

THE NUCLEAR THRESHOLD STATES

Challenges and Opportunities Posed by Brazil and Japan

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"Nuclear threshold states"—those that have chosen nuclear restraint despite having significant nuclear capabilities—seem like the perfect partners for the reinvigorated drive toward global nuclear disarmament. Having chosen nuclear restraint, threshold states may embrace disarmament as a way to guarantee the viability of their choice (which may be impossible in a proliferating world). Supporting disarmament efforts affirms their restraint, both self-congratulating and self-fulfilling. Additionally, the commitment to their non-nuclear status springs at least in part from a moral stance against nuclear weapons that lends itself to energetic support of global disarmament. However, threshold states also offer significant challenges to the movement for nuclear weapons elimination, in particular in relation to acquisition of enrichment and reprocessing facilities. This article analyzes both the challenges and opportunities posed by threshold states by examining the cases of Brazil and Japan.

KEYWORDS: Nuclear disarmament; nuclear energy; nonproliferation; nuclear fuel cycle; Brazil; Japan

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“Brazil and Argentina enjoy a unique safeguards arrangement for their nuclear facilities. The two countries agreed in 1991 to use nuclear energy for non-military purposes, and they established the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC) for verification purposes. The relationship of the IAEA to ABACC was established shortly afterward: “Argentina, Brazil, ABACC and the IAEA signed a comprehensive safeguards agreement (Quadripartite Agreement), which entered into force in March 1994 and that allows the IAEA to apply its safeguards regime in both countries taking into account the findings of the SCCC.” (p. 53).