

Nuclear Fuel Swap Deal: US Sabotages ‘Unique Opportunity’ for Peaceful Resolution with Iran

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In his inaugural speech in January 2009, US president Barack Obama promised a new beginning in foreign policy towards Iran, saying “we will extend a hand if you are willing to un-clench your fist”. He didn’t actually mention Iran by name then, but everyone knew he was saying that the Bush administration’s confrontational approach to the Islamic Republic was being replaced by a more reasonable policy based on mutual dialogue.

Well, we better return to examine everything else promised in that address – about “decent jobs and affordable healthcare” and “America being a friend to each nation and to every man, woman and child” – because the 44th president is now shown to be a liar.

This week, Obama’s fine words were put to the test when, on 17 May, Iran announced a joint declaration with Turkey and Brazil on a nuclear fuel swap deal that, in the words of Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, provides a unique opportunity to resolve the long-running dispute between the US and its western allies and Iran over the latter’s nuclear programme.

“There is a unique chance before us and I believe that we should take this chance,” said Erdogan following the signed accord, which was also brokered in Tehran by Brazilian president Lula da Silva.

“I urge the international community to support this final declaration, which is going to have a very positive impact on the establishment of world peace in the future,” added Erdogan.

But less than 24 hours after the nuclear fuel swap plan – which was hailed as a positive development by diverse opinion, including UN chief Ban Ki-moon, China’s foreign minister Yang Jiechi and even French president Nicolas Sarkozy – the Obama administration moved swiftly to sabotage the deal.

US secretary of state Hillary Clinton announced on 18 May that a draft document for a fourth round of sanctions drawn up by the US had been agreed by all five permanent members of the UN security council (after weeks of arm-twisting on China, it has to be said [1] [2]). The proposed sanctions will have “more teeth” than the previous three rounds, and are aimed at hitting Iran’s international finances and trade.

So much for Obama’s promise of extending a hand to what is clearly a significant bid by Iran to build confidence and trust. More like extending a punch in the face.

The unprecedented agreement between Brazil, Turkey and Iran would see the Tehran

government sending over half of its stock of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey – some 1,200 kg – which would serve as a guarantee for Iran receiving a precise supply of enriched uranium from France or Russia within a specified time. The latter supply would be enriched to a level of 20 per cent which can then be used in radioisotope cancer treatments. It is far below the enrichment level – 80-90 per cent – that would be required for weapons manufacture (which Iran has consistently said is not the purpose of its nuclear programme). The uranium swap transaction would be overseen by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

A similar arrangement was first proposed last October in negotiations in Vienna between Iran and the so-called P5 + 1 group – the five permanent members of the UN security council plus Germany. That proposal failed because Iran was not sufficiently assured that France or Russia would deliver on its commitment to supply the enriched uranium. The Iranians were entitled to be distrustful then about handing over their hard-earned and rightful possession of LEU to world powers that have a long history of treachery and duplicity towards Tehran – from the US/British engineered coup d'état in 1953, to, according to author and historian Dilip Hiro, the French theft of \$1 billion dollars from Iran when a nuclear deal fell through in 1979 following the overthrow of the pro-West Shah, to the ongoing delay by Moscow in honouring a contract to deliver surface-to-air missiles – not to mention Russia's mercurial stance over UN sanctions. Indeed, Russia's zig-zagging over backing sanctions against Iran is probably more motivated by its self-serving agenda to stymie Tehran as a major energy rival, than by any perceived nuclear threat. [3]

Nevertheless, the latest nuclear fuel swap accord potentially bridges this crucial trust gap – with both Brazil and Turkey acting as honest brokers. A measure of the deal's potential for a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Washington and Tehran – which has at times seen the US and its allies threaten Iran with military attack, even a nuclear strike – can be ascertained by the alacrity with which the Obama administration moved to smash the new diplomatic bridge.

'Iran deal sets back US goal of sanctions,' reported the Financial Times (17 May). Sure enough, the next day, declaring the renewed push for sanctions on Iran, Hillary Clinton had this to say: "I think this announcement [for sanctions] is as convincing an answer to the efforts undertaken in Tehran over the last few days as any we could provide."

Clinton's evident glee from pushing for tougher sanctions in place of a workable dialogue reveals that the US is hell-bent on confrontation with Iran. And the western mainstream media dutifully fell in line, with Iran's breakthrough nuclear swap deal buried by other news only two days after its signing.

This US stonewalling of any avenue for dialogue with Iran has disturbing echoes of Washington's deliberate sabotaging of diplomatic overtures for a peaceful resolution prior to its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. It also exposes Obama's vow of a new beginning in US foreign policy to be cynical lie, trotted out in front of his nation and the world with hand on heart.

One thing, however, that Obama said in his inaugural address may turn out to be true: "To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict... know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history." For first among such deceitful leaders is one Barack Obama.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18297>

[2] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18503>

[3] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18176>

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website Globalresearch.ca. He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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