

Fresh sanctions for Iran

WHEN Turkey and Brazil announced a deal with Iran on its nuclear programme recently, the two countries thought they had made a diplomatic breakthrough. But just a day later Hillary Clinton, America's secretary of state, revealed that the permanent five members of the Security Council and Germany (the so-called "P5+1") had agreed on the text of a fresh sanctions resolution against Iran. Many thought that Mrs Clinton's announcement was a slap in the face to Turkey and Brazil. But on June 9th she was proved right when 12 of the 15 members of the Security Council agreed with America and the rest of the six, passing a new sanctions resolution against Iran. Only Turkey and Brazil voted against the sanctions. Lebanon abstained.

Western diplomats they feel that Brazil and Turkey were suckered into agreeing a deal that gave Iran exactly what it wanted: a declaration of its continuing right to enrich uranium, including up to the dangerously-high level of 20% (from which it is not too complicated to enrich up to the level required for a bomb). The Security Council has already demanded in previous resolutions that Iran stop; the Turks and Brazilians thus had no authority to strike a deal telling Iran there was no need to halt enrichment.

This further round of sanctions is unlikely to stop Iran if it is set on making a bomb. The sanctions add a list of heavy weapons that may not be sold to Iran, and forbid Iran to develop ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. They lengthen slightly a list of Iranian officials and institutions on which various travel and financial restrictions are imposed. Perhaps most prominently, the resolution calls on countries to board ships bound for Iran and inspect their cargo, to enforce the resolution (if the country flagging the ships agrees, which is a big if).

What the resolution does not do is take a bite out of Iran's main economic activity, the sale of its oil and gas. China made sure of that. As symbolic a blow as the vote is to Iran, these are not the "crippling" sanctions that the most fretful Iran-watchers have called for.

If these sticks are unlikely to do the trick, what of the carrots? The last annex of the resolution reiterates the P5+1's offer from 2008 to recognise Iran's right to peaceful nuclear power and to co-operate in areas from aviation to trade to security if Iran will suspend enrichment and enter a larger dialogue. The resolution now throws the focus back on Iran's response. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president, is likely to continue his public theatrics against the Western powers and Israel. But the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, holds a great deal of power in Iran. It remains to be seen whether the new sanctions, combined with some muted sweet-talk from the P5+1 can change his mind.

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