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Remarks by Ambassador Thomas Graham, Jr.

Nuclear Maturity in Argentina and Brazil

SAIC Argentina and Brazil Rollback Workshop

McLean, Virginia; October 22, 1998

Good morning. I would like to begin by thanking Jim and Lewis for organizing this interesting and productive seminar.

I am pleased to begin this discussion of the road Argentina and Brazil took on their way to NPT membership. Discussion and understanding of the process by which these two countries were brought into the regime promises to reveal factors and tools important to efforts to move toward the central objective of the NPT, the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons. Argentina and Brazil have demonstrated that countries can change their mind about the value of the nuclear weapon option, and about the NPT.

As I mentioned yesterday, the NPT is becoming increasingly like the United Nations Charter; membership in the Treaty, more and more, is part of the definition of a responsible member of the international community. Argentina and Brazil are particularly important additions to the NPT family because they could, like Japan, Germany, and many countries in the world, have the technical capacity to develop nuclear weapons. Several people here have offered alternatives to the word "rollback" to describe the affirmative non-proliferation

commitments of Argentina and Brazil. From the perspective of my efforts to promote the indefinite extension of the NPT on the behalf of the U.S. Government, it occurs to me that since proliferation and non-proliferation are political questions with marginal technical issues, what we see in the decisions by Argentina and Brazil that nuclear proliferation is counter to their security interests is perhaps a “nuclear maturity,” not of technology but of politics. These countries reached this level of political maturity primarily as a result of internal factors, the international community could not have forced this political maturity, but we could have retarded it. In my view, the excessively high political value attached to nuclear weapons by, among others, the nuclear weapons states is the primary threat to the continuation of this nuclear maturity in many nations and is what has stunted the political development of several states and prevented them from reaching this level of maturity.

In June and October of 1993 I met in Washington with representatives of the Government of Argentina to discuss security and arms control issues including the importance of a strong, permanent, and universal NPT for the future of world security. During the October discussions, the senior Argentinean representative made a strong pledge that Argentina would join the NPT. He said: “the nuclear weapons option did not enhance our security, it only served to cut us off from other countries with whom we wanted normal relationships,” and Argentina took a big step toward NPT membership by waiving the Treaty of Tlatelolco into force for its national territory in January 1994.

In April 1994, I attended a meeting in Bariloche, Argentina at which I delivered a long speech which, among other things, contained a thinly veiled criticism by the United States of Brazil’s continued aloofness from the NPT. At this same meeting, Peru became the first NPT state party in Latin America to declare its support for indefinite extension and Chilean

representatives said privately that they would look hard at joining the Treaty. On my way back to Washington, I stopped in Buenos Aires where Ambassador Pfirter stated Argentina's intention to join the NPT and support indefinite extension; Ambassador Enrique de la Torre played a central role in all of this.

At a conference in Venezuela hosted by the Programme for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation in May, Ambassador Talyhardat of Venezuela proposed an extension of the NPT for twenty-five years followed by another Review and Extension Conference. This option was not only less than optimal for the strength of the Treaty regime, it was of questionable legality with regard to Article X.2, which provides for one, unique Review and Extension Conference. Although it seemed to many to be a reasonable compromise, this option would have gravely eroded the viability of the NPT.

On May 30, 1994, Brazil waived the Treaty of Tlatelolco into force for its national territory. Tlatelolco provided an important stepping stone for the multilateralization of Brazil's non-proliferation commitment on the road to NPT membership. This is important in the context of the NPT regime because it recognizes that non-nuclear weapon states are essential partners in the non-proliferation and disarmament process. While the Quadripartite Agreement is crucially important for technical and political reasons, Tlatelolco membership made a significant difference in Brazil's global role with regard to non-proliferation.

In June I met with the Argentinean Ambassador in Washington to reconfirm Argentine support for indefinite extension. When I put the question to him, he replied: "we will be with you all the way." Argentina became the 171st party to the NPT on February 10, 1995. Accepting Argentina's accession to the Treaty on behalf of the United States in its role as a

depository government, ACDA Deputy Director Ralph Earle characterized this action as “a most important addition to international security.”

In March 1995 I attended an OPANAL meeting in Chile which constituted an important forum for coordinating support for the NPT within Latin America. The six central American states formally pledged their support for indefinite extension at this meeting and Argentina and Peru also spoke out in favor strongly again. Brazil was polite but equivocal on NPT membership and Mexico remained difficult although I had a positive dinner conversation with Ambassador Gonzalez Galvez. Four out of the five protocol parties to Tlatelolco (all but China) spoke out in favor of indefinite extension as did Germany attending as an observer. Interestingly, Cuba had just signed Tlatelolco in February, and when I approached the Deputy Foreign Minister regarding the possibility of Cuba joining the NPT as well, he vigorously responded:

“Guantanamo First!”

In April, we spoke with Gonzalez Galvez in Washington to no avail; Mexico continued not to support indefinite extension. At the Review and Extension Conference in May, all the Latin American states parties to the NPT supported indefinite extension with two exceptions: Mexico and Venezuela. Late in the Conference, Venezuela changed its position and Ambassador Talyhardat resigned in protest, which left Mexico as the lone Latin American holdout. Shortly before the conclusion of the Conference, Mexico offered its own indefinite extension resolution, which seemed to reserve the right to undermine the strength of the decision and the Treaty by attaching conditions to the indefinite extension. The U.S. Government reacted strongly against this action which seemed in conflict with the future of non-proliferation and disarmament and the harmonized efforts of most of Latin America and the world. The issue was pursued again in Mexico City and in the end Mexico did not prevent the consensus decision in

support of indefinite extension and Ambassador Miguel Marin Bosch, a sympathetic but resourceful and determined opponent and Deputy Head of Delegation (under Gonzalez Galvez) in New York at the Conference as well as the Mexican representative in Geneva, became the new Consul General in Barcelona.

The consensus decision to indefinitely extend the NPT without conditions was a victory for all the states parties. Although Brazil did not join before the Review and Extension Conference, it was also a winner because the New York decision kept the NPT viable and available for Brazil to join when it became ready. Now that has happened and only four states remain outside the NPT: India, Pakistan, Israel, and Cuba.

As Professor Fernando de Souza Barros and Tom Collina noted in 1995, “[a] state no longer interested in nuclear weapons may still consider the NPT discriminatory, and an infringement on sovereignty.”¹ But this need not be the case, as Argentina and Brazil have demonstrated. While the holdouts may still subscribe to the view that the NPT is discriminatory, a view with which I disagree entirely, three of the four remain outside the regime because they prefer nuclear weapons to non-proliferation and disarmament. Nuclear weapons do not make a country a great power, but that is precisely what India and Pakistan intended to achieve by acquiring them. Argentina and Brazil, in demonstrating the political maturity to value their own security and the security of the world over the at best ambiguous benefits of nuclear weapons, are leaders in a way that the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and China are not yet.

What the Argentinean and Brazilian experience with NPT membership teaches first is that no model is absolute. Owing to their unique historical and geopolitical circumstances, Argentina and Brazil were able to agree to full scope safeguards first bilaterally, and then with

¹ Tom Zamora Collina and Fernando de Souza Barros, *Transplanting Brazil and Argentina's Success*; Institute for Science and International Security Report, Volume 2, Number 2, February 1995, page 2.

the assistance of the IAEA, more readily than they were able to join the NPT. Through the Quadripartite Agreement, both countries accepted obligations of NPT states parties. From this vantage point of all the obligations and none of the privileges of membership, I submit that continued refusal to sign the NPT may have begun to seem less like a principled stand against discrimination and more like a self-imposed exclusion from an important security forum.

After putting an end to suspicions about their own nuclear intentions, Argentina and Brazil lent the weight of their adherence to the NPT regime, becoming full and equal legal partners with all the other states parties in the effort to prevent proliferation and move toward disarmament.

It is crucial for the future of world security that the NPT be viewed as more than the world's principal non-proliferation tool; it is also the world's principal tool for promoting nuclear disarmament. NPT states parties have an important voice in nuclear issues that states outside the regime do not. NPT membership indicates that a state is serious about disarmament; most states view that as much more important for their national security than any abstract security benefits retention of a nuclear weapons option offers; that is why the NPT is nearing, and will eventually achieve, universality.

Larry Scheinman mentioned yesterday that, in some senses, "where you stand is where you sit" with regard to nuclear proliferation. India, for example, supports nuclear non-proliferation now that they are on the side of the "haves." This seems to me exactly the kind of thinking that the world cannot afford. Last month I attended a conference in Delhi at which a charged debate was sparked when one of the participants characterized the non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT as "a bunch of pigs agreeing not to fly." I am confident that several of you here today would disagree with that characterization. Argentina and Brazil, through their

cooperation and the maturity of their national politics have distinguished themselves as international leaders by joining and supporting the NPT. I hope they continue to lead and that the example they and other such leaders set will eventually overcome the irrational addiction in many nations to weapons of mass destruction that, God willing, will never be used.