

May 13, 1966

**Telegram from Charge d'Affaires of Mexico City on
the Third Session of the Preparatory Commission for
the Denuclearization of Latin America**

Citation:

"Telegram from Charge d'Affaires of Mexico City on the Third Session of the Preparatory Commission for the Denuclearization of Latin America", May 13, 1966, Wilson Center Digital Archive, File No. F.W.II/102(56)/66. Obtained by Ryan Musto.
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/133937>

Summary:

This report focuses on Mexico and Brazil's differing approaches towards the issue of denuclearization of Latin America

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

AMS
SECRET

FROM: C. DASGUPTA, Charge d'Affaires, Mexico City
TO: Shri Gonsalves, Deputy Secretary, MEA
Telegram No: MEX/162-1/66
DATE: May 13, 1966
SECRET

Dear Shri Gonsalves,

□The Third Session of the Preparatory Commission for the Denuclearization of Latin America was held in Mexico City from April 19 to May 4. With the sole exception of Cuba, all the countries of the region - including for the first time Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago - were represented in the Commission. Austria, Canada, Denmark, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, USA and Yugoslavia which had sent observers to the previous session, were now joined by the Federal Republic of Germany, France, India, Poland and the UAR. Poland thus became the first and only "Communist-bloc" country to participate in the proceedings, presumably as a result of her interest in the denuclearization of Central Europe. There were also observers from the IAEA (?) and the Inter-American Nuclear Energy Commission.

2. The Commission was confronted by two distinct approaches to the problem - those of Mexico and Brazil respectively. The Mexican approach found expression in a working document drawn up previously by the Co-Ordinating Committee (our letter of even number dated April 14, 1966 gives details). The Brazilians produced an alternative draft proposal which, with some minor amendments was later presented as a joint effort of Brazil and Colombia. At the Commission's meetings it was found possible to reconcile most of the technical and purely verbal divergences in the rival drafts, but the essential political differences remain unresolved.

3. The Brazilian stand is that the treaty should come into force only after (i) all the countries in the region, including Cuba, subscribe to it; (ii) other countries having de jure or de facto responsibilities for territories lying within the region (USA, UK, France and the Netherlands) accept the same obligations and (iii) the existing nuclear powers, including China (and also in the future, any countries which come to possess nuclear weapons) agree to respect the terms of the treaty, to refrain from introducing nuclear weapons into the region in any form and to undertake that they "will not take the initiative in the employment of nuclear weapons" against any part of the denuclearized region. The Brazilian draft includes two protocols setting out the obligations to be undertaken by the "nuclear powers" and the countries having responsibilities for territories situated in the region respectively, and which are required to be signed by those countries. The Mexican stand is that while the fulfillment of these conditions is highly desirable they should not be considered essential for the treaty to come into force. The Brazilian stand was supported by Colombia, Argentina and Venezuela while the Mexicans found support from Chile, Ecuador, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Also, presumably, she is supported by El Salvador which had taken part in drawing up the draft contained in the Coordinating Committee's working document.

4. The Brazilian stand is based on the two principles of "universality" and "reciprocity." The principle of "universality" is interpreted to mean that all the countries and territories in the region must accept the treaty before it comes into force. The Brazilians maintain that if some countries do not accept the obligation, other countries cannot feel that their security would be safeguarded if they were to permanently denuclearize themselves. The principle of "reciprocity" requires definite obligations to be accepted by the nuclear powers. As envisaged by the UN GA

Resolution 2028 (XX), there must be an acceptable balance of mutual balance of mutual responsibilities and obligations between the "nuclear" and "non-nuclear" countries. The Brazilian delegate, Ambassador Sette Camara, declared that: "Non-Proliferation, whether as a global solution, or in the regional sphere, can never be achieved or even approached as an act of unilateral and gratuitous renunciation, offered disinterestedly to the nuclear powers, without their being obliged to give any compensation...the negotiations which were are coming to realize and which we should carry on further with the nuclear powers constitute an important precedent which essentially interest all the non-nuclearized nations. In order to count on the support and applause of the rest of the non-nuclear countries, we must know how to defend our rights to judge our responsibilities and negotiate our concessions against the rights, responsibilities and concessions of the nuclear powers. We are now the representatives of all the non-nuclear powers of the world."

5. From our point of view, it appears to me that the most interesting aspect of the Brazilian position is that it requires nuclear powers to give not a mere "statement of intentions" but a definite legal commitment embodied in a protocol. In the words of Ambassador Sette Camara: "If we undertake in a solemn and formal manner to proscribe nuclear weapons from our continent, it is just that we seek to obtain from the atomic powers a concession in a form which assures the same character of a judicial obligation...There is no reason why we should be content with exchanging our express and formal renunciation for a *flatus vocis* of mere promises devoid of legal value." Indeed, the Mexican delegate, Ambassador Castañeda, accused Brazil of being inconsistent with her stand in the ENDC, where he said, Brazil "had contended herself with requesting, with the support of Mexico, a mere "declaration of intentions" from the nuclear powers, in the sense that they were ready to continue negotiations regarding the possible reduction of their nuclear inventories. This is considerably more modest than the additional protocol of guarantees which she now demands in this forum." In denying that there was any inconsistency, Sette Camara invoked the aid of our Ambassador Trivedi who, he noted, "in the interview granted to Reuters and later published in the newspaper "Le Monde" of 20th April this year, attached great importance to the position of Brazil in respect of the necessity of formal guarantees on the part of the nuclear powers for the effectiveness of any Treaty aimed at the establishment of denuclearized geographic zones." As I am not aware of the latest position in the ENDC, I am unable to compare the Brazilian positions here and in Geneva. I am attaching herewith an appendix containing interesting passages from the Brazilian delegates' speeches which will enable you to form a definitive opinion.

6. The Mexican case was brilliantly argued by Ambassador Castañeda. Castañeda maintained that an undertaking of denuclearization gave a Latin American country greater, and not lesser, security. None of these countries is capable of building up a credible nuclear deterrence and even if one of them were able to make a few such bombs, it would only result in converting that country into an atomic target without giving her any deterrence capability. Thus, "we cannot accept as valid, in Latin America, the contention that a state cannot renounce nuclear weapons because others refuse to refuse to renounce them. In reality, no Latin American state can base her security on the possession of atomic weapons." Furthermore, to insist that all countries must sign the treaty before it comes into effect would amount to granting a universal veto by which any country could prevent the denuclearization of the region; such a veto is contrary to inter-American traditions. Nor would denuclearization clash with the legal or military obligations of the Latin American countries in regard to the collective security of the continent or the Organization of American States. From the legal point of view, these obligations do not require that a state employ armed force without her consent; consequently no state is obliged to employ without her consent armed force of a nuclear character. From the political and military point of view, "in a possible nuclear conflict, Latin America would occupy a peripheral position, given its geographical situation and its limited industrial development. The great western democracies have built up a vast and complex defense system against all possible extra-continental aggression which does not need the installation of nuclear weapons

in Latin America." On the other hand, "the installation of nuclear bases in a Latin American country, instead of giving her military security, would attract like a magnet the projectiles of the adversary." As regards guarantees from the "nuclear powers," these are extremely desirable but to make them a condition for the entry into force of the treaty would amount only to giving these powers a right of veto. He pointed specifically to China, observing that under the Brazilian proposal, "a number of Latin American countries could not agree between themselves not to possess atomic weapons, unless the People's Republic of China gives it her consent." As regards guarantees from countries having de jure or de facto territorial responsibilities in the region, his impression was that this might turn out to be a purely theoretical dilemma in view of the encouraging attitude of the countries concerned. He added, however, that for reasons similar to those he had advanced in relation to the other controversial points, these guarantees should not be a prior condition for the treaty to come into force.

7. Some of the other points which arose in the debates were the following:

□□ The organization of American States: A number of delegations raised the question of the compatibility of a denuclearization treaty with their obligations to the OAS. Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Peru and Venezuela have reserved the right to request the point of view of the competent organs of the Inter-American system in this regard. The position of Mexico has already been discussed above

. China: A resolution was passed requesting the negotiating committee to explore informally whether Peking is willing to give the guarantee required from the nuclear-weapon states.

. France came in for heavy criticism for the delegates of Colombia and Venezuela. The Colombian delegate read out the text of his President's message to De Gaulle pleading that France desist from atomic tests in the South Pacific and seek an alternative site. The Colombian delegate proposed that a similar message be sent to De Gaulle on behalf of the preparatory commission. Through this proposal was not pressed, France was obliquely reproached in a resolution setting out a "call to the nuclear powers." This resolution, without naming France, observes that soon new nuclear weapon test are to be made which could damage health and maritime resources in certain parts of Latin America, and appeals to the nuclear powers to stop all types of nuclear weapon tests and to desist from nuclear tests which could endanger health or maritime and other natural resources in Latin America. The Venezuelan delegate attacked France for planning to "establish nuclear devices" in French Guiana or in her islands in the continent and suggested that the countries represented in the Commission "exhort the France of Liberty and Law to desist from such propositions." The French Ambassador thereupon sent a note to the President of the Commission declaring, on behalf of his government, that "France has no intention of carrying out nuclear experiments in the territory of her Departments in America. As regard the space centres in Guyana, these will refer only to tests of space rockets and the launching of satellites."

□□

8. As a result of the deliberations of the Commission, a document has been drawn up which sets out the proposed articles common to both the rival drafts as well as the alternative formulations where no agreement could be reached. Annexes to these proposed articles set out i) protocols of guarantees called for by Brazil and ii) the alternative proposal of securing adherence of other countries (including non-nuclear weapon countries) which was suggested by the Negotiating Committee (our letter of even number dated April 14, 1966 refers). This consolidated document will be presented to the member governments for their observations, which should be submitted by July 15. The next session of the Commission will be held here from August 30, 1966.

9. The 3rd Session of the Commission heard for the first time a clear discussion of the political and military issues involved in Latin American denuclearization. For the first

time also, the debates turned on concrete proposals in the shape of draft articles. As a result of the Commission's labours, it was possible to iron out a number of technical and verbal divergences. However, the principal political differences remain unresolved. Consequently, the optimistic view of Chairman Garcia Robles who declared that "ninety per cent" of the differences had been resolved was hardly justified since the remaining ten per cent constitutes the crux of the matter.

10. What are the prospects of Latin American denuclearization? It appears most unlikely that the Brazilian conditions can be fulfilled. Cuba has already indicated that she will not join the treaty. Furthermore, Communist China's attitude is most doubtful. Thus, if a treaty were signed on the lines proposed by Brazil, it is highly unlikely to come into force, at least in the present international situation. It seems for me, therefore, that the Brazilian-Argentine stand amounts to a decision to keep the political option for producing nuclear weapons open for the present. (This is not, of course, to say that they necessarily have any concrete nuclear ambitions. On the other hand, the attitude of Mexico is very different. Her President has unilaterally declared that his country will not under any circumstances produce atomic weapons. If Mexico finds a sufficient number of States to support her attitude, as seems possible, she may decide at a later stage to go ahead and sign a treaty even though it would not cover the whole region. Thus, in the absence of a change in the attitude of Cuba and/or Brazil, Argentine and those who support their position, only certain parts of Latin America and not the entire region can be denuclearized.