

## **Obama's Iranian nuke deal a dismal outcome**

By Greg Sheridan, The Australian, 6 April 2015

US President Barack Obama has now effectively guaranteed that Iran will eventually acquire nuclear weapons, in what will be a black day for the hopes of peace and stability for anyone in the world.

The Iranian government has out-negotiated Obama completely. They showed more resolve, more cunning and greater strategic patience.

### **Obama took a strong hand and played it very badly**

The Iranians played a weak hand to perfection. They were forced into negotiations by the overall weakness of their position but have emerged with all the main elements of their nuclear program intact. In time, they will acquire nuclear weapons. Obama will go down in history as the president who made this possible.

The framework that was announced in Lausanne is a most peculiar document. It is unsigned and interpreted differently in Iran, from in the US. It contains very few details. A great deal of the substance of any agreement remains to be negotiated by June 30. However, as Obama, his Secretary of State, John Kerry, and other senior officials constantly claim that the only alternative to this deal is war, they have effectively given away the last shreds of American leverage.

The Iranians know the Obama administration is absolutely desperate to conclude a deal.

### **All the leverage now rests with the Iranians**

Even the broad terms of the framework as announced contain all manner of key concessions the Americans not so long ago said they would never make.

Among these, Iran gets to keep nuclear facilities, such as its underground Fordow plant, which it developed illegally, in secret, in defiance of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Similarly, it gets to keep its heavy water reactor at Arak, although it will convert it to a facility that for the moment cannot produce plutonium.

It gets to keep 6000 centrifuges to enrich uranium of which 5000 will remain operational. There is no purpose in having these centrifuges other than to eventually produce material for nuclear weapons. It will also be allowed to undertake intensive research on building more advanced centrifuges that can enrich more uranium more quickly. It will not have to export its enriched uranium but merely convert it into a more benign form in a process that can be reversed. And almost all the notional restrictions on Iran run out in 10 years.

The concessions that Iran made, such as reducing the number of centrifuges it now has and allowing IAEA inspections in the future, are useful but modest. Iran was under pressure because of three distinct factors.

One, it was subject to crippling sanctions, which gave it a rotten standard of living. Two, the price of oil is low, exacerbating the effect of sanctions. Three, the US, and to a lesser extent

Israel, had explicitly said that the military option, of potentially attacking Iran's nuclear facilities, remained on the table.

### **Obama removes all the pressure on Iran**

Now Obama has done everything he can to remove all the pressure on Iran. Once the deal is under way, the UN will remove all the nuclear-based sanctions on Iran. The UN Security Council will rescind all its relevant resolutions. Obama says these sanctions will “snap back” automatically if Iran ever breaches the deal. That is a joke. Effective sanctions are extraordinarily difficult to assemble and impose. And Obama has put this all in the hands of the UN, the very byword of procrastination and inaction.

Further, incremental breaches of deals like this are never enforced. Who defines a breach of the deal?

How widely would such a breach notice be accepted? There is no detail on the supposed inspections regime and Iran has a long history of frustrating and denying inspectors.

Also, Obama has taken the military option off the table — never very likely to be exercised by anyone. But the possibility that it might be exercised provided some real leverage.

He has also to some extent tied the hands of his successors. Obama says he will commit the US to all sorts of UN resolutions, which will be extremely difficult for his successors to undo.

### **The strategic triumph for Iran is enormous**

It has to modify no part of its international outlook or behaviour, from sponsoring terrorism to declaring the annihilation of Israel non-negotiable.

It gets, for the first time ever, and this is crucial, international legitimacy for its nuclear program, which covers every part of the cycle. It gets sanctions lifted, which should help its economy dramatically. And from very early on, it will start cheating on the deal.

Obama is dishonest to claim the only alternative was war. The chief alternative was continued sanctions. That would have been the least worst policy.

When Iran eventually acquires nuclear weapons, it will almost certainly induce a raft of other players in the Middle East to acquire nuclear weapons as well. But Obama will have done everything he wanted to do. He will have avoided difficult action and produced another moment he can claim as a triumph for his unique approach to leading the US. This is a dismal outcome for everyone.