

weapons ambitions in order to give room to the Brazilian civilian government to do the same, and to argue that the country could do so without excessive risk.

Of course, the problem in this sense is in large part, but hardly exclusively, that of China. India can and does argue that its *marge de manoeuvre* is greatly limited by Chinese strategic posturing, Chinese regional activities, and China's growing nuclear arsenal and ambitions. Given that no such force acted on the South American scene, even though Argentina was of course highly sensitive to the evolution of Chilean conventional forces and intentions over this period, only so many lessons can be expected here.

Outside that factor, however, there are clearly some points one can make. Democracy, and the return to democratic rule first in Argentina and then in Brazil, was crucial for the abandoning of nuclear weapons ambitions initially by Buenos Aires and then by Brasilia.

Given the nature of the "great equalizer" and other geopolitical arguments in Argentina, it was essential that it move first in leaving those ambitions behind. And that needed a major reduction not only in the influence of the military on national policy, especially on security in particular and foreign affairs in general, but also in the power of nationalist and geopolitical thinking in the Argentine body politic.

The armed forces, and indeed nationalist opinion, were in the driver's seat for long in Argentina but at no time more than in the military governments of the 1960s through the early eighties. The press reflected these perceptions, echoed them, and few influential persons or mass media sources dared to question their validity. Secret programmes were considered perfectly normal in the Argentina of the day and necessary given what was viewed as the hypocritical views of the great, and nuclear, powers on the question of nuclear proliferation. Until this situation changed dramatically, there could be no thought of turning back on nuclear programmes even though, to be fair and as we have seen, military governments were increasingly careful about sending the wrong signals to their rivals as they came closer to actually having advanced nuclear potential useful to weapons programmes.

Thus democracy, an end to excessive military influence in government, and a good dose of revisionism of the geopolitical prism for seeing international relations were all necessary for Argentina to change course on nuclear issues. And without Argentina doing so, there was no likelihood that Brazil would do so. The latter country was so superior to Argentina, as we have seen, by the 1980s that it could afford to be magnanimous on nuclear issues if it could be assured that Buenos Aires was serious about stepping back from what we have called the near-brink.

The two democratic governments, under successive presidents, certainly got along better than their military predecessors and this gave context to much of what they did. Their priorities were elsewhere, largely with ways to get their countries out of the debt crisis and wider economic difficulties, out of their relative isolation after being so long under unsavoury military regimes, and back on net with the major Western states where the technological revolution was concerned. They