



The Emerging Powers and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Regime

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In this *Policy Brief*, Tom Sauer looks at the ambivalent position of emerging powers vis-à-vis nuclear non-proliferation and what this eventually means for the EU.

The world balances between unipolarity and multipolarity, without excluding the re-emergence of a future bipolar structure. As US predominance is diminishing and China's foreign policy is (still) restrained, other states have more leeway to act independently, within the limits of economic globalization. Although the exact contours of the future world structure remain unclear, the rise of the so-called emerging powers¹ seems to be a given (Hurrell, 2007; Drezner, 2007). None of them are small states in terms of population, territory, and GNP.

A common characteristic is that the emerging powers behave more assertively in international politics, as their rising economic prosperity renders them more self-confident. I define emerging powers as states that show the political will and the ability to intervene more directly in international politics (both on a bilateral and multilateral basis, e.g. in international organizations), not limited to their

own region. Amongst them are China, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Egypt, Russia, South Africa, Nigeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, India, Australia, South Korea and Indonesia. Institutionally, the rise of the emerging powers has already been recognized by the establishment of the G20 that to some extent has come to overshadow the classic G8. All states mentioned above, except Iran, Nigeria, and Egypt, are part of the G20. The most ambitious of the emerging powers aim to have a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Partly to reinforce their demand, and more generally to strengthen the voice of the "Global South", some of them have started to form informal "South-South" alliances, such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, better known as IBSA.

New is that these emerging powers also behave more assertively in the domain of nuclear non-proliferation. In this brief, the following question will be central: how do the emerging states behave more assertively in the nuclear domain? More in particular, I will look at four emerging powers that have been more active in the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime over the last years: Brazil, South Africa, Egypt and Turkey.²

Brazil³

Brazil acquired its first nuclear power plant from Westinghouse in 1971. Four years later, it signed an agreement with a German firm to acquire the complete fuel cycle technology as well as eight pressurized water reactors. At the same time, there were suspicions that Brazil was working on a secret military programme as a result of the Brazilian–Argentinean rivalry. These suspicions were later on confirmed. However, due to financial problems in the beginning of the 1980s and the transition from an authoritarian state to a democracy in 1985, Brazil ended its military programme. In 1988, the Brazilian government adopted a new constitution, which forbids the manufacture or possession of nuclear weapons and the financing of such activities. Three years later, Brazil and Argentina signed an agreement underlining the peaceful nature of their nuclear programmes, and established the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC). In 1994, both countries also ratified the Tlatelolco Treaty, which declares Latin-America a nuclear weapon free zone. Brazil joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 1996, and signed and ratified both the CTBT and the NPT (only) in 1998.

From that point onwards, Brazil tried to push the nuclear weapon states to disarm. After the India-Pakistani nuclear tests, and together with seven other states⁴, it formed the so-called New Agenda Coalition (NAC) in 1998. The original statement of the NAC reads: “We can no longer remain complacent at the reluctance of the nuclear weapon states and the three nuclear weapons-capable states to take that fundamental and requisite step, namely a clear commitment to the speedy, final and total elimination of their nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capability and we urge them to take that step now”. Until recently, the NAC played an important role during the NPT

Review Conferences and UN General Assembly First Committee meetings. At the 2010 NPT Review Conference, Brazil was amongst the 17 countries (including the 5 nuclear weapon states) that drafted the disarmament action plan (Johnson, 2010, 4).

At the same time, Brazil resists temptations to accept more stringent controls by the IAEA. It refuses, for instance, to sign the IAEA Additional Protocol (established in 1997), which gives the inspectors of the Agency more leeway, e.g. in undeclared installations. After complaints from Washington in 2004, the

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Brazilian Ambassador to the US, Roberto Abdenur, replied: “We believe firmly it is not enough to have an increasingly stricter and narrow non-proliferation (agreement) without balanced movement, parallel movement, in the area of disarmament” (Sauer, 2005, 23). Brazil has also refused visual access to certain parts of its uranium enrichment facility in Resende, which opened in 2006 and made Brazil master the nuclear fuel cycle. Brazil also possesses a naval nuclear fuel programme that does not fall under IAEA safeguards.

The most visible “non-proliferation statement” by Brazil was the deal that it was able to reach – together with Turkey – on Iran’s nuclear programme on 17 May 2010 (Spektor, 2010). Under the agreement, Iran would send 1,200 kg of its (under 5%) low-enriched uranium to Turkey; in return, Iran would within a year

receive more highly enriched (to 20%) fuel rods for its ageing medical research reactor. The rest of the international community, especially the West, blocked its implementation by imposing new sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council. The Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Celso Amorim reacted as follows: “It is time that in grave matters of war and peace, emerging nations such as Turkey and Brazil – and others, such as India, South Africa, Egypt and Indonesia – have their voices heard. This will not only do justice to their credentials and abilities; it will also be better for the world” (Amorim, 2010). Earlier, Brazil had voted against new economic sanctions against Iran in the UN Security-Council.

While most observers do not believe that Brazil is seriously thinking about a nuclear weapons programme, there have been a couple of statements by Brazilian politicians over the last decade that point in the opposite direction. In 2003, Roberto Amaral, the then minister of Science and Technology, made a disputed comment in which he said that Brazil would not renounce its knowledge of nuclear fission, the process needed to manufacture a nuclear device. The year before, presidential candidate (and later president) Lula da Silva had made similar comments. In September 2009, Brazilian Vice-President Jose Alencar said: “The nuclear weapon, used as an instrument of deterrence, is of great importance for a country that has 15,000 kilometers of borders to the west and a territorial sea” (Boyle, 2009).

South Africa

South Africa derives a lot of moral power in the world from the fact that it is the only nuclear weapon state that has abolished its own nuclear weapon arsenal (in the beginning of the 1990s). However, due to immense pressure from the US, it did not use that power to criticize the nuclear weapon states, but acted as a bridge-builder between the nuclear weapon states and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM),

more in particular with respect to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. From a disarmament point of view, the indefinite extension of the NPT can be called a “pyrrhic victory” because the non-nuclear weapon states gave away the main leverage they possessed (Taylor and Williams, 2006). In 1995, South Africa also became a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). In 1996, Pretoria signed the Pelindaba Treaty on a nuclear weapon free zone in Africa.

Since then, South Africa has moved to a more activist approach on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament (Leith and Pretorius, 2009). In 1998, it became a member of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC). South Africa has also been a member of the so-called Seven Nation Nuclear Disarmament Initiative of Norway since 2005. During the 2010 NPT Review Conference, South Africa was a staunch opponent of making the IAEA Additional Protocol mandatory, despite the fact that it had signed the Protocol. It was also amongst the 17 countries that drafted the disarmament action plan at the Conference.

Interestingly, and in contrast to Brazil, South Africa defended the US-India nuclear deal in 2008.

Egypt⁵

Egypt obtained its first (and only) nuclear (research) reactor from the USSR in 1961. Other plans were cancelled after the Chernobyl accident in 1986. In 2010, right before the Fukushima incident, Egypt again showed a real interest in re-starting the civilian nuclear program.

The country also flirted with a military programme in the 1960s (Ruble, 2006). Egypt signed the NPT in 1968, but ratified the treaty only in 1981. An IAEA report in February 2005 stated that Egypt had failed to declare nuclear material and activities that probably dated back

to the pre-1980s period. Whether the latter points to a secret military programme is unclear. Most experts do not believe so. Nevertheless, former president Mubarak threatened on more than one occasion to acquire nuclear weapons. In an interview with the newspaper *Al-Hayat* in 1998, he warned: “If the time comes when we need nuclear weapons, we will not hesitate” (Blanche, 1998). In 2010, according to Wikileaks, Mubarak apparently had said that if Iran goes nuclear, Egypt will follow (Dziadosz, 2010). Similarly, the Egyptian ambassador to the United Nations, Maged Abdel Aziz, stated in May 2010: “If others acquire nuclear weapons – and if others are going to use these nuclear weapons to acquire status in the region of the Middle East – let me tell you, we are not going to accept to be second-class citizens in the region of the Middle East” (Grossman, 2010).

Egypt is especially known for its active role during the 5-yearly NPT Review Conferences. It delivered for instance the president for the conference in 1985, the first review conference the country attended. At the NPT Review and Extension conference in 1995, Egypt argued successfully for a separate resolution that envisaged a nuclear-weapon free zone for the Middle East, an idea that President Sadat had already proposed in 1974, and which was re-launched by Egypt in 1990. Although Israel was not explicitly mentioned, the 1995 resolution is generally recognized as a success for the Egyptian diplomacy.

Egypt signed the CTBT in 1996, but it is still one of the few non-ratifiers in the world. It also refused to sign the Additional Protocol of the IAEA. These non-ratifications are linked to the status of Israel that has always refused to sign the NPT. Egypt did ratify the Pelindaba treaty, signed in Cairo in 1996, which turned Africa into a nuclear weapon free zone. In 1998, Egypt became one of the eight members of the New Agenda Coalition. At the 2000 NPT Review

Conference, Egypt led the NAC and was key in persuading the nuclear weapon states to accept the so-called “13 nuclear disarmament steps”. For the first time, Israel was also explicitly mentioned in a final declaration due to pressure from Egypt. Similarly, Egypt played a dominant role during the 2005 NPT Review Conference. Together with Iran (and the US, according to non-Western participants), it was blamed for the conference’s failure. Five years later, Rebecca Johnson described Egypt – at that time not only leading the NAC, but also the Non-Aligned Movement (and the Arab League) – as “the most influential player among the non-nuclear weapon states in constructing the [successful] 2010 outcome” (Johnson, 2010, 3). The Egyptian ambassador at the Conference for instance stated: “We are not going to accept that each time there is progress on disarmament that we have to take more obligations on our side” (Ogilvie-White and Santoro, 2011).

This time, Egypt succeeded in obtaining an agreement on a concrete date for a conference

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about a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East: 2012. In addition, and again due to Egypt’s insistence, Israel was again mentioned in the final declaration. Like Brazil and South Africa, Egypt was amongst the 17 countries that drafted the disarmament action plan at the Conference. At the same time, it succeeded in convincing the NAM, especially Iran, in not demanding more.

It remains to be seen what the consequences of the Arab Spring – the end of the Mubarak regime – will be for Egypt’s nuclear non-

proliferation and disarmament stance. In the past, the Muslim Brotherhood, that may convince a substantial part of the electorate in November 2011, has spoken out in favour of a military nuclear programme because of Iran (Grossman, 2011).

Turkey

Turkey is a NATO member that still hosts US tactical nuclear weapons on its soil, and that may host a radar for NATO's missile defense system. It has no nuclear reactors (apart from research reactors since 1962). Turkey has signed the Additional Protocol of the IAEA. In 2007, the government passed legislation approving the construction of nuclear reactors. It remains to be seen to what extent these plans will be implemented, as there was already substantial opposition even before Fukushima.

Only since Erdogan and his AKP party are in power (since 2002), and as a result of a fast-growing economy, has Turkey behaved more self-consciously and assertively in international politics (Larrabee, 2010). For instance, Turkey did not support the Bush administration in its war against Iraq. Behind this policy shift is Minister of Foreign Affairs Davutoglu, a former Professor of international relations. He introduced a “zero problems with our neighbours” strategy, while at the same time keeping good (although less dependent) relations with the West. Above all, he wants to see Turkey as a key (instead of a peripheral) actor in the Middle East. The most visible actions were the support for the Gaza flotilla (in the realm of foreign policy) and the Brazilian-Turkish-Iran deal (in the nuclear non-proliferation sphere), both in May 2010. Turkey is not a fervent supporter of sanctions vis-à-vis Iran either, including voting against in the UN Security-Council; it also blocked consensus within NATO in 2010 on mentioning Iran as the main target for NATO's missile defense system. Turkey also resisted the introduction of more intrusive rules by the Nuclear Suppliers Group

with respect to the export of enrichment and reprocessing facilities (Hibbs, 2010); the NSG finally gave in to Turkey's demands in June 2011.

Because of Iran and because the US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe may be withdrawn in the foreseeable future, there is an ongoing debate in the literature whether Turkey will acquire its own nuclear arsenal. While this option cannot be ruled out, most experts believe that Turkey will not do so (Udum, 2010). In principle Turkey is in favour of a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East. In 2010, Turkey also joined a group of 10 countries, including Japan, Australia, and Germany, that supports the idea of a world without nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

The emerging powers seem to be in an awkward position. They perceive themselves as rising powers that should be awarded positions that reflect their enhanced power in the international order. Most of them – a notable exception is South Africa – still see a positive link between nuclear weapons and a state's position in the power hierarchy of states. Although most emerging states are bound by the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states, they may in the end consider acquiring nuclear weapons for reasons of confirming their status (Campbell, 2004).

These emerging powers follow a double-track approach that at first sight seems not very consistent: on the one hand, they are at the vanguard pushing the nuclear weapon states to disarm. On the other hand, the emerging powers seem to resist pressure from the nuclear weapon states – especially the US, the UK, and France – to counter proliferation. One of the reasons is that there is a growing interest in many of these rising powers in nuclear energy, while this interest was (or has been temporarily) absent in the past. A robust

nuclear energy programme may enable them to acquire the technical capacities that are needed to produce nuclear weapons.

The major lesson for the European Union in dealing with the emerging powers in the domain of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is to become familiar with their (sometimes changing) points of view, which are not only influenced by their location and threat

assessment, but also their (self-perceived) history, and their perception of the current international political system and of the remaining role of nuclear weapons. The EU should and can do better than its approach vis-à-vis Iran (Sauer, 2007).

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Endnotes

¹ Other names are new powers, rising powers, pivotal powers, and – more confusingly - middle powers.

² The following categories of emerging powers have been a priori excluded: highly industrialised, “Western” states (Australia, South Korea); “official” and de facto nuclear weapon states (China, Russia, India), and aspiring nuclear weapon states (Iran).

³ For this part, I rely partly on the master thesis written by Kirsten Arnauts, supervised by myself, *Challenges to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime: Brazilian objections and frustrations*, Master-na-Master Internationale Betrekkingen en Diplomatie, Universiteit Antwerpen, 2010.

⁴ Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden.

⁵ For this part, I rely partly on the master thesis written by Olivier Philipsen, supervised by myself, *De verhoogde assertiviteitsgraad van Egypte in het nucleaire non-proliferatie en ontwapeningsregime*, Master-na-Master Internationale Betrekkingen en Diplomatie, Universiteit Antwerpen, 2011.

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