

Obama ties his legacy to Iran

AFP, Washington

A tentative Iran nuclear deal offers President Barack Obama the prospect of a legacy-gilding victory as he confronts a panoply of foreign policy crises in the sunset of his presidency.

It may be just a framework, but with two years left in office Obama has teed-up an agreement with a decades-old adversary that could vindicate his doctrine of negotiating with US enemies.

Obama's Republican critics were quick to denounce the deal as a sell-out, but the president gave a tough defense of its provisions, insisting he had not let Tehran off the hook.

"If Iran violates the deal, sanctions can be snapped back in place," he promised.

Since his 2008 run for the White House, Obama has often repeated John F Kennedy's dictum "let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate."

Back then, the young senator invited charges of naivety by saying he would meet US foes without precondition.

The foes don't come much bigger than Iran. Relations have been downright hostile since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and ensuing US embassy hostage crisis.

They have also proved a minefield for successive US presidents. The 444-day hostage crisis torpedoed Jimmy Carter's re-election bid and the Iran-Contra affair ensnared Ronald Reagan.

In the last decade Iranian support for Iraqi Shia militias helped transform George W Bush's war into a bloody sectarian quagmire.

Today, Tehran is propping up Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, fuelling a civil war that repeatedly breached Obama's self-declared "red lines", making the president look in turn impotent and vacillating.

And a Shia militia, apparently partly armed with Iranian weapons, overthrew the government in Sanaa.

Even Obama would admit Thursday's agreement is not perfect, or final.

REPUBLICANS FUME OVER IRAN DEAL

The agreement's limitations open the door wide for attacks from Obama's political foes.

Republican House Speaker John Boehner slammed it as an "alarming departure" from the White House's initial goals, suggesting the Obama administration caved to Iranian negotiators and allowed certain concessions.

Senator Mark Kirk, among the most hawkish Republicans on Iran and co-author of legislation that tightens sanctions, minced no words in reacting to the agreement.

"Neville Chamberlain got a better deal from Adolf Hitler," Kirk sneered, referring to the 1930s British prime minister and his disastrous policy of Nazi appeasement.

If Tehran does cheat, and Obama's deal falls apart he could be just the latest US president to get caught on the horns of his own Iran policy.

If the deal is respected, Obama may have succeeded in dragging the Middle East away from another bloody conflict, put in place a stepping stone to improving relations with Iran and bolstered his place in the history books.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (C) greets people as the nuclear negotiating committee arrive at Mehr Abad Airport in Tehran yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Final Iran deal far from done

AFP, Lausanne

Iran and world powers scored a major breakthrough with a framework deal aimed at stopping Tehran getting nuclear weapons, but major work is needed to finalise the potentially historic accord, analysts said yesterday.

In addition, those alarmed by what was agreed, not least US President Barack Obama's Republican opponents, may yet scupper the entire process before the June 30 deadline to sign on the dotted line.

"This accomplishment is not final. It is as fragile as the forces against it are formidable," Ali Vaez from the International Crisis Group told AFP.

"A lot of thorny issues will have to be resolved in the next three months." Iran and six major powers late on Thursday agreed after 18 months of talks, culminating in a gruelling marathon of sleepless nights in a Swiss hotel, the main parameters of what the final deal will look like.

According to the US, Iran has promised to slash its uranium enrichment capacity -- which makes nuclear fuel but also the core of a bomb -- by two-thirds and reduce its enriched uranium stock by 98 percent.

The framework agreement was however very light on detail on when

exactly all this will happen once the final comprehensive deal is agreed on June 30.

Iranians, who celebrated on the streets in the early hours of Friday when the news from Lausanne came through, want to see sanctions lifted quickly to boost the economy and attract foreign investment.

But the sanctions will not all be lifted in one fell swoop on July 1.

Instead they will be tied to Iran first

"To be clear, there is no aspect of this agreement that is based on promises or trust; every element is subject to proof"
US Secretary of State John F Kerry

carrying out what it has undertaken to do, something to be verified by the UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In addition, there will be the possibility for a "snap" back of the sanctions if Iran violates the deal.

The task of the next three months therefore will be to hammer out in minute detail a timetable for which sanctions are eased when, and what

Iranian actions they will be dependent upon.

One potential snag is that in addition to slashing its capacities, Iran will also have to clear up allegations that before 2003, and possibly since, it did research into making a nuclear weapon.

Other potential problem areas are the language that goes into a mooted new UN Security Council resolution to replace the six others that will be lifted, and the mechanism for determining violations.

"The agreement also does not spell out the specific timeline for Iran's compliance with the IAEA investigation," Arms Control Association expert Kelsey Davenport told AFP.

According to Vaez, the most important "wildcard" is US lawmakers who believe the concessions made constitute a humiliating climbdown that will not do enough to stop Iran getting the bomb.

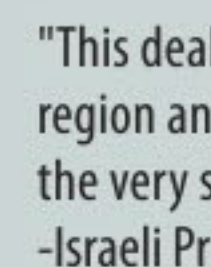
Republican pressure could make it hard for Obama to lift US sanctions while mooted new legislation they want to bring could impose further measures and force the president to get lawmakers' approval for the deal.

"The US Senate should avoid taking any steps to undermine this framework," Tom Collina from Ploughshares Fund said. "This could kill the deal before it is finished."

IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL WHO SAID WHAT



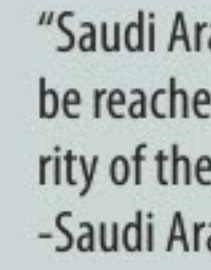
"I am convinced that if this framework leads to a final comprehensive deal, it will make our country, our allies and our world safer. ... if Iran cheats, the world will know it."
-US President Barack Obama



"This deal would pose a grave danger to the region and to the world and would threaten the very survival of the state of Israel."
-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu



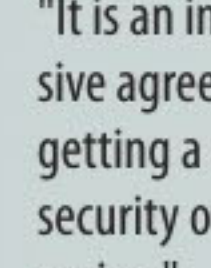
"If the other side honours its promises, we will honour our promises."
-Iran's President Hassan Rohani



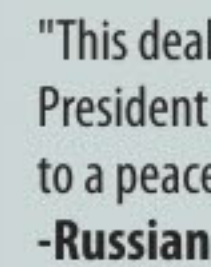
"Saudi Arabia hopes a final binding deal would be reached to reinforce the stability and security of the region and the world."
-Saudi Arabia King Salman



"The deal will contribute to peace and stability in the region."
-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon



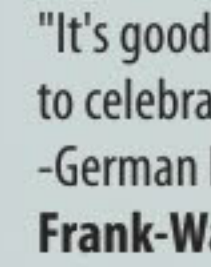
"It is an important step toward a comprehensive agreement that would prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon and strengthen the security of the United States, Israel, and the region."
-Hillary Clinton



"This deal contains the principal put forward by Russian President Vladimir Putin, which is Iran's unconditional right to a peaceful nuclear programme."
-Russian foreign ministry



"This is well beyond what many of us thought possible even 18 months ago. We will continue to have our differences on many other issues with Iran, but the deal will crucially "avoid a nuclear arms race in the region."
-British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond



"It's good, but at the same time it's too early to celebrate."
-German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier



"More work to do to arrive at the finish line."
French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius



Students evacuated from Moi University listen to an address by Interior Minister for Security Joseph Ole Nkaissey before they are transported to their home regions from a holding area yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Kenya defiant after massacre

AFP, Garissa

Grieving relatives were yesterday searching for news or the remains of their loved ones after Somalia's Shebab Islamists massacred 147 in a university in northeastern Kenya.

The day-long siege of Garissa University was Kenya's deadliest attack since the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi, and the bloodiest ever by the al-Qaeda-affiliated militants.

Survivors recounted how the masked gunmen taunted students before killing them, including forcing them to phone their parents to urge them to call for Kenyan troops to leave Somalia -- before then still shooting them.

Hurling grenades and firing automatic rifles, the gunmen stormed the university at dawn as students were sleeping, shooting dead dozens before setting Muslims free and holding Christians and others hostage.

The day-long seige ended with four gunmen killed in a hail of heavy gunfire, and one suspect reportedly arrested. At least 79 people were also wounded in the attack on the campus, which lies near the border with Somalia.

On Friday, a huge crowd of traumatised and shocked survivors and relatives of those killed or missing gathered at the university gate.

Visiting the scene of the carnage, Kenya's Interior Minister Joseph Nkaissey vowed that the country would not bow to terrorist threats.

"Kenya's government will not be intimidated by the terrorists who have made killing innocent people a way to humiliate the government," he told reporters, promising the government will "fight back".

"We shall win this war against our enemies."



Britain spied on Argentina over Falklands

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Documents released by American whistle-blower Edward Snowden claim that Britain spied on the Argentine government for several years.

British agents are alleged to have been actively spying on Argentina between 2006 and 2011 as part of a large-scale operation.

While the documents, which consist of memos, presentations and internal communication, provide no clear details of tactics employed; reports suggest that they may have involved computer viruses, collecting intelligence with the aim of discrediting the Argentine government, and circulating false propaganda.

There has not been any formal response from the British or Argentine governments to the allegations, which have been published by several different Argentine news agencies.

TN, an Argentine news site, said its journalists had accessed the database that allegedly showed Argentina had been a "clear victim" of cyber-attacks and "invasive" NSA spying complicit with GCHQ.

It has been suggested that Britain was concerned Argentina could launch another attempt to reclaim the Falkland Islands following the war fought over the territory in 1982.

The news comes close to the 33rd anniversary of the beginning of the Falklands war, which saw more than 900 servicemen killed.

Last month defence secretary Michael Fallon said that Britain would spend £280m over the next decade on renewing and increasing its defences of the Falkland Islands.

BJP to stay for next 10-20 years

Says Amit Shah
PTI, Bengaluru

Modi government is here to stay for 10-20 years, BJP president Amit Shah asserted yesterday, claiming that the new dispensation has ended the "reign of scams" and policy paralysis while changing the political culture in the country.

"Modi 'sarkar' (government) has arrived and will be in power for next 10-20 years. It will change the face of India," he said while addressing the party's national executive.

Shah lauded the 10 months of Narendra Modi government, saying it has brought a perceptible change in the system of governance by bringing in transparency and has ended the policy paralysis.

Yemen rebels quit palace

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UN aid chief Valerie Amos said Thursday that 519 people had been killed and nearly 1,700 wounded in two weeks of fighting, adding she was "extremely concerned" for the safety of trapped civilians.

The conflict has sent tensions soaring between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the foremost Shia and Sunni Muslim powers in the Middle East.

Iran has angrily rejected accusations or arming the rebels, who have allied with military units loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh to seize large parts of Yemen, including the capital Sanaa.

After a night of intense coalition bombardment, rebel forces withdrew from President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi's palace in Aden, a senior official said.

They had captured the hilltop complex a day earlier in a symbolic blow to Hadi,

who has fled to Saudi Arabia.

The rebel forces retreated to the nearby central district of Khor Maksar, where 12 rebels were reported dead in an overnight attack by pro-Hadi militiamen.

The coalition air dropped rifles, ammunition and communications equipment to supporters of the president in Aden battling to prevent its fall, according to a local official.

Before the latest chaos erupted, Yemen had been a key US ally in the fight against al-Qaeda, allowing Washington to carry out drone attacks on its territory.

The government's collapse forced the United States to close its embassy and withdraw US special operations forces that were helping Yemeni forces battle AQAP.

Members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

(AQAP) launched calls from mosques in the city for "jihad against Shias", according to residents.

Meanwhile, as part of its logistical support for the Saudi-led campaign, US will provide aerial refuelling, the official said.

The United States was also delivering intelligence from surveillance satellites and aircraft to help the Saudis monitor their border and to track Huthi rebels as they push south, the official added.

Meanwhile, China said it had evacuated from Yemen 225 people from 10 different countries aboard a missile frigate, an unprecedented move that underscores its growing global reach.

The evacuees included 176 people from Pakistan, the foreign ministry said, with the remainder from Ethiopia, Singapore, Italy, Germany, Poland, Ireland, Britain, Canada and Yemen.

Co-pilot pilot 'accelerated' plane before Alps crash

Second black box confirms Lubitz deliberately crashed plane

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Evidence retrieved from the second black box discovered at the site of the Germanwings crash confirms co-pilot Andreas Lubitz repeatedly and deliberately accelerated the Airbus A320 as he used the automatic pilot to descend the plane, the French BEA air accident investigation agency has said.

The BEA said investigators are analysing the data retrieved from the flight recorder, which was found on Thursday. The agency said this new detail was based on initial readings and will continue to examine the data further.

The flight data recorder was discovered by a mountain rescue officer in a spot that had been repeatedly searched.

Prosecutors say evidence from the cockpit voice recorder suggests Lubitz locked the pilot out of the cockpit and intentionally crashed the plane into the French Alps,

killing all 150 passengers and crew on board.

French prosecutor Brice Robin reiterated their belief that he was conscious until the final moment of impact, and appears to have acted repeatedly to stop an excessive speed alarm from sounding, according to the Associated Press.

Dusseldorf prosecutors say Lubitz had searched online for suicide methods and for information about the security of cockpit doors in the weeks leading up to the air disaster.

The prosecutors' spokesman Ralf Herrenbrueck said on Thursday that search terms found on a tablet computer in his home included medical treatment, suicide methods, and cockpit doors and their security.

Lubitz, 27, suffered a severe depressive episode in the past and expressed concerns about his vision following a car crash in 2014, according to reports.

