

# Iran Confronts US At Nuke Talks Over GOP Letter

BY BRADLEY KLAPPER  
Associated Press

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — Iranian diplomats twice confronted their American counterparts about an open letter from Republican senators who warned that any nuclear deal could expire the day President Barack Obama leaves office, a senior U.S. official said Monday.

The official, noting the administration's warnings when the letter first surfaced, said the GOP intervention was a new issue in the tense negotiations facing an end-of-month deadline for a framework agreement.

The letter came up in nuclear talks Sunday between senior U.S. and Iranian negotiators, the official said, and the Iranians raised it again in discussions Monday led by Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Zarif was quoted by Iranian state media after the meeting as saying the topics included the potential speed of a softening of U.S. economic sanctions and the new issue of the letter from the senators. "It is necessary that the stance of the U.S. administration be defined about this move," he was quoted as saying.

Kerry and Zarif met for nearly five hours in Lausanne, the start of several planned days of discussions. Most of the Iranians then departed for Brussels, where they were to meet with European negotiators.

In Brussels, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said that "we are entering a crucial time, a crucial two weeks." And German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said that after "more than 10 years of negotiations, we should seize this opportunity."

"There are areas where we've made progress, areas where we have yet to make any progress," British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said. "But the fact that we're all here talking shows the commitment on both sides to try to reach an agreement."

In Lausanne, the U.S. official wouldn't say how much time the sides spent talking about the letter drafted seven days ago by freshman Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and signed by 46 other GOP senators. The Iranians have called the letter a propaganda ploy, and Zarif joked last week that some U.S. legislators didn't understand their own Constitution. The Obama administration has called the letter "ill timed" and "ill advised," coming weeks before the deadline for a preliminary agreement with Iran on its nuclear program.

Cotton isn't backing down. In his maiden speech in the Senate, Cotton reiterated his view that the deal being discussed would pave Iran's path to a nuclear bomb.

"Iran is an outlaw regime. ... Unsurprisingly, Iran is only growing bolder and more aggressive as America retreats from the Middle East," Cotton said, adding that Iranian leaders continue to call for Israel's elimination and that Iran is meddling in other nations, including Syria and Iraq.

The U.S. official in Lausanne, who briefed reporters only conditionally, said that in the end, the talks and a potential agreement depend on Iran showing the world that its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful.

The goal for a full agreement is the end of June.

Republicans argue that a deal would be insufficient and unenforceable, allowing Iran to eventually become a nuclear-armed state. To that end, they've delivered a series of proposals to undercut or block an agreement, including ones that would require Senate say-so on a deal and order new sanctions against Iran while negotiations are underway.

Cotton's letter, the administration and congressional Democrats argue, went further, interfering in the president's execution of U.S. foreign policy. The letter, styled as a U.S. civics lesson, warned Iranian leaders that any deal negotiated by the current administration could be tossed by Obama's successor.



President Barack Obama meets with the Council of the Great City Schools Leadership in the Roosevelt Room of the White House Monday in Washington. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss efforts to strengthen educational opportunities for students in city schools.

## Obama Says He's Ready To Fight GOP Over Education

BY NEDRA PICKLER  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pointing to increased high school graduation rates, President Barack Obama said Monday he's prepared to fight with Republicans for school funding and his education priorities rather than risk going backward.

The president said he hopes that Republican lawmakers focus on educating every child and not shifting money away from needy districts. He's also calling for a focus on low-performing schools, annual assessments and investments in special education and English-language learners.

Obama said if the Republican budget doesn't reflect those priorities, they will have "a major debate."

"We are making too much progress now in terms of graduation rates, improved reading scores, improved math scores, increasing standards, increasing access to the resources the kids need, for us to be going backward now. And this is something worth fighting for," Obama said at a White House meeting with urban school leaders.

The Education Department said Monday that high school graduation rates for all racial groups have increased, according to data from the 2012-2013 school year. But black, Hispanic and American Indian students still significantly lag behind their white and Asian/Pacific Islander counterparts.

Previously, the department said the graduation rate had reached a high of 81.4 percent.

That means 1 in 5 students overall leave high school without a diploma.

Among black students, the rate reported was 70.7 percent — up from 69 percent a year earlier.

Hispanic students had a rate of 75.2 percent, which was up from 73 percent a year earlier.

American Indian students had a rate of 69.7 percent — up from 67 percent.

Asian/Pacific Islander students had a rate of 88.7 percent, which was up from 88 percent.

White students had a rate of 86.6 percent, which was up from 86 percent.

The No Child Left Behind law, signed in 2002, has been credited with shining a light on the performance of poor, minority, disabled and non-English speaking students, but also has led to complaints from both Republicans and Democrats that the requirements were unworkable.

Lawmakers are working on a bipartisan effort to update the No Child Left Behind Act. Congress for years has been stymied on the best way to renew the much maligned law, and last month House Republican leaders abruptly canceled a vote on a GOP reform bill after conservative opposition made passage uncertain.

Lawmakers have grappled with such issues as whether federal law should continue to require annual reading and math testing in grades three to eight and again in high school. Much of the conflict focuses on how much of a federal role there should be in identifying and fixing failing schools.

## UN Says 24 Dead In Vanuatu After Powerful Cyclone Pam

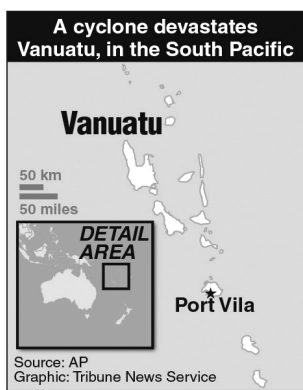
BY NICK PERRY  
Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Relief workers were trying desperately on Tuesday to reach Vanuatu's remote outer islands that were smashed by a monstrous cyclone, as the United Nations reported that 24 people were confirmed dead and 3,300 displaced by the storm that tore through the South Pacific archipelago.

Radio and telephone communications with outer islands have not yet been established three days after what the country's president called a "monster" storm, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

The agency said 3,300 people are sheltering in 37 evacuation centers on the main island of Efate and in the provinces of Torba and Penama. "Basic emergency rations are being provided to evacuees, including water, rice, tinned fish or meat, coffee, tea, sugar, Milo, biscuits and other items," the report said.

Military aircraft from New Caledonia, Australia and New Zealand have been conducting aerial assessments of the damage, and aid groups were on Tuesday trying to reach Vanuatu's hard-hit outer islands, which officials in the capital, Port Vila, have been unable to contact due to a breakdown in the nation's communications infrastructure.



The latest report came as Vanuatu's president rushed back to his country, which has repeatedly warned it is already suffering devastating effects from climate change with coastal areas being washed away.

Looking weary and red-eyed, Baldwin Lonsdale told The Associated Press that Cyclone Pam destroyed or damaged 90 percent of the buildings in the capital alone. Lonsdale was interviewed on Monday in Sendai, in north-eastern Japan, where he had been attending a U.N. disaster conference when the cyclone struck. He was expected to reach Vanuatu on Tuesday.

"This is a very devastating cyclone in Vanuatu. I term it as a monster, a monster," he said. "It's a setback for the government and for the people of Vanuatu. After all the development that has taken place, all this development has been wiped out."

Lonsdale said because of the communications blackout,

even he could not reach his family. "We do not know if our families are safe or not. As the leader of the nation, my whole heart is for the people, the nation," he said.

Vanuatu has a population of 267,000 people spread over 65 islands. About 47,000 people live in the capital.

Officials were struggling to determine the scale of devastation from the cyclone, which tore through the nation early Saturday, packing winds of 270 kilometers (168 miles) per hour. Bridges were down outside Port Vila, making travel by vehicle impossible even around Efate.

"The indications are showing that there will be extensive injuries if the people didn't go to higher ground (on the outer islands) and there might be a lot of fatalities," the director of Vanuatu Prime Minister Joe Natuman's office, Benjamin Shing, told reporters in Port Vila.

The damaged airport in Port Vila has reopened, allowing some aid and relief flights to reach the country. Lonsdale said a wide range of items were needed, from tarpaulins and water containers to medical supplies and construction tools. Those on the ground pleaded for help to arrive quickly.

## Durst Could Face The Death Penalty

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Los Angeles prosecutors have filed a murder charge against real estate heir Robert Durst that could carry the death penalty.

Prosecutors said Durst was charged Monday with first-degree murder in the killing of his friend, Susan Berman.

Durst was arrested in New Orleans over the weekend on a murder warrant and waived extradition to return to Los Angeles to face the charges.

Berman had acted as Durst's spokeswoman after his wife disappeared in 1982.

She was shot in the back of the head in her Los Angeles home in December 2000 just before New York authorities planned to interview her about Kathleen Durst's disappearance.

## Netanyahu Rules Out Palestinian State

JERUSALEM (AP) — In a frenzied last day of campaigning, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday ruled out the establishment of a Palestinian state and vowed to keep building east Jerusalem settlements as he appealed to hard-line voters on the eve of Israel's closely contested general election.

The moderate opposition, meanwhile, announced a dramatic last-minute machination of its own, removing one of its two joint candidates for prime minister.

Netanyahu, who has governed for the past six years and has long been the most dominant personality in Israeli politics, has watched his standing plummet in recent weeks.

Recent opinion polls show his Likud Party lagging behind Isaac Herzog's Zionist Union. Herzog, who has vowed to revive peace efforts with the Palestinians, repair ties with the U.S. and reduce the growing gaps between rich and poor, confidently predicted an "upheaval" was imminent.

Late Monday night, it was announced that Herzog's main partner, former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, had given up an agreement to rotate the prime minister post with him if their alliance wins. It was widely thought that the unusual arrangement was driving away voters.

## Ferguson Suspect Didn't Target Officers

CLAYTON, Mo. (AP) — A man accused of shooting two police officers last week in Ferguson was not targeting police nor aiming at demonstrators at a late-night protest, his attorney said Monday, countering an earlier police description of the crime.

Defense attorney Jerryll Christmas also suggested that St. Louis County police may have used excessive force when arresting the suspected shooter, Jeffrey Williams, saying his client had bruises on his back, shoulders and face and a knot on his head.

Police spokesman Brian Schellman called the lawyer's allegations "completely false," adding that Williams was seen by a nurse when booked into the county jail, standard procedure for all incoming inmates.

Williams, 20, appeared in court Monday morning, one day after his arrest on charges of felony assault, armed criminal action and a weapons offense. His case was continued until March 31. Christmas did not appear at the brief hearing and said he first spoke with his client late Monday afternoon.

"This wasn't any type of ambush shooting," Christmas said in an interview with the AP, countering an earlier description by St. Louis County Police Chief Jon Belmar of the March 12 shooting outside Ferguson police headquarters. "Those officers were shot accidentally."

## Pakistan: Suicide Bombers Kill 15

LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — A pair of suicide bombers attacked two churches in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore on Sunday as worshippers prayed inside — killing 15 people in the latest assault against religious minorities in this increasingly fractured country, officials said.

A spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, Ahsanullah Ahsan, claimed responsibility for the assault in a statement emailed to reporters, and warned, "There will be more of such attacks."

Afterward, an angry Christian mob blocked a major highway, ransacked a bus terminal and burned two people to death who they suspected of being involved in the attacks. Christian demonstrators blocked roads in other major Pakistani cities as well.

The explosions occurred in quick succession in the Christian neighborhood of Youhanabad at two churches while parishioners worshipped at Sunday morning services. The churches are about 600 meters (650 yards) apart. At least 70 people were wounded, said Zahid Pervez, the provincial director general of health, who gave the death toll.

Area hospitals filled with casualties and scenes of mourning. Shaheen Bibi's 10-year-old son Abhishak was among those killed.

## GOP Weighs Increase In War Funds

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are considering adding tens of billions of dollars to President Barack Obama's request for overseas military operations in an effort to get around tight limits on Pentagon spending. The move comes as Republicans are set to unveil their latest budget plan.

Obama requested \$51 billion for Pentagon operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, but GOP aides said Monday party leaders are weighing figures above \$90 billion — enough to surpass Obama's proposal to spend \$38 billion over the limits for the budget year beginning in October.

GOP defense hawks have promised not to support any budget that doesn't at least match Obama's \$561 billion request for defense, but a 2011 budget "sequestration" law imposes a \$523 billion limit on the defense budget — an automatic cut of \$54 billion below previously agreed levels.

War spending, however, is outside the limits and offers an easy way around the automatic cuts imposed after the failure of lawmakers to replace sequestration with alternative deficit-cutting moves.

The exact figure has yet to be determined and was still the subject of debate among top House Republicans on Monday.

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### NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING & ELECTION OF DIRECTORS OF B-Y WATER DISTRICT

TO BE HELD ON  
MARCH 25, 2015

At the Scotland VFW Building, 531 First Street, Scotland, South Dakota, at 1:30 p.m. for the purpose of electing directors to succeed those whose terms are about to expire. Those directors whose terms are about to expire and the division which they represent are Chris Nelsen, Div. #1; James Stark, Div. #2; Gary Kronaiz, Div. #3; and Mark Schaeffer, Div. #10.

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