

The Risk Professional: Turkey's international aspirations

What has happened to Turkey? After decades - perhaps even a century - of being irrelevant on the international stage, it has suddenly leapt into a position of being far more than a floating voter. It is now taking an active part in international affairs, particularly in the Middle East.

Turkey's lead in relation to the flotilla of boats taking aid to Gaza, knowing that Israel would take some form of hostile action, was just one of the signs that it is determined to change its role in the world.

Another was its vote last night against further sanctions against Iran. Even Russia and China, normally Iran's staunchest supporters, voted in favour of the sanctions: they did not even abstain. The only other NO vote was from Brazil. Lebanon abstained.

But to get that support, the USA and the UK, in particular, had to agree to water down their demands. China said the new sanctions would not harm the ordinary people of Iran; the Brazilians said sanctions would inevitably have a negative impact on those same people.

Last month, Brazil and Turkey began independent efforts with Iran, a move that the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said "could be a positive step." But the USA, in particular, pressed for ever more stringent measures - in line with US President Obama's statement about 18 months ago to push for further isolation of Iran.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad used his usual over-active rhetoric, which often seems to be deliberately taunting and teasing, tongue-in-cheek humour, to describe the sanctions as "a used handkerchief, fit only for the dustbin." But his claims that they will not hurt Iranians is probably wide of the mark for, regardless of the public statements made in support of sanctions, the real reason for them is to change attitudes in target countries so that internal pressure builds on politicians. In truth, the fundamental object of sanctions is to create internal dissent and political instability. That's why they do not work in North Korea and Myanmar: dissent is rapidly quashed.

The UN said "The latest text – resolution 1929 – builds on previous sanctions by deciding that Iran shall not acquire an interest in any commercial activity in another State involving uranium

mining, production or use of nuclear materials and technology.

"The Council also decided that all States shall prevent the supply, sale or transfer to Iran of battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles or missile systems. It also asks States to take all necessary measures to prevent the transfer to Iran of technology or technical assistance related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

"In addition, the resolution contains provisions to help block Iran's use of the international financial system, particularly its banks when they may be used to fund proliferation and nuclear activities.

"Among other elements, the resolution also alerts States to the potential link between Iran's energy sector revenues and energy-related technologies and proliferation, and establishes a UN panel of experts to help monitor and enforce sanctions implementation."