

# WHY TURKEY CANNOT ABSTAIN ON IRAN'S NUCLEAR VIOLATIONS

*The IAEA Board, despite Turkey's abstention, has reported its latest concerns to the Security Council. The time has come for the Security Council to take action in the form of increased sanctions. Turkey has troubled experience with international sanctions. Yet as a member of the Security Council, Turkey must assume its responsibilities. If Turkey wishes diplomacy to succeed, it must join in a unified effort to present Iran's leaders with a clear choice between serious negotiations and serious sanctions. Turkey cannot abstain when nuclear dangers mount within range of a Shahab 3 missile.*

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Last September, flanked by President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Brown, President Obama revealed to the world that Iran was building a second underground facility for uranium enrichment. The President warned that Iran's decision to build yet another nuclear facility without notifying the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was a direct challenge to the world's nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Iran is good at citing its rights under the Non-proliferation Treaty. The latest revelation shows Iran is just as good at violating obligations. Covert construction of this facility violated Iran's obligation under its Safeguards Agreement to inform the IAEA in advance. It also violated multiple resolutions by the UN Security Council requiring Iran to suspend all activities related to enrichment. Iran claims it needs to enrich uranium to produce fuel for nuclear power. This claim makes no sense: Iran has *no* nuclear power plants except one being built with assistance and fuel from Russia.

Shocked into action by Iran's latest infraction, the IAEA Board adopted a resolution in November condemning the continued violations and calling for Tehran to cooperate fully with the IAEA. The resolution also called for Iran to confirm that it was building no more secret nuclear facilities – a confirmation that Iran subsequently refused to provide.

The IAEA resolution was significant in two respects. First, it was the first resolution since the Board reported Iran to the Security Council in 2006. Second, it provides a strong basis for the Security Council's ongoing deliberation on further sanctions.

25 of the 35 Board members supported the resolution. The United States voted yes. The EU3 –France, Germany, and the United Kingdom– voted yes, as did Denmark, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine. Russia, China, and India voted yes. Argentina, Peru, and Uruguay voted yes. Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea voted yes. Burkino Faso, Cameron, and Kenya voted yes. Turkey abstained.

### ***Turkey Abstained?***

Turkish diplomats blamed the abstention on timing. The vote, they explained, came in the midst of Ankara's efforts to mediate a nuclear agreement with Tehran.

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But, purposely or not, Turkey's abstention had deeper significance. It removed diplomatic pressure from Tehran. It rewarded Iran's efforts to divide the international community. It gave Iran's leaders added comfort as they continued their illicit nuclear pursuits.

This was presumably not the intention of Turkey's government. But it was the effect. Abstention cannot remain Ankara's policy if Turkey and the world are to avoid the dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran.

### *The Dangers of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*

Iran is reaching the threshold where it can build nuclear weapons. It has mastered the basic technology to enrich uranium, despite the absence of any obvious civil requirement. Iran's recent decision to up enrichment from five percent to 20 percent is yet another step toward weapons-grade material.

The enrichment facility recently revealed by President Obama is cause for serious concern. Being built into a mountain on a base of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the facility is considerably out of character for a peaceful activity. Moreover, the facility is much too small to produce fuel on the scale necessary for civil nuclear reactors. However, it is sized quite adequately to produce weapons-grade uranium for a small stockpile of nuclear weapons.

Iran's illicit pursuit of enrichment capabilities is particularly worrisome when coupled with international concern about Iranian work on "weaponization". UN investigators have reported troubling indications that Iran has undertaken detailed studies and engineering work on assembling a nuclear warhead for Iran's Shahab 3 missile – an existing system that can reach Turkish soil.

The latest IAEA report states that "extensive" information from multiple sources "raises concerns about the possible existence in Iran of past or current undisclosed activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile." An earlier internal IAEA assessment concluded that Iran has sufficient information to be able to design and produce a workable nuclear device.

Turkey, the United States, and our allies have supported diplomatic efforts to stop Iran's pursuit of bomb-making capabilities. Yet offer after offer has been refused by Tehran. Multilateral diplomacy backed by sanctions has not succeeded

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in dissuading an autocratic regime from nuclear pursuits that it apparently sees as essential to prestige, power, and influence. Recent domestic unrest in Iran gives its leaders added interest in distracting the international community with its nuclear pursuits.

Turkey and its allies in Europe and NATO increasingly face the dangerous prospect of a new and direct security threat: Iran, under the grip of a hostile and authoritarian leadership, armed with and emboldened by nuclear weapons.

Once armed with nuclear weapons, Iran's leaders may not be so suicidal as to detonate them on NATO territory. However Iran's leaders may engage in nuclear brinkmanship to try to intimidate neighbors, deter outside intervention, or awe their own public. They may feel emboldened to use surrogates, asymmetric attack, or conventional force to seize territory, extend influence, or assault neighbors. And whether Tehran intends it or not, groups like Hezbollah may see Iran's atomic arsenal as a "nuclear umbrella" for more aggressive action against Israel and others. The Middle East's strategic balance would be tipped and disrupted in a dangerous way.

Mishandled brinkmanship or nuclear-emboldened aggression may escalate, deliberately or not, to nuclear use. Others in the region may decide to shed their nonproliferation treaty commitments and acquire their own nuclear arsenals. A nuclear arms race is not inevitable, nor would it necessarily be fast. But it would magnify the risk of accident, miscalculation, or nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. The Middle East is not a safe place for a nuclear arms race.

The United States and Turkey both support the vision of a Middle East free of nuclear weapons. But obtaining that vision is unrealistic as long as Tehran is aggressively pursuing bomb-making capabilities in violation of its international commitments.

### ***Last Chance for a Diplomatic Solution***

Diplomacy may not succeed. Sanctions have been too late and too weak. Inducements have not been compelling. Most importantly, the determination of Iran's leaders has been unyielding. This means that NATO, with Turkey, must guard against the dangers of a nuclear-armed Iran.

We must reinforce our collective ability to protect allied territory, population, and regional interests. We must invest in missile defenses and consider the role of NATO's own nuclear forces. We must strengthen security relationships with Arab partners, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states.

But before shifting entirely to a defensive posture –or risking a regional confrontation prompted by a military strike– diplomacy deserves another chance.

Mediation can play a role. Certainly, Turkey has better insights into Iran and contacts with its leaders than do the United States and many other countries seeking a diplomatic solution. At one point last fall, it appeared that Turkey's mediation could bring Tehran to accept an IAEA proposal to ship much of Iran's illicitly-produced low-enriched uranium out of the country in exchange for fuel for a research reactor. This prospective deal gave hope for a diplomatic breakthrough that would build confidence and buy time for further diplomacy. But the deal died – either a victim of Iranian domestic politics or another Iranian ploy to avoid Security Council action.

Iranian authorities recognize the value of mediation – not to secure a diplomatic solution but to divide the international community. Iran has regularly convinced countries and politicians –from Switzerland to former IAEA chief El Baradei– that they could serve as important mediators. Being a mediator is a comfortable position. It gives an excuse to avoid confrontation and tough positions. Prospects for success bring special attention. Failure can be blamed on the parties or external meddling.

Iran's interest in encouraging mediation is to chip away at the coalition of international concern about its illicit nuclear pursuits. It often encourages mediation by countries that have significant trade ties with Iran or that can influence key international decisions. Turkey, now on both the IAEA Board and UN Security Council, meets both criteria.

Mediation is not sufficient for diplomacy to succeed. Success, at this juncture, requires that the offer of negotiations be reinforced by significant international pressure. Pressure or its prospect move Iran's leaders in ways that mediation has not.

The goal of international pressure is not to back Iran's leaders into a corner, but to convince them to walk through a door toward serious negotiations. In these negotiations, Iran's leaders must take more than token steps but agree instead to significant, verifiable measures that demonstrate they have given up any weapon ambitions. Even if today's leaders refuse to rollback their illicit nuclear pursuit, we must create conditions to convince future leaders who respect Iran's international obligations and seek a different relationship with the rest of the world.

The IAEA Board, despite Turkey's abstention, has reported its latest concerns to the Security Council. The time has come for the Security Council to take action in the form of increased sanctions. Turkey has troubled experience with international sanctions. Yet as a member of the Security Council, Turkey must assume its responsibilities. If Turkey wishes diplomacy to succeed, it must join in a unified effort to present Iran's leaders with a clear choice between serious negotiations and serious sanctions.

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