

Directions:

1. Annotate the text to show evidence of a close reading and understanding of the text. Include a legend with minimum of 2 key things at the top of the article.
2. Write a 3-part response on a separate sheet of paper (refer to handout).

Obama Breaks Three Decades of Silence with Call to Iranian President

Source: Paul Richter and Christi Parsons/LATimes.com/September 27, 2013

President Obama exchanges pleasantries with his Iranian counterpart, Hassan Rouhani, in the first such contact since 1979.

WASHINGTON — Breaking a silence of more than three decades between the leaders of the United States and Iran, President Obama on Friday called President Hassan Rouhani to express confidence that the two can find a "comprehensive solution" to their nuclear standoff and begin restoring the nations' damaged relationship.

Hoping to boost a new round of talks, Obama called Rouhani as the Iranian was driving to the airport after a week at the United Nations. Leaders of the two nations had not spoken since Iran's 1979 revolution, when militants took 52 Americans hostage and held them for 444 days.

Obama said that while there remains "deep mistrust" and other obstacles to overcome, he believes that the two sides can make quick progress toward a deal on Iran's nuclear program.

"A path to a meaningful agreement will be difficult," Obama told reporters at the White House after the call. "But I believe we've got a responsibility to pursue diplomacy and that we have a unique opportunity to make progress with the new leadership in Iran."

Though Rouhani had declined an opportunity to shake Obama's hand earlier in the week, with observers speculating that he feared the image would upset hard-liners at home, he was ready to receive the call and responded warmly. The newly elected president thanked Obama for his hospitality in New York and said he too believed they could work out a deal.

"In regards to the nuclear issue, with political will, there is a way to rapidly solve the matter," Rouhani said, according to his official Twitter feed.

The first conversation after 34 years of icy silence or outright hostility ended with an exchange of pleasantries: Obama said he hoped Rouhani was not suffering in New York's gridlock on the way to the airport, and said thank you in Persian. Rouhani responded in English, "Have a nice day."

Before Obama left the United Nations this week, U.S. officials had extended an offer to have the two presidents speak. On Friday, Iranian officials said they were ready.

At 2:30 p.m., the two leaders and their interpreters got on the call.

Obama began by congratulating Rouhani on his June election. He referred to the long mistrust between the two sides but said he believed the talks were already making progress.

Israeli leaders and senior U.S. lawmakers, some of whom remain wary of Iran's intentions, were notified of Obama's plans ahead of time.

Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor blasted Obama for failing to press the Iranian leader on terrorism, Syria and other issues.

"It is particularly unfortunate that President Obama would recognize the Iranian people's right to nuclear energy but not stand up for their right to freedom, human rights, or democracy," Cantor said.

White House aides said Obama wanted to give a "push" to the talks, and that both leaders want to convey a sense of urgency to everyone involved.

"I do believe that there is a basis for a resolution," Obama said Friday. "Iran's supreme leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] has issued a *fatwa* against the development of nuclear weapons. President Rouhani has indicated that Iran will never develop nuclear weapons. I have made clear that we respect the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy in the context of Iran meeting its obligations."

U.S. officials and other world powers are trying to talk Iran into a deal that would end international economic sanctions and give Tehran greater access to non-military nuclear power if it agrees to accept limits on its nuclear activities and answer questions about suspected efforts to gain bomb-making knowledge.

In reaching out to Rouhani, Obama was carrying through on the idea he first promoted in his 2008 campaign of seeking high-level talks with hostile governments.

The idea yielded little payoff with the Iranians early in his administration, as Tehran rebuffed his approaches. But the cumulative effects of six years of punishing sanctions and international isolation have made the Iranians more willing to see what they can gain from direct conversation.

On Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry began discussing the possibility of a deal that Zarif said might be wrapped up in a year.

Rouhani has strong public support for the negotiations, but that may not last indefinitely. The Iranian people want quick relief from the economic sanctions that have battered their economy, and Khamenei, Rouhani's boss, may not have unlimited patience.

The call was warmly received in Tehran.

The news led the website of the official Islamic Republic News Agency, which reported that both leaders underlined the need to resolve the standoff over Iran's nuclear program and for mutual cooperation on regional issues.

Nader Karimi Juni, chief editor of a reformist daily newspaper, said Obama's telephone call to Rouhani was "the best work I could imagine" and will be good for future negotiations.

"It was even better than handshake photos and exchanges of pleasantries," he said. "President Rouhani was treated as a very important guest. It is similar to actually seeing off President Rouhani personally. It is the best reaction we could expect by the U.S. administration."

One former Obama administration advisor on Iran said that despite the warm feelings, there may be risks that such contacts will raise expectations too high in Tehran and the United States.

If the two sides can't make progress, "people's feelings could sour," said Ray Takeyh, an Iran specialist at the Council on Foreign Relations. "I don't know if it's healthy to raise expectations too high."

He noted that the administration has, in recent years, sought to keep public expectations for the nuclear talks low.

U.S. and Iranian officials, along with officials of five world powers, are due to resume the talks in Geneva on Oct. 15 and 16.

Possible Response Questions:

- What did you learn about the relations between the United States and Iran after reading this article?
- Explain what Iran would gain from breaking the silence with the United States and vice versa.
- Explain Republican House Majority Leader Eric Cantor's criticism of President Obama.