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Brazil-Turkey Deal with Iran Undermines Big Power Politics

By Thalif Deen

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When Brazil and Turkey clinched a deal with Iran over its disputed nuclear program last weekend, the two non-permanent members of the Security Council not only challenged the unbridled political power exercised by the five big powers but also jeopardized U.S. plans for a unanimous resolution imposing sanctions against Tehran.

As a result, the 15-member Security Council now remains split, with at least two countries — and possibly more — lined up against a U.S.-inspired resolution against Iran.

The Brazil-Turkey initiative, which has undermined the upcoming resolution likely to be adopted next month, has also triggered implicit political threats against the two "renegade" countries.

According to unnamed government sources both in Europe and Washington, Turkey's longstanding attempts to join the European Union (EU) are likely to be derailed further.

And so would Brazil's plans to join as a permanent member of the Security Council (along with Japan, Germany and India).

Both countries, with strong economic links to Iran, stand accused of thwarting mostly Western efforts to isolate Tehran.

Norman Solomon, executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, told IPS that rather than wisely encouraging Turkey and Brazil to pursue their new diplomatic efforts with Iran, the U.S. government is spurning those constructive efforts.

"Washington is failing to affirm the enormous positive potential of the kind of diplomacy that Turkey and Brazil are offering," he said.

Instead of searching for a new configuration, the administration of President Barack Obama is falling back on an old one: confrontation, he noted.

"Led by Washington, the escalation of rhetoric from the world's biggest nuclear-weapons powers is aimed at a government that is engaged in a nascent nuclear program with unclear goals," said Solomon, author of [*War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*](#).

Under the agreement reached last week, Iran has agreed to ship about half of its nuclear fuel stockpile to Turkey.

Iran, which has continued to vehemently deny it has any plans to develop nuclear weapons, says its existing projects are aimed at developing nuclear energy, not armaments.

"That the Brazil/Turkey initiative has set back Brazil's bid for a permanent seat and Turkey's application for EU membership assumes that these countries were on track to achieving their aspirations," a U.N. diplomat told IPS.

The fact is that the five big powers in the Security Council, the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China (P5), have never been keen on having new permanent members in their ranks.

"They would like to keep membership to this exclusive P5 club closed. And Turkey's chances of getting admitted into the EU have also dimmed in recent years," he pointed out.

And so, in reality, both Turkey and Brazil are not in any danger of losing what they do not have — or what they have been promised but never delivered.

Phyllis Bennis, director of the New Internationalism Project at the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies, told IPS the U.S. crusade for new U.N. sanctions against Iran has been underway for a long time.

"But the new intensity, the new scurrying around to make sure China and Russia were on board, the new scramble for an immediate public announcement, all reflected Washington's frustration with Iran's new agreement with Turkey and Brazil," she said.

That agreement requires Iran to send about half of its low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for somewhat higher-enriched prepared fuel rods for use in its medical reactor — pretty close to what the United States and its allies were demanding of Iran just months ago.

"So the harsh U.S. response — condemning the agreement as 'just words,' and demanding that Iran make even more concessions, implying that only a complete and utter Iranian surrender would suffice — makes clearer than ever the reality that the U.S. policy towards Iran is not about an actual nuclear weapons threat but about power politics," said Bennis, author of [*Ending the US War in Afghanistan: A Primer*](#).

If adopted, the proposed resolution would be the fourth, imposing a variety of sanctions against Iran.

The current resolution improves on the previous three by requiring U.N. member states to inspect ships and aircraft headed into or out of Iran — if there are grounds to suspect that banned materials were on board.

Solomon said that rather than genuinely pursuing a nuclear-weapons-free Middle East, "The administration in Washington is maintaining the U.S. policy of winking at Israel's sizeable nuclear arsenal while insisting that nuclear developments elsewhere in the region must strictly adhere to Washington's edicts."

Turkey and Brazil should be supported — not undermined — as those two countries endeavor to find solutions to the dangerous standoff between Washington and Tehran, he declared.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the U.N. diplomat told IPS that the Turkey/Brazil initiative has definitely complicated matters.

"The initiative was in some ways a reaction of some of the bigger, more influential non-permanent members to the secretive manner in which the P5 plus 1 (Germany) have dealt with this issue," he noted.

They have been keeping discussions to themselves and not sharing information or bringing the non-permanent members into the discussions, thereby giving the impression that the non-permanent members will have no choice but to go along with whatever resolution the P5 plus-1 produce, he said.

Besides the five permanent members, the 10 non-permanent members in the Security Council are Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Gabon, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Nigeria, Turkey and Uganda.

Bennis said that new U.N. sanctions are not going to stop Iran's nuclear enrichment — like sanctions against any country with a repressive government, they are far more likely to impact the civilian population.

The Brazil-Turkey initiative, on the other hand, actually takes major steps towards increasing international oversight of Iran's nuclear power program, and, if allowed to go forward without the all-too-likely U.S. interference, could well lead to a significant diminution of Iran's enrichment, she added.

"If that were really the goal of the U.S. anti-Iran mobilization, you'd think they would be pleased," Bennis said.

Instead, she pointed out, the U.S. Congress and the Obama administration appear to be moving as fast as they can to prevent the Brazil-Turkey initiative from working, potentially even resolving the current crisis.

Ironically, the one thing that could prevent a new round of U.N. sanctions might just be a renewed level of independence in the U.N. Security Council.

Even if U.S. pressure won promises from Russia and China that they wouldn't veto a harsh new sanctions regime, that's not the same as a promise to vote for the sanctions.

If current Council members Brazil and Turkey can convince some of their friends and allies on the Council to resist the U.S. pressure, Chinese and Russian abstentions could allow a new "coalition of the unwilling" to stop the sanctions.

Led by Turkey and Brazil, other Council members — whom the U.S. and other veto-holders rarely consult — could stop a sanctions move in its tracks.