

The fruits of weakness

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By Charles Krauthammer

WASHINGTON, D.C.—It is perfectly obvious that Iran's latest uranium maneuver, brokered by Brazil and Turkey, is a ruse. Iran retains more than enough enriched uranium to make a bomb. And it continues enriching at an accelerated pace and to a greater purity (20 percent). Which is why the French foreign ministry immediately declared that the trumpeted temporary shipping of some Iranian uranium to Turkey will do nothing to halt Iran's nuclear program.

It will, however, make meaningful sanctions more difficult. America's proposed Security Council resolution is already laughably weak—no blacklisting of Iran's central bank, no sanctions against Iran's oil and gas industry, no nonconsensual inspections on the high seas. Yet Turkey and Brazil—both current members of the Security Council—are so opposed to sanctions that they will not even discuss the resolution. And China will now have a new excuse to weaken it further.

But the deeper meaning of the uranium-export stunt is the brazenness with which Brazil and Turkey gave cover to the mullahs' nuclear ambitions and deliberately undermined U.S. efforts to curb Iran's program.

The real news is that already notorious photo: the president of Brazil, our largest ally in Latin America, and the prime minister of Turkey, for more than half a century the Muslim anchor of NATO, raising hands together with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the most virulently anti-American leader in the world.

That picture—a defiant, triumphant take-that-Uncle-Sam—is a crushing verdict on the Obama foreign policy. It demonstrates how rising powers, traditional American allies, having watched this administration in action, have decided that there's no cost in lining up with America's enemies and no profit in lining up with a U.S. president given to apologies and appeasement.

They've watched President Barack Obama's humiliating attempts to appease Iran, as every rejected overture is met with abjectly renewed U.S. negotiating offers. American acquiescence reached such a point that the president was late, hesitant and flaccid in expressing even rhetorical support for democracy demonstrators who were being brutally suppressed and whose

call for regime change offered the potential for the most significant U.S. strategic advance in the region in 30 years.

They've watched America acquiesce to Russia's re-exerting sway over Eastern Europe, over Ukraine (pressured by Russia last month into extending for 25 years its lease of the Black Sea naval base at Sevastopol) and over Georgia (Russia's de facto annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is no longer an issue under the Obama "reset" policy).

They've watched our appeasement of Syria, Iran's agent in the Arab Levant—sending our ambassador back to Syria even as it tightens its grip on Lebanon, supplies Hezbollah with Scuds, and intensifies its role as the pivot of the Iran-Hezbollah-Hamas alliance. The price for this ostentatious flouting of the United States and its interests? Ever more eager U.S. "engagement."

They've observed the administration's gratuitous slap at Britain over the Falklands, its contemptuous treatment of Israel, its undercutting of the Czech Republic and Poland, and its indifference to Lebanon and Georgia. And, in Latin America, they see not just U.S. passivity as Venezuela's Hugo Chavez organizes his anti-American "Bolivarian" coalition while deepening military and commercial ties with Iran and Russia. They saw active U.S. support in Honduras for a pro-Chavez would-be dictator seeking unconstitutional powers in defiance of the democratic institutions of that country.

This is not just an America in decline. This is an America in retreat—accepting, ratifying and declaring its decline, and inviting rising powers to fill the vacuum.

Nor is this retreat by inadvertence. This is retreat by design and, indeed, on principle. It's the perfect fulfillment of Mr. Obama's adopted Third World narrative of American misdeeds, disrespect and domination from which he has come to redeem us and the world. Hence his foundational declaration at the U.N. General Assembly last September that "no one nation can or should try to dominate another nation" (guess who's been the dominant nation for the last two decades?) and his dismissal of any "world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another." (NATO? The West?)

Given Mr. Obama's policies and principles, Turkey and Brazil are acting rationally. Why not give cover to Mr. Ahmadinejad and his nuclear ambitions? As the United States retreats in the face of Iran, China, Russia and Venezuela, why not hedge your bets? There's nothing to fear from Mr. Obama, and everything to gain by ingratiating yourself with America's rising adversaries. After all, they actually believe in helping one's friends and punishing one's enemies.