

for petroleum troubled both South American regional powers and more attention was suddenly given to nuclear questions. A year later, Buenos Aires decided on both a second nuclear plant and on greater autonomy in nuclear energy production through natural uranium for Atucha I. This would one day permit national control of the whole nuclear cycle.

The Indian nuclear test of the same period also acted as a detonator of increased interest in nuclear power. But Canadian reactions to their role in the Indian developments complicated bilateral cooperation between Buenos Aires and Ottawa on the nuclear side. Unilateral cancellation of cooperation agreements led the Argentines to be even more anxious to achieve independence of foreign collaboration in their nuclear programmes.

Brazil noticed with interest what it viewed as the growth in Indian prestige and international importance caused by the explosion. Suddenly, viewed from Brasilia, the Indians were being listened to in ways unknown before the event. After disappointments with the United States over IAEA safeguards in their cooperative efforts, Brasilia turned in 1975 to West Germany for the purchase of a maximum of eight reactors, a deal that would give Brazil the complete nuclear fuel cycle. Despite a storm of protest from Washington, the Brazilians were taking a major step towards a nuclear weapons option.

Argentina in 1978 began construction secretly of a uranium enrichment plant at Pilcaniyeu, one capable of producing each year from 1985 on some 500 kg of enriched uranium. The next year saw Brasilia launch what was called the "parallel programme" with most of the elements of a weapons programme. An open Nuclebras (Brazilian state enterprise) civil programme was to be one leg of the national effort, giving guarantees, based on imported technology, and aiming to develop a national nuclear energy plan for the whole country. The other leg was to be an "autonomous" or parallel programme, headed by a general officer, with homegrown technology and no safeguards. Although secret, the existence of a parallel programme was soon suspected by a number of countries.<sup>7</sup>

Everything suggested then that during the seventies and the early eighties the two countries were determined to develop a nuclear weapons capability. Nationalist and military opinion, dominant in both countries while they were under military governments, ensured the programmes' life and influential geopolitical thinking gave them their *raison d'être*. Tension was high as well at this time as a result of the halting of the Argentine armed forces' drive for war with Chile through the Papal intervention of 1978-9. Many in Brasilia felt Buenos Aires would search for another way of uniting public opinion behind the governing junta and that with Chile a difficult victim, Brazil might offer too much temptation to resist.

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<sup>7</sup> See Leonard Spector, *Nuclear Ambitions: the Spread of Nuclear Weapons 1989-90* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1990), pp. 243-4, and Hal Klepak, "Le Tango de la dénucléarisation: le duo Argentine-Brésil," in Albert Legault and Michel Fortmann, *Prolifération et non-prolifération nucléaires: stratégies et contrôles* (Québec, Centre québécois de relations internationales, 1993), pp. 367-418.