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Ahmadinejad and Lula expose Obama's hapless diplomacy.

What a fiasco. That's the first word that comes to mind watching Mahmoud Ahmadinejad raise his arms yesterday with the leaders of Turkey and Brazil to celebrate a new atomic pact that instantly made irrelevant 16 months of President Obama's "diplomacy." The deal is a political coup for Tehran and possibly delivers the coup de grace to the West's half-hearted efforts to stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear bomb.

Full credit for this debacle goes to the Obama Administration and its hapless diplomatic strategy. Last October, nine months into its engagement with Tehran, the White House concocted a plan to transfer some of Iran's uranium stock abroad for enrichment. If the West couldn't stop Iran's program, the thinking was that maybe this scheme would delay it. The Iranians played coy, then refused to accept the offer.

But Mr. Obama doesn't take no for an answer from rogue regimes, and so he kept the offer on the table. As the U.S. finally seemed ready to go to the U.N. Security Council for more sanctions, the Iranians chose yesterday to accept the deal on their own limited terms while enlisting the Brazilians and Turks as enablers and political shields. "Diplomacy emerged victorious today," declared Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, turning Mr. Obama's own most important foreign-policy principle against him.

The double embarrassment is that the U.S. had encouraged Lula's diplomacy as a step toward winning his support for U.N. sanctions. Brazil is currently one of the nonpermanent, rotating members of the Security Council, and the U.S. has wanted a unanimous U.N. vote. Instead, Lula used the opening to triangulate his own diplomatic solution. In her first game of high-stakes diplomatic poker, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is leaving the table dressed only in a barrel.

So instead of the U.S. and Europe backing Iran into a corner this spring, Mr. Ahmadinejad has

backed Mr. Obama into one. America's discomfort is obvious. In its statement yesterday, the White House strained to "acknowledge the efforts" by Turkey and Brazil while noting "Iran's repeated failure to live up to its own commitments." The White House also sought to point out differences between yesterday's pact and the original October agreements on uranium transfers.

Good luck drawing those distinctions with the Chinese or Russians, who will now be less likely to agree even to weak sanctions. Having played so prominent a role in last October's talks with Iran, the U.S. can't easily disassociate itself from something broadly in line with that framework.

Under the terms unveiled yesterday, Iran said it would send 1,200 kilograms (2,646 lbs.) of low-enriched uranium to Turkey within a month, and no more than a year later get back 120 kilograms enriched from somewhere else abroad. This makes even less sense than the flawed October deal. In the intervening seven months, Iran has kicked its enrichment activities into higher gear. Its estimated total stock has gone to 2,300 kilograms from 1,500 kilograms last autumn, and its stated enrichment goal has gone to 20% from 3.5%.

If the West accepts this deal, Iran would be allowed to keep enriching uranium in contravention of previous U.N. resolutions. Removing 1,200 kilograms will leave Iran with still enough low-enriched stock to make a bomb, and once uranium is enriched up to 20% it is technically easier to get to bomb-capable enrichment levels.

Only last week, diplomats at the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran has increased the number of centrifuges it is using to enrich uranium. According to Western intelligence estimates, Iran continues to acquire key nuclear components, such as trigger mechanisms for bombs. Tehran says it wants to build additional uranium enrichment plants. The CIA recently reported that Iran tripled its stockpile of uranium last year and moved "toward self-sufficiency in the production of nuclear missiles." Yesterday's deal will have no impact on these illicit activities.

The deal will, however, make it nearly impossible to disrupt Iran's nuclear program short of military action. The U.N. is certainly a dead end. After 16 months of his extended hand and after downplaying support for Iran's democratic opposition, Mr. Obama now faces an Iran much closer to a bomb and less diplomatically isolated than when President Bush left office.

Iran's Nuclear Coup

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Israel will have to seriously consider its military options. Such a confrontation is far more likely thanks to the diplomatic double-cross of Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazil's Lula, and especially to a U.S. President whose diplomacy has succeeded mainly in persuading the world's rogues that he lacks the determination to stop their destructive ambitions.

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