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המרכז הבינתחומי הרצליה מרכז בינתחומי הרצליה מכלל - 84260						



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Playing for time?

The agreement that was cooked up by the leaders of Iran, Turkey and Brazil, under which Iran agreed to ship 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for nuclear fuel for a research reactor in Iran pulls the rug out from under U.S. efforts to create broad international support for sanctions against Tehran.

The Americans will find it difficult to preserve China's and India's commitment to even the lightest of sanctions. These giants, which stand to lose a lot from reducing their trade with Iran, they might take advantage of the new situation to get off the sanctions wagon.

The new agreement is a variation of the formula discussed with world powers in October, which the Iranians backed away from in a fog of conflicting declarations. The international community's ability to monitor Iran's moves is unclear. In the long term, the agreement could bring Iran to at least being a nuclear threshold state, leaving it at a good jumping-off point toward nuclear capability without having to pay the whole price of actually attaining that capability.

Under certain circumstances, this could mark the line of withdrawal for the Obama administration.

The fact that the West expressed doubts about the agreement does not mean it will manage to block it.

Israel was in any case pessimistic about sanctions. A senior security official told Haaretz recently that, "Efforts to create a broad front dilute the content of the sanctions, rendering them ineffective, but after what happened in connection to going to war with Iraq in 2003, this is a hurdle the Americans must cross."

Defense Minister Ehud Barak said yesterday that Israel must allow the United States to continue to take the lead regarding Iran, assisting when possible such as in moving forward with the peace process with the Palestinians.

But the deputy chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces said yesterday that "Iran is connected to everything negative in the region." Maj. Gen. Benny Gantz was speaking at a conference at Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies.

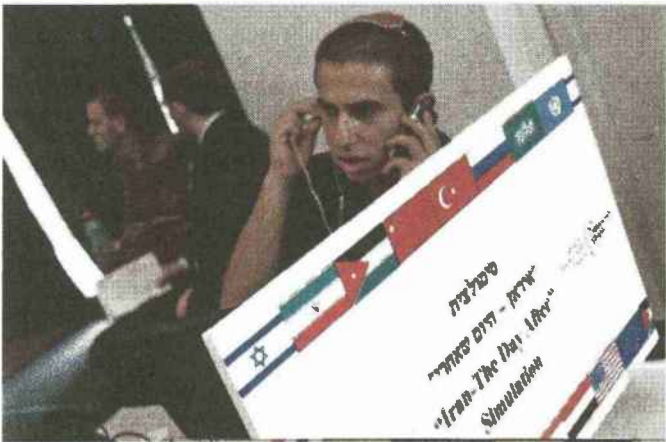
The institute's deputy director, Dr. Ephraim Kam, said that voices in the West are increasingly saying it will be impossible to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capability and that eventually even the United States will have to talk about living with the bomb.

On Sunday the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya hosted a simulation game, "Iran, the Day After." There were no official representatives of the government, but opposition leader MK Tzipi Livni addressed the gathering.

Other experts expressed caution about the significance of yesterday's agreement. Prof. David Menashri of Tel Aviv University said the timetable was fuzzy, adding, "If the transfer is done [too slowly] it will mean the Iranians are again playing for time."

Meir Javedanfar, director of the Middle East Economic and Political Analysis Company, said: "Last October they had 1,763 kilograms of enriched uranium. In February they already had 2,063 kilograms.

Even if they send 1,200 kilograms abroad a significant amount will remain in Iran." If the uranium transfer is gradual it will not significantly affect Iranian policy, he said. "They can torpedo sanctions while continuing to enrich uranium."



Reuters

A participant in an Iran war game at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, which concluded that a nuclear-armed Iran would blunt Israel's military autonomy, though some predicted Tehran would also exercise restraint.