

## Masters of Deception

For years, Iran has pursued a policy of feigning negotiations with the international community to buy time while refusing to halt work on its nuclear program—as demanded by two binding U.N. Security Council resolutions.

A few months ago, Iran’s top nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, resigned. His inexperienced replacement was Said Jalili, a hard-line, close ally of Iran’s president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Larijani himself was no moderate. He was a master of deception, well-liked by Iran’s top leaders. Following the resignation, 183 Iranian lawmakers passed a measure praising his performance. During his term, Iran expanded its uranium enrichment program dramatically as it carried out a textbook campaign of deception.

One of Larijani’s “accomplishments” was Iran’s signing of a seriously flawed agreement with International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei that set a timeline for Iran to answer a series of unanswered questions about its nuclear program. The agreement called for Iran to answer these questions sequentially, rather than simultaneously, even though the regime is already long overdue on its obligation to address all these concerns.

Ahmadinejad declared that “the nuclear issue of Iran is now closed,” adding that sanctions would not stop Tehran’s nuclear progress. As the “negotiator” torch passed to his openly hard-line friend Jalili, Iran may have a more difficult time maintaining the pretense that it is interested in negotiating.

Ali Larijani’s replacement by an even harder-line ally of Ahmadinejad should serve as a wakeup call to those who have been unwilling to acknowledge the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.

While diplomacy has thus far failed to deter Iran from its nuclear ambitions, a concerted international effort to target Iran’s vulnerable economy is now more important than ever.

President Bush recently stated that he would “continue to work with Russia, as well as other nations, to keep a focused effort on sending Iran a message that ‘you will remain isolated if you continue your nuclear weapons ambitions.’”

As the Iranian nuclear program continues to progress, a tough campaign by a united international community is required to bring about Iranian compliance. By depriving the regime of the money and technology it needs to further its nuclear programs (and export terrorism), the international community may still be able to wield significant leverage over Iran’s decision-makers.