

MIDDLE EAST SPEECH

# Obama presses for reform

BBC ONLINE

US President Barack Obama yesterday said a "new chapter in American diplomacy" has been turned after the Arab Spring uprisings.

In a speech at the State Department, Obama said the future of the US was bound to the Middle East by forces of economics, security, history and fate.

"It will be the policy of the US to promote reform, and to support transitions to democracy," he said.

Analysts say the speech is Obama's first comprehensive response to revolts sweeping the Arab world.

Obama said the top US priority across North Africa and the Middle East was to promote reform, and oppose the use of violence and oppression.

"We face a historic opportunity. We have a chance to show that America values the dignity of a street vendor in Tunisia more than the raw power of the dicta-

tor," he said.

"As Americans have been seared by hostage taking, violent rhetoric, and terrorist attacks that have killed thousands of our citizens - a failure to change our approach [in the Middle East] threatens a deepening spiral of division between the United States and Muslim communities," Obama added.

On the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Obama said it was "up to the Israelis and Palestinians to take action".

"No peace can be imposed upon them, nor can endless delay make the problem go away," Obama said.

"But what America and the international community can do is state frankly what everyone knows: a lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples."

President Obama delivered the long-awaited speech at the state department in Washington, which he described as "a fitting venue to mark a new chapter in

## KEY POINTS IN OBAMA'S SPEECH

- ◆ In months ahead the US must use all its resources to encourage reform in North Africa and the Middle East
- ◆ Will cut \$1b of debt for a democratic Egypt and work to create Enterprise Funds to invest in Tunisia and Egypt
- ◆ Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must lead a political transition or get out of the way
- ◆ US will continue to insist the Iranian people deserve their universal rights, and a government that does not smother their aspirations
- ◆ Mass arrests and brute force in Bahrain are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain's citizens
- ◆ The borders of Israel and a Palestinian state should be based on pre-1967 borders with agreed swaps

American diplomacy".

The BBC's Kim Ghattas, in Washington, says that following the death of al-Qaeda chief Osama Bin Laden, President



Obama wants a new start with the Muslim world, although polls show opinions of the US are low.

Obama said that Bin Laden, who was killed by special forces

this month, was a mass murderer, not a martyr, whose ideas were being rejected even before he was killed.

"Bin Laden and his murderous vision won some adherents. But even before his death, al-Qaeda was losing its struggle for relevance, as the overwhelming majority of people saw that the slaughter of innocents did not answer their cries for a better life," Obama said.

"By the time we found Bin Laden, al-Qaeda's agenda had come to be seen by the vast majority of the region as a dead end, and the people of the Middle East and North Africa had taken their future into their own hands."

### UNPRECEDENTED CHANGE

Analysts say Obama's speech is an attempt to convince his US audience that the fate of countries in the Middle East and North Africa is worth the money and effort even during difficult economic times at home.

To his wider audience, Obama

wants to underline that Washington stands behind those seeking greater human rights.

Obama's address comes during a time when the Middle East is undergoing unprecedented change.

The push for democracy began with the overthrowing of Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in January. Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak was later toppled in Egypt, with demonstrators in Libya currently working to overthrow dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Similar uprisings are also taking hold in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria.

On Wednesday, the White House imposed sanctions on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

It was the first time Washington had personally penalised the Syrian leader over the actions of his security forces. More than 850 people have died since the uprising began in March.

Obama is set to meet visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Friday.

IMF will choose new leader on merit: WB

AFP, Washington

World Bank head Robert Zoellick said yesterday he was certain that the IMF would choose a new leader based on merit rather than politics after the resignation of managing director Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

Asked whether the process to replace Strauss-Kahn, who was arrested in New York for sexual assault, would be based on individual qualifications, Zoellick replied "I'm sure it will."

"There's a process that the (IMF member) countries will use ... and you can see it's starting to take form now," he said.

"I'm sure they'll pick a fine person."

Strauss-Kahn's resignation announced at midnight Wednesday, four days after he was arrested for sexually assaulting a hotel chambermaid in New York.

Blast kills 29 in Iraq

BBC ONLINE

Three bombs targeting security forces in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk have left at least 29 people dead and injured dozens more, officials say.

Two of the bombs exploded in quick succession near a police station.

Many of the casualties were police officers who rushed outside after the first bomb went off.

One official blamed al-Qaeda for the attack. Kirkuk, about 180 miles north of Baghdad, has seen violence linked to ethnic divisions in the past.

Yesterday morning's attacks were the most deadly the city has seen for some months.

The third blast nearby was reported to have targeted the convoy of a senior police official, injuring him and a number of officers.

The bombs badly damaged buildings, and charred cars could be seen flipped on to their roofs.

Overall, at least 70 people were wounded, officials said.

## Yemen power transition deal collapses

### Opposition blames President Saleh

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's opposition blamed President Ali Abdullah Saleh yesterday for the failure of a Gulf plan aimed at ending a bloody political dispute, saying he would do "everything" to remain in power.

Saleh "foiled the initiative by refusing to sign it" Wednesday, head of the opposition Common Forum Yassin Saeed Noman, told AFP.

Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Abdullatif al-Zayani, flew out of Sanaa Wednesday after sources close to the negotiations between the regime and opposition said the two sides again failed to ink the power transfer accord.

Saleh, in power since 1978, "has refused the peaceful choice and is ready to do everything to remain in power," said Noman.

"With this, the regime will have to face the people who will continue with their peaceful revolt and will continue to escalate, even if the regime uses violence against them," he said.

Conditions Saleh has set that he says will enable him to sign in his capacity as president, cannot be met, said another member of the Common Forum who requested anonymity.

According to the Gulf-brokered proposal, Saleh would quit office within 30 days, in return for immunity from prosecution,

before a government of national unity is formed and elections for a new president held after two months.

Washington issued a fresh plea Wednesday for the deal to be inked.

US President Barack Obama's aide John Brennan called Saleh to urge him to sign and implement the agreement "so that Yemen is able to move forward immediately with its political transition," a White House statement said.

However, Saleh has called onto his loyalists to stage a rally in his support Friday, as every week, in a move described by his opponents as a sign that the veteran ruler is still clinging to power.

South Yemen was independent from the 1967 British withdrawal from Aden until the region united with the north in 1990. The south seceded in 1994, sparking a short-lived civil war that ended with it being overrun by northern troops.

As the protests, which began in January raged, rifts surfaced within Yemen's army. Pro-opposition troops led by dissident General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar control the capital's northern and western regions, while troops loyal to Saleh control the rest of Sanaa.

Anti-regime protesters staged a massive rally in Taiz, Yemen's second-largest city yesterday, carrying banners accusing Saleh and his ruling party of "manoeuvring."

## Syria blasts US sanctions

AFP, Damascus

Syria yesterday denounced US sanctions imposed on President Bashar al-Assad and top aides, saying they were part of long-time efforts by Washington to impose its will in the region to Israel's benefit.

"The US measures are part of a series of sanctions imposed by successive US administrations against the Syrian people as part of a regional scheme, aimed primarily at serving Israel's interests," the official SANA news agency said.

It said "any aggression against Syria is akin to US support for Israeli aggressions against Syria and the Arabs," in reference to the country's neighbour, with which it is still technically at war.

Sanctions "have not and will not" affect decisions taken by the Syrian government or its struggle against US hegemony, it added.

In slapping the sanctions on Wednesday, the United States told Assad to lead a transition toward democracy or step down.

## 'Gaddafi rule will collapse': Nato

UN resolution on Libya 'violated': AU

REUTERS, Tripoli

The head of the Nato military alliance said yesterday that military and political pressure were weakening Muammar Gaddafi's hold on power in Libya and would eventually topple him.

Nato Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen delivered his message as Libya's government denied persistent rumours that Gaddafi's wife, daughter and top oil official had left the country.

Libyan officials have produced no evidence of the whereabouts of the three, raising questions about Gaddafi's ability to hold together his entourage in the face of a widespread rebellion and Nato bombing.

"We have significantly degraded Gaddafi's war machine. And now we see results, the opposition has gained ground," Rasmussen told a news conference in the Slovak capital, Bratislava.

Meanwhile, African Union president Jean Ping has said that the United Nations resolution authorising the use of force to protect civilians in war-torn Libya has been "violated."

The Libya UN Resolution 1973 that the Security Council passed in March has "virtually already been violated in spirit and in letter," AU President Jean Ping said in comments earlier this week that were transmitted on public television yesterday.

Earlier, a Tunisian security source and a Libyan opposition source with links to the ruling circle said Gaddafi's wife Safia and daughter Aisha were staying on the Tunisian island of Djerba, near the border with Libya.

Libyan regime denied the allegation.

Former Irish PM Fitzgerald dies at 85

REUTERS, Dublin

Garret Fitzgerald, Ireland's most popular elder statesman who twice served as prime minister and played a crucial role in paving the way for peace in Northern Ireland, has died at the age of 85, his family said yesterday.

Known universally as Garret and much loved for his dotty professor persona, the erudite economist played an important role in shaping modern Ireland.

His death, after a short illness, prompted tributes from around the world, including Britain's Queen Elizabeth and Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission.

## Who could be the next IMF chief?

Dominique Strauss-Kahn



Israel's central bank governor (Israel/United States)

Stanley Fischer



Former economy minister (Turkey)

Kemal Dervis



Former German finance minister (Germany)

## East-West ভার্সিটির



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