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New players in the dispute over Iran's nuclear program



Brazilian, Turkish and Iranian objectives

New players in the Dispute over Iran's Nuclear Program

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Introduction

Iran's nuclear program has been at the center of international nuclear diplomacy since 2002. The Iranian government has attempted to frame the debate in the context of an 'inalienable right to technology', flowing from Article IV of the NPT. Its detractors see the program as a threat to both regional security and to the non-proliferation regime. Non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS) often emphasize the discriminatory nature of the NPT, allowing some nations to have specific rights concerning nuclear technology and armament, and others not, dividing the world into nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots'.¹ They argue that this is sustainable only in the short run, and that disarmament is therefore the critical and urgent agenda to pursue.

This division has led to a battle for emphasis between member states on non-proliferation not upon disarmament, when the two are inextricably linked. The former U.S. administration in particular, focused on non-proliferation and counter-

¹ Baktiari, Bahman, 'Seeking International Legitimacy: Understanding the Dynamics of Nuclear Nationalism in Iran', in Yaphe eds. (2010), *Nuclear Politics in Iran*, Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), Middle East Strategic Perspectives, Center for Strategic Research, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press).

*Cover photo: 'Trilateral session-Iran, Turkey, Brazil issue joint declaration', website of the Presidency of the Islamic Republic of Iran, May 17, 2010.

proliferation at the expense of disarmament negotiations. At the same time, U.S. officials argued that other states were focusing on Article VI violations 'that did not exist'.² It is obvious that this has caused frustration among NNWS who aim for a balance between disarmament and non-proliferation.

According to Iranian President Mahmoud [Ahmadinejad](#), the lack of an effective tool to enforce nuclear disarmament, in the context of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the U.N. Security Council putting unprecedented pressure on Iran to enforce non-proliferation, constitutes one of the major shortcomings of the NPT.³ Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that global nuclear disarmament is impossible without widespread confidence in successful non-proliferation. Iran insists that its nuclear program does not include military objectives and is entirely meant for civilian use. Its claim for the need of greater energy diversity is indisputable as it seeks to meet increasing domestic demand and rising oil exports. In addition, its nuclear facilities are used for vital medical and agricultural purposes.⁴ These are all valid arguments to pursue a nuclear program on Iranian soil.

² Wurst, Jim "U.S. Says Nonproliferation Treaty Faces Crisis," *Global Security Newswire*, April 27, 2004, in Rublee, Maria Rost, 'The Nuclear Threshold States: Challenges and Opportunities Posed by Brazil and Japan', *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 2010 (Monterey Institute of International Studies, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies).

³ Iranian President Ahmadinejad's address to NPT Conference 2010 accessible through <http://www.president.ir/en/?ArtID=21656>.

⁴ Baktiari (2010) Anthony, Ian (2010), 'The End of Deference: Iran, Brazil and Turkey and the Nuclear Fuel Swap', *Real Instituto Elcano*, (ARI 96/2010).

The conflict between Iran and the West is complex beyond the nuclear arena, so that resolving the nuclear crisis requires confidence building and trust. Such efforts are complicated by recent sanctions, often seen by Iranians as neo-imperial attempts to limit access to technology and consequently broader economic development. The majority of U.N. Security Council members remains highly skeptical about its peaceful purposes and considers sanctions as the only possible means to delay Iran's enrichment program without force.

This perception was reinforced by Tehran's refusal to agree to a fuel-swap deal in October 2009. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had proposed the exchange of Iranian-produced low-enriched uranium (LEU) for the supply of fabricated fuel for Tehran's Research Reactor (TRR), on behalf of the so-called Vienna Group, consisting of France, Russia, the United States and the IAEA. This was in response to Iran's June 2009 request to the IAEA for support in acquiring such replacement fuel. The deal involved at the time a large proportion of Iran's stockpile (1200 kg; 75% of total) of LEU, reducing concerns about imminent breakout.⁵ It offered Iran the opportunity to demonstrate its LEU was for civil purposes while keeping the TRR functioning, as there are currently no civil requirements for LEU in Iran as the only reactor anywhere near completion (in Bushehr) will use Russian-supplied fuel.⁶ But Iran insisted on further amendments to the deal on the grounds that it was unable to trust the states involved with the majority of their LEU, given their past record in

⁵ Ibid., Fitzpatrick, Mark, 'Iran: The Fragile Promise of the Fuel-Swap Plan', *Survival*, Vol. 52, No. 3, June-July 2010, pp. 67 – 94

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the fuel-swap negotiations see Fitzpatrick (2010).

breaking agreements and contracts in the nuclear field.

Turkey and Brazil joined the process as interlocutors after the Washington summit of April 12, 2010, leading to the [Tehran Declaration](#) (with Iran) on May 17.⁷ Yet the following day leading states on the [Security Council](#) announced their intention to agree a fourth round of sanctions against Iran, passed on June 9, with Turkey and Brazil voting against.⁸ Following the United States, the European Union agreed an additional set of economic [sanctions](#) on June 17, consisting of a ban on certain investments, technical assistance, technology transfers to Iran's key oil and gas industry, and much of the operation of its shipping and air cargo.⁹ The U.N., U.S. and EU sanctions made immediate negotiations impossible. Iranian legislators passed a [bill](#) mandating that the government continue enriching up to 20 percent in preparation for domestic fabrication of fuel for the TRR.¹⁰ It seemed like both sides were throwing

⁷ Joint declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil (Tehran Declaration)

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2010/iran-100517-irna07.htm>.

⁸ Security Council, SC/9948,

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9948.doc.htm>

⁹ See 'FACTBOX - EU, US and U.N. sanctions on Iran', *Reuters*, 28 June, 2010,

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LDE65R1DH.htm>

; Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act of 2010 can be found on

http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_reports&docid=f:hr512.11.1.pdf.

¹⁰ 'Iranian MPs pass bill for 20 percent uranium enrichment', *Agence France Presse*, July 18, 2010,

<http://www.zawya.com/Story.cfm/sidANA20100718T072722ZHQJ14/Iran%20MPs%20Pass%20Bill%20For%2020%25%20Uranium%20Enrichment>.

away their steering wheel in a game of Chicken, confident that the other side would not prevail.

Since then there are growing signs that states involved are planning to meet to pick up the negotiations, that look set to include Brazil and Turkey. This paper briefly outlines the motives of each of these three states in the context of Iran's engagement with Brazil and Turkey.

Iran: independence and status

Iran has the world's second largest [reserves](#) of gas and third largest reserves of oil¹¹ heavily influencing the battle for control over the country. It occupies an important strategic location, with rich energy routes connecting the Persian Gulf region to Central Asia and placing it at the center of global competition. The democratically elected government led by Prime Minister Mossadeqh was overthrown in 1953 in a coup inspired and financed by Britain and America, over the nationalization of oil. The two countries had only eight years earlier won the Second World War on the back of Iranian oil, demonstrating its critical strategic, as well as economic, importance. The Iranian revolution of 1979 was largely in response to the oppressive rule of the Shah backed by the United States and Britain. U.S. hostages were taken and held for 444 days, a prime source of U.S. hostility towards the new government partly because of the feelings of U.S. impotence in the incident. The revolution brought in a government based upon significant ideological and cultural challenge to the West,

manifested in a number of ways, not least Iran's support for Hezbollah and Hamas.¹²

The Iranian national psyche is heavily influenced by a bloody eight year 'imposed' war after the Iraqi attack in 1980 and the use by Iraq of chemical weapons against Iranian troops and civilians, with much of the international community supporting Saddam Hussein. At the end of the conflict a U.S. warship shot down an Iranian airliner in 1988. This experience underlines a desire for strategic independence, and opposition to Great Power interference in the region.

Globally, Iran, with its current state of technological development and military capability, cannot reasonably rely on nuclear deterrence against its adversaries in the international arena.¹³ Iran has invested much time, energy and capital instead in developing and expanding domestic conventional capabilities and establishing and empowering proxy groups. It does not want to see its regional power reduced by nuclear proliferation in the region. Instead, to augment Iranian influence in the region, it has been necessary for Iran to win the confidence of neighbors. All the more so, as Iranians perceive constant unilateral U.S. and Israeli threats of a pre-emptive strike as a reason to invest in its missile program, believing that their enemies will not miss a chance to exploit any vulnerability, and Iran's inability to acquire sophisticated aircraft.¹⁴

On the other hand, [regionalism](#) in Iranian foreign policy is a combination of three sets of interlinked

¹¹ Energy Information Administration, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Iran/pdf.pdf>.

¹² Khan, Saira (2010), *Iran and Nuclear Weapons: Protracted conflict and proliferation*, (London and New York: Routledge) p. 103-8.

¹³ Ibid., (2010).

¹⁴ Khan, p.142-143.

approaches, namely cultural-historical, developmental-geopolitical, and security-political.¹⁵ Iran's political-security and economic ambitions in the region and the world require more interaction with different regions of the world.¹⁶ On a platform of regionalism, Iran has found in Turkey and Brazil two partners upon which it can rely in its dealings with Western powers.

The development of an Iranian nuclear industry symbolizes some of the values and aims of the revolution: securing independence, equality and respect. It also helps drive the increasingly important scientific, socio-economic modernization, and energy diversification. Electricity consumption within Iran has increased more than [four-fold](#) since 1980 and will continue to grow.¹⁷ The country depends heavily upon foreign exchange revenues from finite oil and gas exports and cannot afford, in a global age of climate change and dwindling resources, to over-consume its oil and gas domestically.

Iran has found it easier to deal with Turkey and Brazil in relation to its nuclear program since both countries treat Iran as an equal and respected partner; something that Western powers seem incapable of as they perceive the state largely through a security lens. All three – Brazil, Turkey

¹⁵ Barzegar, Kayhan (2010), "Regionalism in Iran's Foreign Policy", http://sid.ir/fa/VEWSSID/J_pdf/40213880502.pdf p. 5-10.

¹⁶ Maleki, Abbas (2006), "Iran", *Silk Road Studies*, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/GCA/GCAPUB-06.pdf> p. 168-171.

¹⁷ World Development Indicators, http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators?cid=GPD_WDI; see also BASIC Paper 'Changing the Frame of the International Debate over Iran's Nuclear Program: Other solutions to Iran's Energy Security', March 9, 2008, <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Papers/08iran02.htm>.

and Iran - emphasize in their foreign policy statements multilateralism and the principles of justice and inclusivity, and a resistance to power politics.¹⁸

There should be no doubt that Iran seeks a leading role in the Muslim world and the Middle East. It is motivated by both ambitious influence and defensive considerations.¹⁹ It utilizes every opportunity to move towards its prime regional goal of reduced Western influence and presence. The prospect of closer ties with Turkey and Brazil almost certainly provides it with a platform and the necessary political capital to influence regional developments in accordance to its own needs and interests.

Brazil: international influence

Brazil's status as a rising global power is due mainly to its uninterrupted economic growth in the face of international financial meltdown, its vocal and at times proactive role in the evolution of major international institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), and its increasing presence and involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. Brazil seeks independence within the international community and to expand its roles and responsibilities in international politics.²⁰

¹⁸ For example, see Hamid Eslamizad, Director of Department for Disarmament and International Security in the Iranian Foreign Ministry, in Zarif, M, Javad (2002) 'Missile Proliferation and Missile Defence', <http://www.zarif.net/Articles/Missile-China.pdf>.

¹⁹ Chubin, Shahram (2006), *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, (Washington DC: Edwards Brothers, Inc), p. 113

²⁰ Lima, de, Maria Regina Soares and Monica Hirst, 'Brazil as an intermediate state and regional power: action, choice and responsibilities', *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 2006, p. 22; Azambuja de, Marcos C., 'A Brazilian Perspective on Nuclear Disarmament', in Blechman, Barry M. eds. *Brazil, Japan and Turkey*, September 2009, (Washington: The Henry L. Stimson Center), p. 8; Rublee (2010), p. 51.

Brazil's open nuclear research program began in 1951, but a parallel secret nuclear program was later set up in the 1970s, partly in response to U.S. attempts to constrain civil nuclear development. Today, while Brazil's program is now entirely civil in nature, it involves the indigenous development of sensitive dual-use enrichment technology, in the face of U.S. opposition—activity that enables Brazil to have some empathy with Iran.²¹ If Brazil were to have voted in favor of the fourth round of sanctions in June 2010 this might have opened it up to demands for a more rigid inspection of its own nuclear installations and enrichment facilities.²² As a high-ranking official recently [stated](#); 'when Brazil looks at Iran, it doesn't only see Iran, it sees Brazil too.'²³

Brazil only joined the NPT in 1997, skeptical about its discriminatory nature. Ratification required an understanding that 'effective measures will be taken with a view to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and the total elimination of nuclear weapons.'²⁴ Brazil therefore sees its involvement in the Iranian nuclear crisis as an opportunity to highlight the shortcomings of the generally partial international approach to the NPT

²¹ Rublee (2010), p. 51, Azambuja (2009), p. 7

²² Burges, S.W. (2009), *Brazilian Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, (Gainesville: University Press Florida), p. 135-148

²³ Spektor, Matias, "How to Read Brazil's Stance on Iran", *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 4, 2010, http://www.cfr.org/publication/21576/how_to_read_brazils_stance_on_iran.html.

²⁴

Pereira, Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations, First Session of the 2005 NPT PrepCom, New York, April 8, 2002, in Rublee (2010), p. 51.

regime, an opportunity to draw out the need to focus on nuclear disarmament.²⁵

Brazil has chosen to highlight principles of non-intervention and respect for national sovereignty in its national security doctrine. Since the 1990s, Brazilian diplomacy has also consistently sought to expand its reach and establish more favorable and constructive economic relationships with the wider world, further enhancing Brazil's national security and economic prosperity. As an example, Brazil has seen a 16% annual rise in [sugar](#) production, with a drop in price. Conversion of surplus sugar to ethanol, partially for export, offers an attractive alternative, and Iran is a key potential market, in particular if U.S. attempts to sanction Iranian gasoline imports succeed.²⁶

Brazil registered the seventh largest [uranium](#) reserve in the world²⁷ and the NPT was ratified with the explicit understanding that nuclear activities allowed under the treaty could be pursued. In addition, Brazil has an ambitious program to master the complete nuclear fuel cycle and plans to build several other nuclear power plants besides the two operating at the moment. Also, it seeks to develop nuclear-powered naval turbines.²⁸

²⁵ For instance; Conference on Disarmament, International Panel on Fissile Materials, Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime, see Rublee (2010), p. 51.

²⁶ Luft, G., 'Ahmadinejad's Sugar Daddy: How Brazilian ethanol could help Iran outwit American sanctions', *Foreign Policy*, June 3, 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/03/ahmadinejad_sugar_daddy.

²⁷ Industrias Nucleares do Brasil, Reserves – Brazil and World, www.inb.gov.br/inb_eng/WebForms/Interna2.aspx?secao_id=48.

²⁸ Rublee (2010), p. 53-55; Perkovich and Acton argue that Brazil's nuclear submarines further complicate the goal of global nuclear disarmament, in 'Managing the Nuclear

In this line, the Brazilian government has rejected the IAEA's 'Additional Protocol', asserting that more regulations would create unnecessary burdens for developing countries and seems unlikely to make any further concessions in the absence of meaningful concessions from the NWS.²⁹ This rejection of the Additional Protocol is a source of some comfort for Iran.

Finally, the end of the Cold War and the accompanying decline in ideological distinction between developed and developing countries encouraged Brazil to adopt a Western identity in a philosophical and humanistic sense while seeking to preserve its political independence.³⁰ As such, one of the 'cornerstones' of Brazil's foreign policy has been a focus on the developing world and 'South-South' trade relations, as it aims to assume a role as leader of the developing world.³¹ Brazil also seeks to pursue this role in the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) and insists on the need to adapt to the reality of the post Cold War world thereby justifying its goal of obtaining a permanent seat.³²

Turkey: a stronger regional role

Given Turkey's geostrategic location, along with its NATO membership and EU aspiration on the one hand and its historical ties to the Islamic world on the other, Turkey is well-equipped to play a key role in regional and global security affairs.

Historically, the Turkish state has acted in accordance to a "fundamental goal" and "policy

line" in its foreign policy making, aiming at the pragmatic "optimization of Turkey's zones of action" and a strong relationship with the United States.³³ These continue today, alongside the preservation and expansion of its European and Islamic identity, and policies based upon the principles of justice and fairness, and "[zero problems](#)" with neighbors.³⁴ Co-operation with Eurasian countries through energy and transportation corridors figure highly in foreign policy. Iran is prominent, not least because there are strong cultural and institutional ties between the two countries. Ironically, the Turkish government is challenging Tehran for regional leadership, but in so doing receives support from an Iran in need of influential allies.

A key issue for Turkey is the prospect of an independent Kurdistan. Some analysts and politicians are now claiming that it was a mistake to refrain from any sort of military involvement in the Iraq war, as this limited its influence over the post-war settlement that has given a great deal more autonomy to Kurds in the north of Iraq.³⁵ There is widespread recognition within Turkey that instability in Iran could strengthen the Kurdish secessionist movement. Turkey is also concerned with political instability of Turkic republics on its borders, terrorism, and Islamic fundamentalism. While Iran could be an important ally in dealing

³³ Goodman, Joshua (2009), p. 6-8.

³⁴ Davutoglu, Mehmet, 'Turkish Zero-Problems Foreign Policy', *Foreign Policy* magazine, May 20, 2010, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-h_e_ahmet-davutoglu-published-in-foreign-policy-magazine-usa-on-20-may-2010.en.mfa.

³⁵ Bal, I. 'Instability in the Middle East and the Relevant Role of the PKK' in Bal, I. (2004), *Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post Cold War Era*, (Florida: Brown Walker Press), p. 358.

Industry in a World without Nuclear Weapons,' *Adelphi series*, Volume 48, Issue 396, March 2008, p. 95.

²⁹ Azambuja (2009), p. 10, Rublee (2010), p. 53.

³⁰ Burges (2009), p. 69-74.

³¹ Goodman, Joshua, 'Brazil: The Global Power Looking for a Backyard', *SAIS Review*, Vol. 29, Number 2, Summer-Fall 2009, p. 4, 5.

³² Lima, de & Hirst (2006), p. 29.

with these issues, Turkey also fears overbearing Iranian and Russian influence in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus ; while its conflict with Greece has put it in an indirect confrontation with the European Union.³⁶

Turkish officials have expressed explicit concern over the prospect of a nuclear weapons program in Iran, but see the issue regionally and point to the need for a universal nuclear free zone throughout the Middle East, including Israel. It is attempting to achieve some balance in these approaches. The Turkish attempt to strike a deal with Iran is about balancing its approach to East and West and further develop ties with Iran, but also to prove its importance to its Western allies. Furthermore, it is through involvement in the Iranian nuclear drama that Turkey can secure a share in the market that would emerge once the Iranian crisis is over. Trade between Turkey and Iran has already increased significantly over the last decade, from \$1 billion in 2000 to \$10 billion in 2008, according to some studies.³⁷ And despite recent sanctions both countries recently signed an agreement over a \$1 billion pipeline.³⁸

³⁶ Bal, I. 'Turkey-USA relations and impacts of 2003 Iraq war' in Bal, I. (2004). *Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post Cold War Era*, (Florida: Brown Walker Press) p. 128-130.

³⁷ Raphaeli, Dr. Nimrod, 'Turkey Throws Iran a Safety Net', *The Middle East Media Research Institute*, August 3, 2010 (Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 629) <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4498.htm>.

³⁸ 'Iran, Turkey Sign EUR1 Billion Gas Pipeline, NASDAQ, August 9, 2010, <http://www.nasdaq.com/aspx/stock-market-news-story.aspx?storyid=201007230548dowjonesdjonline000364&title=iranturkey-sign-eur1-billion-gas-pipeline-deal>.

Conclusions

The international community needs to look beyond punishment, toward strengthening the non-proliferation regime, a Middle East WMD free zone, and engagement in a regional strategic dialogue where Iran is recognized as a regional power. The 2010 NPT Review Conference final document, in particular its call for a conference in 2012 to discuss issues around a regional WMD free zone, and the prospect of fuel-swap deals offer hope. To avoid military escalation, a political settlement will have to be found.

Even though the involvement of more actors in the negotiations could complicate communication, it should be acknowledged that different interlocutors could break the obvious logjam. Agreeing to their involvement could be an effective confidence-building gesture on the part of the P5+1. It could also assist in unifying opinion with Tehran, if proposals have the backing of the Brazilians and the Turks, an important consideration as previous proposals have been vetoed by domestic opposition from all sides of the political spectrum. Both Brazil and Turkey have a chance of carrying positive influence where the United States and Europe are now almost entirely negative. Brazil offers an important model for Turkey, as an independent state with close economic links to the United States and a sophisticated civil nuclear program. Turkey's cultural and ideological background, and close traditional ties with Tehran provide it with significant leverage. As a respected NATO ally, Turkey's recent efforts to strike a deal with Iran can be perceived as an attempt to prove its value to its Western allies, in particular the United States.

The involvement of Brazil and Turkey could help Iran to build confidence with the wider

International community and deliver the message that the NPT regime requires a focus on disarmament and universal membership as well as strengthened non-proliferation measures. It also has the potential to emphasize the importance of more holistic regional responses that crucially include Israel in commitments and responsibilities.

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