

Brazil Accused of Stealing Nuclear Technology

Written by Alessandra Dalevi Brazil News (brazil.com)

Friday, 22 October 2004

Brazilian authorities argue that it is all rumor and innuendo without any basis in reality. But news that Brazil is close to develop its own atomic bomb has become increasingly insistent.

On April 4, the *Washington Post* published an article alleging that Brazil intended to deny access to experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to its uranium enrichment plant under construction in Resende, state of Rio de Janeiro.

The paper hinted that Brazil was in a path of atomic development that would allow the country to easily convert its peaceful technology into a nuclear weapons program.

The UN experts finally visited the plant this week. The inspectors and Brazil, however, still have not reached an agreement on access levels needed for proper inspection.

While IAEA says that it needs full access to the plant to ensure no uranium is used in weapons, Brasília insists that it will not allow full access because it needs to protect domestic technology.

Now, in its latest issue, *Science* magazine, in an article entitled "Brazil's Nuclear Puzzle," suggests that Brazil is capable of producing several nuclear weapons annually.

"At its announced capacity, Brazil's new facility located at Resende will have the potential to produce enough uranium to make five to six ... warheads per year," write the authors of the *Science* article Gary Milhollin and Liz Palmer from the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control.

The article goes on to say that with planned upgrades, by 2010 Brazil would be able to produce between 26 and 31 nuclear warheads annually and between 53 to 63 by the year 2014.

"This is pure fantasy," responds the Brazilian government.

Brazil's National Commission on Nuclear Energy (CNEN) called the information on the magazine false: "There are no basis for any speculation on suspicions on the part of the Brazilian government concerning IAEA's intentions."

Milhollin and Palmer also accuse the Brazilian government of breaking its promises to the International Atomic Energy Agency by denying full access to the IAEA inspectors.

Brazil, whose uranium reserves are the world's sixth largest, has been enriching uranium since 1980. On October 2003, Brazilian authorities announced that they would start the production of industrially-enriched uranium by 2004.

The *Washington Post's* April article revealed that US nuclear experts urged the Bush administration to insist on thorough inspections in Brazil and quoted US nuclear negotiator James Goodby as saying:

"If we don't want these kinds of facilities in Iran or North Korea, we shouldn't want them in Brazil."

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Milhollin and Palmer go further in their accusation. For them, the real reason behind Brazil's refusal to give the IAEA full access to its facilities is not to protect any commercial secret, but to hide the origin of the centrifuges being used in Resende.

They make a case that Brazil's centrifuge machines are no Brazilian scientific breakthrough, but simply an illegal and pirated copy of equipment created by Urenco, a European company.

The article says that in December 1996, Brazil detained Karl-Heinz Schaab, a former employee from the German company Man Technologie AG.

The firm had developed centrifuges for the European consortium known as Urenco. Germany asked for Schaab's extradition, accusing him of selling a centrifuge project to Iraq.

The magazine sustains that there is evidence that Schaab and others are now helping Brazil the same way as they did help Iraq.

If the inspectors were allowed to look at the Brazilian centrifuges they would find this out, they suggest.

The authors recognize that Resende is configured to enrich up to 3.5% of uranium 235, a concentration too small to produce an atomic bomb.

They argue, however, that with uranium reserves enriched by this amount Brazil would be halfway from a nuclear bomb.

That's what they call "breakout capability," the ability to produce an A-bomb before the world can react. The US and Europe fear that Iran is going in this same direction.

The Science article also reminds readers that Brazil developed a parallel nuclear program in the '80s, far from the eyes of the UN inspectors, which was abandoned in 1990, only after President Fernando Henrique Cardoso repudiated it.