

IRAN AND NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

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Folha de S. Paulo, March 8, 2010

The world has much more serious problems to deal with than the fact of Iran possibly joining the club of nuclear powers.

The Secretary of State of the United States, Hillary Clinton, was in Brazil last week to persuade our government to support new economic sanctions against Iran, but she was not successful. Perhaps because Brazilian interests in this case are not the same as those of the United States, or because our evaluation of the problem of nuclear proliferation is different from theirs.

After Iraq and its weapons of mass destruction, Iran became “the major problem” in international policy, and United States and Europe are threatening the country with new sanctions, because it would be building nuclear capability. I doubt that this is the primary motivation against Iran, given the “logic” of American international policy since September 11, but I will not address this issue. The most important question is: is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons so relevant to world peace? There is a tacit assumption among right-minded people all over the world that the treaty is essential to peace, and therefore no one wishes to discuss it, but we must do it.

The treaty has two formal purposes: to prevent new countries from becoming able to produce atomic weapons, and to promote the nuclear disarmament of nuclear power countries. Significantly, however, none of these two purposes defined in 1970 is being fulfilled. After the treaty, India, Pakistan, Israel, and probably North Korea became nuclear powers. And there were no major sanctions against the three former countries. On the other hand, I am not aware of a reduction in the atomic arsenal of the major countries, as predicted by the treaty.

Although unwritten, the treaty's chief purpose is to prevent “irresponsible countries” from becoming nuclear-armed countries. It is impossible not to agree with this idea. But what is a responsible country? Why would be Pakistan and Israel responsible whereas Iran is not? I have no doubt about the danger of a country such as North Korea, whereas it is difficult for me to see more danger in Iran than, for instance, in Pakistan. Iran is a great country, heir to an ancient civilization. Among Middle East countries, only Turkey compares with it in terms of development. And it is a country that is feeling severely threatened since it achieved its nationalist and Islamic revolution in 1979.

The threat issue is a significant one. The major countries failed to enforce the treaty and did not disarm because this is not in their interest, nor, I believe, in the interest of the rest of the world. Even though there are other reasons for the world peace existing among major countries since 1945, the nuclear *détente* is still one of them. No country dares to attack another one that has nuclear power. Now, if the possession of atomic weapons is a good reason for Russia or China not to attack the United States and vice versa, why would it not also be a good reason for Israel not to attack Iran and vice versa? The Israelis had no doubt about it. Why would it be less legitimate for the Iranians to have the same opinion?

Nuclear weapons are a danger for the whole world, but they are also a reason for nuclear powers to stop waging wars against each other. We do not live in the perfect world of our dreams, but this is not due to the existence of nuclear weapons. The world has much more serious problems to deal with than the fact of Iran possibly joining the club of nuclear powers. Let's deal with these problems and leave Iran in peace.