ruled out because it was deemed to be dangerous for the internal stability of the political regime. Mexican rulers at the time were adamant about involving the military in political issues, in part because they wanted to avert an insubordination of the kind experienced in South America, in countries such as Brazil. The fear of excessive military influence prompted the early demilitarization of Mexican politics.

Consequently, an alternative plan had to be devised to deal with the consequences of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In U.S.-Soviet relations, this translated into the *détente*; in Mexico, the path followed was an indisputable resolution in favor of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. In 1963, Adolfo Lopez Mateos (Mexico's first civilian president in the postrevolutionary era) instructed Minister of Foreign Affairs Manuel Tello and his representative to Brazil, Alfonso Garcia Robles (who would later win the 1982 Nobel Peace Prize for the Tlatelolco Treaty), to immediately embark on multilateral negotiations to ban nuclear weapons in Latin American territories.<sup>66</sup> The decision to rely on diplomacy instead of traditional security and military policies was clearly strategic and motivated by domestic politics. Denuclearization provided an opportunity to de-secure nuclear issues by making them a feature of diplomatic and multilateral negotiations. Hence, for Mexico, nuclear proliferation became a legal issue instead of a military affair, whereby treaties, norms, and rules were political tools with which to constrain proliferation options. In making this choice, Mexican presidents delegated a sensitive security issue to its diplomatic corps, enabling civilians to insulate the military establishment from the temptations of nuclear-



ization, while maintaining civilian supremacy and political stability in a regime that was all but democratic. This, again, reinforces the argument that transferring authority to an international regime helps diffuse certain domestic coalitions, while it mobilizes others who might share the international norms implicit in the regime or those who have a stake in global trends.

The policy embraced by Mexico was not only less costly than the alternative; it also allowed the country to maintain full civilian control of its own nuclear program, while averting any suspicion of its intentions and ambitions. Paradoxically, the move satisfied all parties involved. First, participation in arms control agreements offered Mexico a forum in which the country was free of conflict with the United States. Washington had expressed interest in and support for regional denuclearization efforts because they explicitly prohibited Soviet missiles in Latin American territory, averting a future nuclear crisis in the region. This reinforces the argument that a propitious international context and support from the United States can affect incentives among middle powers. Second, the leftist movement in Mexico was equally satisfied. Labor unions, the Communist Party, and intellectuals had developed strong ties with Cuba, but Mexico's stand on nuclear issues appeared politically neutral and even anti-American. In sum, the support for nonproliferation appeased the military, satisfied the left, and mobilized the diplomatic establishment, while portraying an international image for Mexico that was neither pro-American nor pro-Soviet.

In due course, Mexico became Latin America's norm entrepreneur in nonproliferation forums. Its position in favor of disarmament and nuclear-weapon-free zones during the Cold War era became institutionalized and embedded in Mexican diplomacy. Once this stand was taken and assumed, Mexico's support for nonproliferation became "sacred," nearly subject to path dependence, in the sense that it was almost impossible to reverse this path. Diplomats in Mexico would often refer to their nonproliferation policies as part of a legacy, which they branded as the Garcia Robles doctrine, in reference to the founding father of the Tlatelolco regime.

#### LESSONS FROM THE PAST, PRESENT POLICIES, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Given the relevance of both U.S. foreign policy and civil-military relations in Latin America, what should we expect from the region in terms of support or opposition toward the nonproliferation regime today? A number of lessons can be drawn from this historical and comparative case study.

First, policies, actions, and rhetoric from nuclear states can often have unintended consequences in the Western Hemisphere. During the Cold War era, U.S. nuclear denial policies generated negative incentives for potential proliferators, such as Brazil, to join international regimes like the NPT. To date, Washington appears to be making similar mistakes as it once again provides sticks and carrots to different states with varying nuclear ambitions. In particular, the 2008 nuclear deal with India now allows the United States to sell nuclear fuel, technology, and reactors to New Delhi for peaceful energy, despite the fact that India tested nuclear bombs in 1974 and 1998 and never signed the NPT.<sup>67</sup> Other states will have learned the lessons from this nuclear agreement either through emulation or by socialization. And no other state in Latin America is as interested in the Indian case as Brazil.

Like India, Brazil feels entitled to international status and recognition. The U.S. endorsement of New Delhi's nuclear program and its support for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council provides strong incentives for Brazil to follow the Indian path.<sup>68</sup> This could lead Brazilian leaders to reverse, reconsider, or condition their country's nonnuclear status. As Brazilian scholar Diego Santos Vieira de Jesus reminds us, Brazil is using nuclear policy to promote its new role as an "emerging power" by developing close relations with other southern and nuclear partners, including India and China.<sup>69</sup> Hence, U.S. nonproliferation policies in India may have established a wrong precedent, since other countries will demand similar concessions to those granted to the South Asian nuclear power.

Second, while Brazil has joined the NPT and Tlatelolco regimes, and even founded its own regional inspection mechanism (ABACC), its commitment to the nonproliferation regime remains ambivalent. Brazil needs nuclear energy to deal with its own energy shortages. Blackouts caused by low rainfall and droughts in 2000 and 2001 increased the domestic demand for civilian nuclear power programs.<sup>70</sup> Yet, in 2004, Brasilia denied the IAEA permission to carry out inspections in its uranium enrichment plant in Resende, near Rio de Janeiro. A confidential agreement signed between Brazil and the IAEA increased the agency's access to the nuclear plant but was short of unrestricted inspections. Brazil temporarily suspended Resende's official start date in 2006 in an effort to avoid comparisons with Iran, which had also restricted inspections to its nuclear facilities.<sup>71</sup> Still, Brazil continued to resist efforts to increase the IAEA's inspections mandate via the Additional Protocol to the NPT.

In fact, Argentina and Brazil closed ranks again and requested a joint exception to the Additional Protocol. They argued that ABACC exempted them from making additional arrangements with the IAEA. For Buenos Aires and Brasilia,



ABACC had already reached an agreement with the IAEA in 1997, giving inspectors access to any part of the country and ensuring the absence of nondeclared nuclear materials and activities.<sup>72</sup> Brazil has refused to sign the IAEA's Additional Protocol, mainly because it perceives the system as intrusive and jeopardizing its ability to develop an independent and indigenous centrifuge technology.<sup>73</sup> Luis Pinguelli Rosa, head of Eletrobras, the national electric company, declared that "there are no conceptual secrets. . . . But there are advanced technological solutions, such as equipment, setup and materials, that Brazil has the right to guard."<sup>74</sup> In 2010, Samuel Pinheiro Gimaraes, Brazil's former minister of strategic affairs under the Lula administration, denounced the Additional Protocol for allowing nuclear weapon states to have free access to the most sensitive nuclear technologies of developing states. In his view, the protocol's guidelines on nuclear technology could promote industrial espionage.<sup>75</sup>

Critics of the Argentine-Brazilian exception, such as Carnegie analyst Mark Hibbs, correctly point out that the Additional Protocol and the ABACC are intended to build confidence that nuclear activities are peaceful, but they are not the same. As Hibbs argues:

The former is a legal document setting forth inspection rights and the latter is an institution. The Additional Protocol provides the IAEA specific rights to access a wealth of information that is outside the purview of standard NPT safeguards agreements, especially concerning undeclared activities. The agreement between the IAEA and ABACC, on the other hand, is similar to standard NPT safeguards agreements and does not give the IAEA rights specified by the Additional Protocol.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, the ABACC cannot move unless the governments of Argentina and Brazil, which effectively control it, move forward; so it has less political independence to autonomously assess information provided by the governments. The exception clause given to Argentina and Brazil also raises the possibility that other countries with access to sensitive nuclear material will request exceptional treatment, thus undermining the multilateral nonproliferation regime. Ironically, the ABACC concession created a similar condition to the one that Brazil had criticized for decades before joining the NPT, namely, a regime based on discrimination and exceptions with two different types of legal obligations, one for ABACC members and another for non-ABACC states.

If Brazil pursues civilian and peaceful interests, then why is it so hesitant to allow nuclear inspectors under the IAEA Additional Protocol? Again,

civil-military relations offer an answer to this puzzle. While the nuclear plant is for commercial use, designed to enrich uranium to 3.5–5 percent, the navy developed its technology. Military interests are thus still very much vested in Brazil's nuclear program. The resistance to open the Resende plant for inspection is in direct response to the military's continuous involvement in nuclear policy. The Brazilian Navy had always wanted to develop a nuclear-powered submarine, for which uranium would have to be enriched to 20 percent. To date, civilian leaders appear to have conceded to this demand. In 2008, President Lula's National Defense Strategy called for the mastery of the complete nuclear fuel cycle and for the building of nuclear-powered submarines. The Brazilian government has designated its production facilities for nuclear submarine construction as restricted military areas, thus denying IAEA inspectors access to such facilities. Military politics thus continue to shape Brazil's nuclear project.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, according to Hibbs, if Brazil were to join the IAEA Additional Protocol, it would be obliged to render additional information about its nuclear parallel project and "disclose to the IAEA any high-level radioactive waste inventories, which would testify to historical production of undeclared nuclear material processing in the country."

Furthermore, there is strong suspicion that the technology used by the navy to build the nuclear plant was based on the design by the European enrichment consortium URENCO, which would, as it has been pointed out, "undermine Brazil's claim to indigenous development of the centrifuges, as well as [lead to] questions about how the design was acquired."<sup>78</sup> From a civil-military perspective, Brazil's reservation toward the IAEA inspection system is, in fact, consistent with the military's known secrecy and lack of transparency. If Brazil were to develop a nuclear program with military assistance, then such a decision would cast doubt as to the strength of regional and global nonproliferation norms, which arguably dissuade states from considering the nuclear option.

The Brazilian Constitution and the international obligations within the NPT and Tlatelolco legally forbid Brazil from acquiring a nuclear weapon, although these legal obligations have not silenced those who believe the country should develop a nuclear device. A coalition within the military and defense establishments remained skeptical about Brazil's accession to the nonproliferation regime. For example, in 2009, Vice President Jose Alencar publically declared that nuclear weapons would be a boon to the security of Brazil. Alencar, who was a former minister of defense, declared: "The nuclear weapon, used as an instrument of deterrence, is of great importance for a country that has 15,000 kilometers of border to the west and a territorial sea that contains oil reserves."<sup>79</sup> This



was a shocking declaration coming from one of Brazil's highest public authorities. The presidential spokesman quickly dismissed Alencar's comments, which he argued "did not reflect the position of the government."<sup>80</sup> Still, the vice president's statements raised questions about why a peaceful country, surrounded by mostly friendly countries, would require a nuclear bomb for deterrence. Once again, the predominant view among some military strategists is that Brazil conceded too much when it joined the NPT and Tlatelolco. Reversing the decision to become nuclear is thus suggested as a means of recovering bargaining leverage and power status. On the other hand, environmental groups, scholars, diplomats, and some scientists (not military scientists) consider that such a move is fundamentally flawed because it could destabilize the region and harm Brazil's national interests. As global public policy expert Oliver Stuenkel argues, "Brazil could conceivably use its status as the only BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) member without nuclear weapons to play a leading role in the quest for global disarmament."<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately, this means that nuclear analysts need to pay close attention to Brazil's domestic politics, specifically to civil-military relations. Brazil has been able to achieve substantial gains in terms of democratic consolidation (especially during the Cardoso administration), but institutional civilian control remains inherently weak. The Ministry of Defense operates mostly as an administrative agency, with little impact on strategy and doctrine; congressional oversight of the armed forces is notoriously low; and the armed forces continue to operate with a degree of institutional autonomy.<sup>82</sup> While the military is no longer in power, it continues to exercise influence over security and nuclear issues.

This leads us to the third and final question: Which is the ideal country to help reinvigorate nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation discussions in the region? For decades, the leading Latin American partner was Mexico, the country that had chosen nuclear restraint and whose embrace of disarmament initiatives helped propel global and regional nonproliferation norms. If anything, the nonproliferation regime requires more than just solid norms and principles to work; it also needs norm entrepreneurs and leadership. As Australian National University expert Maria Rost Rublee argues, nuclear threshold states that have chosen restraint play a significant role in this regard. Their commitment to a nonnuclear status provides "a moral stance against nuclear weapons," leading to an energetic support of global disarmament."<sup>83</sup>

Yet, Mexico's support for the nonproliferation regime is slowly eroding, in part due to domestic politics and U.S. influence. This too can undermine both

regional and global disarmament efforts. Two dynamics are in operation in Mexico. First, the traditional role of the armed forces is being revised because of the government's offensive launch against drug cartels. Increasingly, internal security has become the main issue of concern, with nuclear proliferation occupying a secondary role. Recent survey polls conducted by one of Mexico City's leading public research institutes show that Mexicans feel threatened by drug trafficking and organized crime, global warming, AIDS, food shortages, and the global economic crisis, in that order.<sup>84</sup> In a country that has just recently democratized, politicians and diplomats alike feel compelled to follow their constituents' wishes. In this context, the armed forces are being asked to perform policing missions, thus occupying a more active and present role in politics than in the past. Not surprisingly, Mexico's diplomatic corps pays increasing interest to promoting and establishing an international regime for small weapons and gun control, which, ironically, is inspired by the nonproliferation regime. At the same time, the shadow of the Cuban Missile Crisis has vanished, as few Mexicans seem to remember the negative consequences of nuclear proliferation. Mexico's unconditional support for the nonproliferation regime is thus in question.

The second dynamic is directly linked to Mexico's close relationship with Washington. Since the early 1990s, there has been a tendency toward bilateralism, in which the U.S. role in Mexican politics increased at the expense of multilateralism. Mexico's economic and trade policy relies heavily on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), since more than 86 percent of its exports go to the United States and Canada.<sup>85</sup> With more than 70 percent of its GDP derived from trade, Mexico's bilateral relationship with Washington has a predominance that no other issue occupies in the Mexican foreign policy agenda. There is no doubt that NAFTA has made Mexico and Washington close partners. This is evident in Mexico's voting behavior in the UN General Assembly, as well as in NPT review conferences, especially since 1995, when Mexico flatly sided with Washington after decades of opposition.<sup>86</sup> The strong bilateral policy has affected the country's policy in the regime itself. Personnel, resources, money, and infrastructure go to fund bilateral initiatives, including consulates and support for Mexican communities in the United States. With limited diplomatic ties in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, Mexico is at a clear disadvantage to negotiate with members of the General Assembly, the Group of 77, and the Non-Aligned Movement (made up mostly of African and Asian states), all of which are influential in the nonproliferation regime. In other words, the bilateralization of



Mexico's foreign policy has undermined its traditional leading role in the multi-lateral nonproliferation regime.

The findings in this chapter lead to a number of policy prescriptions. Lessons drawn from Latin America suggest that efforts should perhaps be made to promote stable civil-military relations in countries with nuclear energy programs by strengthening civilian control of them. Interestingly enough, few civil-military relations promotion programs have an interest in nuclear policy issues. They focus instead on parliamentary control, defense spending reduction, and military effectiveness. Perhaps it is time for the United States to shift its attention away from sanctions and nuclear carrots and toward consolidating civilian control of nuclear energy programs.

### Notes

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36. On the Brazil–West Germany nuclear agreement, see Michael Barletta, "The Military Nuclear Program in Brazil," Center for International Security and Arms Control, Stanford University, August 1997.

37. See Goldemberg, "Brazil," and Espil, "Argentina."

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43. Alfred C. Stepan, "The New Professionalism of Internal Warfare and Military Role Expansion," in *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies, and Future*, ed. Alfred C. Stepan (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), 47–65.

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45. Barletta, "Military Nuclear Program," 6.

46. Redick, "Military Potential," 18–29.

47. Barletta, "Military Nuclear Program," 6.

48. David Albright, "Bomb Potential for South America," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 45, no. 4 (1989): 16–20; Redick, "Military Potential"; Adler, *Power of Ideology*; Jean Krasno, "Non-proliferation: Brazil's Secret Nuclear Program," *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs* 38, no. 3 (1994): 425–36.

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50. José Goldemberg, minister of science and technology, testimony, "Comissão Parlamentar Mista de Inquérito Destinada a Apurar o Programa Autônomo de Energia Nuclear, Também Conhecido como 'Programa Paralelo'" [Joint Parliamentary Inquiry Commission Intended to Investigate the Autonomous Nuclear Energy Program, also known as the "Parallel Program"], Congressional Report no. 13, November 14, 1990, 88 (personal translation).

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