Case study analysis: Brazil’s nuclear choices and three main tensions in the NPT regime

1. Reluctance to additional non-proliferation measures
   ► Brazil has maintained a critical stance on the NPT, constantly denouncing what it perceives to be a discriminatory nuclear order.
   ► In its view, the NPT treats countries differently and imposes stronger obligations on the side of non-proliferation than on the side of disarmament.
   ► The country chose not to sign the Additional Protocol.
   ► The latest National Strategy of Defense (2008) states that Brazil will not adhere to amendments to the NPT, until the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) advance their own nuclear disarmament.

2. Autonomy in the nuclear fuel cycle
   ► Since the 1970s, Brazil has undertaken major efforts to develop indigenous nuclear technology or otherwise acquire it. The country has mastered all major stages of the nuclear fuel cycle.
   ► Nuclear autonomy is seen as one of the most significant features of an industrialized country and also as a right under the NPT.
   ► This view was evident in the Brazilian attempt to find a solution to the impasse over the Iranian nuclear program, in 2010.
   ► Nuclear autonomy can serve multiple purposes: social and technological development, political power and commercial interests.

3. Naval nuclear propulsion
   ► Developing a nuclear submarine has for long been a goal of the Brazilian navy, in the late 2000s, the government decided to take up this project.
   ► A nuclear-propelled submarine would be useful to guard the country’s coast, as well as to protect offshore natural resources – usually presented as Brazil’s “Blue Amazon”.
   ► The nuclear submarine project is also construed as a symbol of political power, international pre-eminence, modernity and development.
   ► If successful, Brazil will become the first NNWS to join the “nuclear submarine club”. This would pose new challenges to safeguards, inspections, monitoring and verification.

What can we learn from the case of Brazil?

► Non-nuclear countries that could do more to promote and strengthen the regime resist cooperation on non-proliferation measures because these are perceived to establish unfair obligations.

► Concerns with the slow pace of nuclear reductions and the absence of a time horizon for eliminating the NPT inequality have the potential to weaken NPT’s legitimacy and negatively affect compliance.

Recommendations to strengthen the NPT regime

► Revitalize nuclear diplomacy, especially between the US and Russia.

► NWS need to demonstrate they are willing to rethink nuclear deterrence.

► Set time goals for negotiations of each agreed disarmament measure.

► Set timeframes, benchmarks and accountability measures for the implementation of the agreed actions.

► NWS should reinforce NPT’s identity as a transformation regime by agreeing on cutting down the numbers of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems.

► NWS should take concrete actions that recognize the important role played by the NNWS, like removing the reservations placed in the protocols of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone treaties.