**A Bogus Deal on Iran**

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Both Turkey and Brazil have grown much closer to Iran in recent years and have voiced their opposition to further sanctions. So it is not surprising that they have now come to the Islamic Republic’s rescue, handing it a lifeline on its nuclear program just as the Obama administration, after a year of failed diplomacy, had begun to contemplate the possibility of new sanctions.

Acting more as Iran’s advocates than neutral brokers, Turkey and Brazil worked out a deal whereby Iran would ship low-enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for higher grade nuclear material. But the deal does little to stop Iran’s uranium enrichment activities, which are now approaching the 20 percent threshold that is considered the prelude to an operational nuclear weapon. A senior Israeli official has rightly called the deal “an Iranian trick,” as it will not end Iran’s own enrichment efforts and comes just as Secretary Clinton says the U.S., Russia and China have agreed on a draft resolution to impose sanctions.

The nuclear deal is just the latest sign of Turkey and Brazil’s newfound closeness with Iran. President Lula da Silva of Brazil reacted to the Ahmadinejad’s highly suspect “victory” in last year’s presidential elections by saying, “What right do I have, or any president, to question the election results in Iran. It would be overly arrogant for Brazil, 12,000 kilometers away, to pass judgment on Iran’s elections. Nor would I want them to judge ours.” A few months later, Ahmadinejad said that the ties between Iran and Brazil have “no limits.”

This deal comes just as Secretary of State Clinton announced that the U.S., U.K., France, Russia and China have finally agreed on the potential sanctions to be placed on Iran. The punishments include an arms embargo, freezing the assets of the Revolutionary Guards Corps, intercepting suspected WMD-related shipments, and other restrictions on dealing with the regime. This deal threatens to reset those negotiations.

China is reacting positively to the deal in the hopes of using it to justify the delay of further action. Iran provides China with 11.4 percent of its crude oil imports, and their overall trade has doubled since 2005. The Iranian refusal to budge made it difficult for China to stand by the Islamic Republic’s side in the United Nations, but this latest maneuver will give them the excuse to call for more diplomacy. Avoiding sanctions is clearly the goal of the Brazilian President, who boasted, “Diplomacy emerged victorious today.”

The Brazilian President is technically right. Diplomacy was indeed victorious—but it was a victory for Iran, and not for the U.S. or anyone threatened by Iranian nuclear weapons capabilities. Whereas Russia and China were in a tricky spot due to Iran’s blatant refusal to work with the international community, the role has been reversed and now the U.S. is the one in a tricky spot.

“But if he accepts it, many of the urgent issues he has said will have to be resolved with Iran in coming months—mostly over suspected weapons work—will be put on hold for a year or more.”

The New York Times perfectly frames America’s new position. “Mr. Obama now faces a vexing choice. If he walks away from this deal, it will look like he is rejecting an agreement similar to one he was willing to sign eight months ago,” the newspaper wrote.

Giving Iran another year will allow the regime to better prepare for the day when sanctions may finally be placed upon them. One of the regime’s key vulnerabilities is that it has to import petroleum-based products, including 30 percent of its gasoline. Iran is moving fast to expand ten of its current refineries and build seven more, allowing them to produce twice as much gasoline in 2012. The Iranians have struck a $6.5 billion deal with a Chinese company to help make this happen.

If Iran ships out a large part of its uranium to Turkey, it will not significantly delay its pursuit of the ability to create a nuclear arsenal. It is true that Iran will lose some of their uranium stock, which they are already short on. However, while international pressure is alleviated, Iran can work on other aspects of the weapons program such as the ability to mount a nuclear warhead on a ballistic missile. In the meantime, Iran can work to replenish its uranium stockpile from places like Zimbabwe, Venezuela, North Korea, possibly Burma, and through expanding production from its own uranium mine near Bandar Abbas, which they are still refusing to give the IAEA access to.

It is also important to remember that the deal does not stop Iran from enriching the uranium it keeps to 20 percent. David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security says that it would only take about six months to enrich the uranium from 20 percent to the bomb-grade level of 90 percent using 500 to 1,000 centrifuges. Iran currently has about 9,000 centrifuges, but only about 60 percent are said to be operating due to technical difficulties, probably courtesy of Western intelligence agencies.

This means that if this deal is enacted, Iran will still be enriching uranium to a level that will allow them to quickly create the fuel necessary for a nuclear bomb. The Iranians are openly expanding the number of their nuclear facilities, and likely have undeclared enrichment sites and stockpiles of uranium. The Syrians’ own nuclear program, which should be seen as an extension of Iran’s, and the planned opening of the Bushehr nuclear reactor in August further highlight the foolishness of relying upon this agreement to stop a nuclear-armed Iran from becoming a reality.

The Iranians’ best weapon in fighting the West has been the illusion that they can be dealt with diplomatically. Brazilian and Turkey have made this farce a reality. If the United Nations uses this latest deal as an excuse for inaction, the U.S. must immediately create a coalition that will place sanctions on Iran outside of the toothless organization’s framework.