

Former President Confirms: Brazil Was Ready to Build A-Bomb

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Former Brazilian President José Sarney revealed that the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for two decades (1964/1985) had plans to build an atomic bomb, but the initiative was discarded once democracy was restored in the country.

It had long been suspected that the Brazilian military were very much intent in developing atomic energy and the bomb, but this is the first time it has been confirmed.

Mr. Sarney, the first elected civilian to rule Brazil following the dictatorship said in an interview Sunday on the Globo television net that he first heard of the project when he was informed of a very deep drill in the northern state of Pará apparently for underground atomic testing.

Mr. Sarney became president in 1985 following the death of Tancredo Neves who had been nominated president by Congress, following a gradual democratic opening agreed with the military. Mr. Sarney ruled for five years until 1989 and is currently Senator.

The former President added he found out about the atomic bomb plan a year after taking office when the National Security Council informed him of the existence of the testing grounds in Cachimbo, state of Pará.

"I was taken by surprise. At the same time I was concerned about the fact it should not become public news because it would interfere with the close relations we were building with Argentina", revealed Mr. Sarney.

Actually in August 1986 the Brazilian press reported that drilling works were taking place in the Cachimbo sierra with the purpose of atomic underground testing.

The president Sarney replied at the time, "that issue has not been on my desk", but nineteen years later he admits having misled Brazilian public opinion.

"I ordered the Security Council chairman to immediately seal whatever they were drilling in Cachimbo and simultaneously announce that the purpose was to store nuclear waste."

Mr. Sarney said that at the time Argentina and Brazil, political rivals in the region for decades were looking for closer relations, and admitting the existence of the underground testing area would have been interpreted "we were in a nuclear race."

"The Argentines were also involved in nuclear activities, but as happened with Brazil they also denied it."

Finally in 1991 Argentine president Carlos Menem and his Brazilian counterpart Fernando Collor de Melo signed an agreement for the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

According to Mr. Sarney, during negotiations Brazil became aware that Argentina was ten years ahead in nuclear research.

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