

Iran Seeks Engagement with the United States

By

Akbar E. Torbat

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As has been reported for sometime there have been secret talks going on between the US and Iran. Behind the scenes, the Iranian-born Valerie Jarrett, an adviser to President Barack Obama, has been in talks with representatives of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei headed by Ali Akbar Velayati who is currently an advisor to the Leader on foreign affairs. We do not know the details of the talks; but it can be assumed that was primarily related to Iran's nuclear issue and rapprochement between the two countries. According to the New York Times, the US and Iran had agreed on one-to-one negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. The agreement resulted from secret exchanges between American and Iranian officials that go back to almost the beginning of President Obama's first term.¹

In March 2012, the former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in an interview with Fareed Zakaria at CNN, said diplomatic negotiations with Iran would only work if the United States was willing to give the Islamic Republic security guarantees that it would survive.² He suggested, the US should ignore the Islamic Republic's human rights abuses and guarantee to protect the regime against threats in exchange for concessions to abandon its nuclear activities. It seems this scenario has been pursued by the US in recent months. Such scenario implies that the clerical regime will be preserved under the US protection similar to the Arab monarchies and sheikdoms in the Persian Gulf region. In exchange, the clerics would cooperate to protect US interests in the region. Thus instead of the regime change scenario that had been pursued since 2002 by the Bush administration and the covert war policy that had been going on since Obama came to office in 2009, the new scenario now is to engage with the regime in Tehran.³

In the past few years, President Obama has directly exchanged letters with the Leader Khamenei. It can be speculated that Obama and Khamenei had made a deal behind the scene to have a moderate cleric to be Iran's president so that he could compromise on the nuclear issue in exchange for removing the sanctions. That moderate cleric happened to be Hassan Rouhani. According to Abass-ali Kadkhodaei, the Guardian council's spokesman, Rohani did not receive enough votes in the Guardian Council to enter the presidential race. He received only 5 votes from the 12-member council members, but later the votes were increased to six by mediation of Ahmad Jannati, a conservative cleric who is the chairman of the Guardian Council.⁴ The Council also closed its eyes on Rouhani's falsification of his educational background who had given himself a doctorate title going back to the time when he had first served in the Iranian parliament.⁵ The Guardian Council selects and disqualifies the candidates for presidential elections in violation of the regime's own constitution.⁶ After the elections, Rouhani returned the favor to Janati by appointing his son Ali Jannati as the minister of Culture and Islamic guidance in his cabinet.

Since Obama won his second term, the secret talks have been continued and speeded up when President Hassan Rouhani replaced President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on August 3, 2013. Recently Obama disclosed that he has also exchanged letters with Rouhani.

Too much propaganda to boost Rouhani's image by the Western media and especially by the Persian BBC and Voice of America has created an impression on some Iranians that Rouhani's election was the result of the regime compromise to reconcile with the West. As a prelude to reconciliation between the two countries, on August 19, 2013, after sixty years, the US officially acknowledged that it had managed the 1953 Coup in Iran to topple the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. Rouhani's constituencies are the affluent and merchant class who has been badly hurt by the West's economic sanctions imposed on Iran. To please them, Rouhani wants to hastily compromise on the nuclear issue hoping for possible removal of the sanctions. However, Rouhani does not have support from the radical groups who boycotted the election and most of the populous poor who did not vote for him.

The clerics' repression of the Iranian people civil rights and liberties along with economic difficulties created by the sanctions have weakened the regime. As it appears, in order to prevent losing power under the economic pressures by the West, the clerics in Tehran plan to yield to the US demands. The yield was carefully reworded as "heroic softness" by the Leader Khamenei to save face. The regime's anti-imperialist slogans now have changed to motto of "constructive engagement". On September 19, Rouhani put an editorial piece in the Washington Post seeking constructive engagement with the US.⁷

The Obama's speech delivered on Sept. 24, 2013, at the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, was partly about Iran. Obama said "Since I took office, I've made it clear in letters to the Supreme Leader in Iran and more recently to President Rouhani that America prefers to resolve our concerns over Iran's nuclear program peacefully -- although we are determined to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. We are not seeking regime change [in Iran], and we respect the right of the Iranian people to access peaceful nuclear energy."⁸ Rouhani gave a speech on the same day at the General Assembly hours after Obama's address. Rouhani said he was prepared to engage in nuclear negotiations without delay and did not want to increase tensions with the United States. He emphasized nuclear weapon and other weapons of mass destruction have no place in Iran's security and defense doctrine.

Rouhani has now obtained authority from the Leader Khamenei to negotiate on Iran's nuclear program but still the Majles has to approve the outcome of his negotiations. Khamenei has asked the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) not be involved in the political activities.⁹ That meant IRGC should not interfere with Rouhani's government nuclear negotiations. IRGC has already warned the danger of dealing with US,¹⁰ and does not trust Rouhani will protect Iran's rights in the negotiations. When Rouhani headed the nuclear negotiations in 2003-2005, he and his team were charged with nuclear espionage and even one member of his team Shahin Dadkhah was arrested on the charge of espionage

and sentenced to seven years in prison.¹¹ Western officials and specially Britain have favored Rouhani to negotiate the nuclear issue. Rouhani appointed Mohammad Javad Zarif, a US educated diplomat who is favored by Washington, as his Foreign Minister. He has also transferred Iran's nuclear file from the Secretariat of the Supreme National Security Council to the Foreign Ministry under Zarif's supervision. Furthermore, Rouhani appointed the former foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi as the new head of Iran's atomic energy agency.

President Obama has ordered the Secretary of State John Kerry to oversee the engagement with Tehran. On September 26, John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, foreign ministers and envoys of the countries involved in the nuclear negotiations met to begin negotiations on Iran's nuclear issue. That was the first time after more than three decades that high level officials of the two countries made face-to-face contact. A new round of negotiations is planned to begin in Geneva in mid October.

It remains to be seen whether Washington and Tehran can progress in the negotiations to resolve their disputes and re-establish diplomatic relations.

<http://www.countercurrents.org/torbat290913.htm>

Akbar E. Torbat (atorbat@calstatela.edu) teaches economics at California State University, Los Angeles. He received his Ph.D. in political economy from the University of Texas at Dallas.

¹ U.S. Officials Say Iran Has Agreed to Nuclear Talks By HELENE COOPER and MARK LANDLER, October 20, 2012 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/21/world/iran-said-ready-to-talk-to-us-about-nuclear-program.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

² Kissinger: Talks work only if US gives Iran something, 16, March 2012, p. 1, <http://iran-times.com/kissinger-talks-work-only-if-us-gives-iran-something/>

³ The Confrontation with Iran: A Covert War, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article30305.htm> ,the cover war included using computer malwares to cripple Iran's nuclear centrifuges and sabotage of nuclear installations and assassinations of Iran's nuclear scientists by Israel Mossad; the last one assassinated on January 11, 2012. Also see DAVID E. SANGER, Obama Order Sped up Wave of Cyber attacks against Iran, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/world/middleeast/obama-ordered-wave-of-cyberattacks-against-iran.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 .

⁴ <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/109621-rohani-aref-confirmed-to-run-for-president-through-guardian-council-chiefs-mediation-report>

⁵ <https://khodnevis.org/article/51756#.UkIDYJ3n-P8>

⁶ Iran Has a Challenging Election Ahead, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article35153.htm> , also see <http://original.antiwar.com/akbar-e-torbat/2013/07/01/the-unexpected-results-of-presidential-elections-in-iran/>

⁷ http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/2013/09/19/4d2da564-213e-11e3-966c-9c4293c47ebe_story.html

⁸ http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-president-obamas-speech-at-the-un-general-assembly/2013/09/24/64d5b386-2522-11e3-ad0d-b7c8d2a594b9_story_4.html

⁹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/16/us-iran-politics-guards-idUSBRE98F0HY20130916>

¹⁰ Iran's elite military warns of dangers of dealing with US, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2013/09/22/iran-usa-idINL5N0HI09D20130922>

¹¹ Former Iranian nuclear negotiator denied visitation in Evin prison, 25/04/ 2013, <http://www.iranhrc.org/?p=462>