



Iranian Senior Officials Disclose Confidential Details From Nuclear Negotiations: Already In 2011 We Received Letter From U.S. Administration Recognizing Iran's Right To Enrich Uranium

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Iranian officials recently began to reveal details from the nuclear negotiations with the U.S. since their early stages. Their statements indicate that the U.S. initiated secret negotiations with Iran not after President Hassan Rohani, of the pragmatic camp, was elected in 2013, but rather in 2011-2012, in the era of radical president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.^[1] The disclosures also indicate that, already at that time, Iran received from the U.S. administration a letter recognizing its right to enrich uranium on its own soil. Hossein Sheikh Al-Islam, an advisor to the Majlis speaker, specified that the letter had come from John Kerry, then a senator and head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Iranian vice president and top negotiator Ali Akbar Salehi said that Kerry, while still a senator, had been appointed by President Obama to handle the nuclear contacts with Iran.

The following are initial details from these disclosures; a full translation is pending.

Khamenei: Bilateral Talks Began In 2011, Were Based On U.S. Recognition Of Nuclear Iran

In a speech he delivered on June 23, 2015, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said that the American administration had initiated the nuclear talks with Iran during Ahmadinejad's term in office, based on a U.S. recognition of a nuclear Iran: "The issue of negotiating with the Americans is related to the term of the previous [Ahmadinejad] government, and to the dispatching of a mediator to Tehran to request talks. At the time, a respected regional figure came to me as a mediator [referring to Omani Sultan Qaboos] and explicitly said that U.S. President [Obama] had asked him to come to Tehran and present an American request for negotiations. The Americans told this mediator: 'We want to solve the nuclear issue and lift sanctions within six months, while recognizing Iran as a nuclear power.' I told that mediator that I did not trust the Americans and their words, but after he insisted, I agreed to reexamine this topic, and negotiations began."^[2]

Hossein Sheikh Al-Islam: Kerry Sent Iran A Letter Via Oman Recognizing Iran's Enrichment Rights

In an interview with the Tasnim news agency on July 7, 2015, Hossein Sheikh Al-Islam, an advisor to Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani, said that John Kerry had relayed a letter to Tehran recognizing Iran's enrichment rights: "We came to the [secret] negotiations [with the U.S.] after Kerry wrote a letter and sent it to us via Oman, stating that America officially recognizes Iran's rights regarding the [nuclear fuel] enrichment cycle. Then there were two meetings in Oman between the [Iranian and U.S.] deputy foreign ministers, and after those, Sultan Qaboos was dispatched by Obama to Khamenei with Kerry's letter. Khamenei told him: 'I don't trust them.' Sultan Qaboos said: 'Trust them one more time.' On this basis the negotiations began, and not on the basis of sanctions, as they [the Americans] claim in their propaganda."^[3]

Salehi: Obama Appointed Senator Kerry To Handle The Nuclear Dossier Vis-à-vis Iran; Later He Was Appointed Secretary Of State

Iranian Vice President Ali Akbar Salehi and head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, who was restored to the nuclear negotiation team this year, served as Iran's foreign minister in 2010-2013. In interviews he has given on Iranian media since April 2014, he too claimed that the Americans initiated the secret talks with Iran in 2011-2012, and stressed his role in jumpstarting the process from the Iranian side. In a comprehensive interview with the daily *Iran* on August 4, 2015, he elaborated on the secret contacts initiated by the Americans. The following are excerpts from the interview:

Interviewer: "Why was Oman chosen as a mediator [in the contacts with the U.S.]?"

Salehi: "We have very good relations with Oman. When [Supreme Leader] Khamenei recently mentioned 'a respected regional figure,' he was obviously referring to the Omani leader. Oman is also respected by the West, and it had mediated between America and Iran on several previous occasions, for instance in the affair of the American mountain climbers who were arrested in Iran [in

2009]... When [Iranian deputy Foreign Minister] Qashqavi was there [in Oman], an Omani official gave him a letter in which he announced that the Americans were willing to hold negotiations with Iran and that they were very interested in solving the challenging [crisis] between Tehran and Washington. We [Iranians] were willing to help facilitate the process, and it looked like a good opportunity had come up. The 2012 U.S. elections had not yet started back then, but Obama had already launched his reelection campaign. The Omani message came just as [Obama and Romney] were starting their race in the U.S. elections, but there was still time before the elections [themselves]. At that stage I did not take the letter seriously."

Interviewer: "Why didn't you take it seriously? Because it was delivered by a mid-level Omani official?"

Salehi: "Yes. This fact concerned us, because the letter was hand-written and back then I was not familiar with that official. After a while, Mr. Souri, who was the CEO of an Iranian shipping [company], visited Oman to promote various shipping interests and talk with Omani officials."

Interviewer: "This was how long after the delivery of the letter?"

Salehi: "He came to me about a month or two after the first letter was delivered, and said to me: 'Mr. Salehi, I visited Oman to promote shipping interests, and an Omani official conveyed to me that the Americans were willing to enter secret bilateral negotiations on the nuclear dossier.' It was clear that they wanted to launch negotiations..."

"The Omani official whose message Souri was relaying was one Isma'il, who had just been appointed an advisor to the Omani leader and who still holds a position in the Omani foreign ministry. He had good relations with the Americans, and Omani officials trusted him [too]. I said to Souri: 'We are not at all certain to what extent the Americans are serious, but I'll give you a note. Go tell them that these are our demands. Deliver [the note] during your next visit to Oman.' On a piece of paper I wrote down four clearly-stated points, one of which was [the demand for] official recognition of the right to enrich uranium. I thought that, if the Americans were sincere in their proposal, they had to accept these four demands of ours. Mr. Souri delivered this short letter to the mediator, stressing that this was the list of Iran's demands, [and that], if the Americans wanted to resolve the issue, they were welcome to do so [on our terms], otherwise addressing the White House proposals to Iran would be pointless and unjustified.

"All the demands presented in this letter were related to the nuclear challenge. [They were] issues we had always come up against, like the closing of the nuclear dossier, official recognition of [the right to] enrichment, and resolving the issue of Iran's past activities under the PMD [possible military dimensions] heading. After receiving the letter, the Americans said, 'We are definitely and sincerely willing, and we can resolve the issues that Iran mentioned.'"

Interviewer: "With whom did the Americans hold contacts?"

Salehi: "They were in contact with Omani officials, including the relevant figure in the Omani administration. He was a friend of U.S. Secretary of State [John Kerry]. Back then Kerry was not yet secretary of state, he acted as head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In any case, we received from the Americans a positive response and message. We came to the conclusion that we could prepare [to take] further steps on this issue. That's why I asked the Omanis to relay to Iran an official letter that I could present to the officials in Iran. I assessed we had a good opportunity and that we could take advantage of it... They did so, and I presented the official letter that was received to the regime officials and went to the [Supreme] Leader to detail to him the process that had been conducted..."

Interviewer: "What was the American position in the first meetings that took place between Iran and the P5+1 during Rohani's presidency?"

Salehi: "After Rohani's government began working [in August 2013] – this was during Obama's second term in office – a new

[round of] negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 was launched. By this time, Kerry was no longer a senator but had been appointed secretary of state. [But even] before this, when he was still senator, he had already been appointed by Obama to handle the nuclear dossier [vis-à-vis Iran] and later [in December 2012] he was appointed secretary of state. Before this, the Omani mediator, who was in close touch with Kerry, told us that Kerry would soon be appointed secretary of state. In the period of the secret negotiations with the Americans in Oman, there was a more convenient atmosphere for obtaining concessions from the Americans. After the advent of the Rohani government and the American administration [i.e., after the start of Obama's second term in office], and with Kerry as secretary of state, the Americans expressed a more forceful position. They no longer displayed the same eagerness to advance the negotiations. Their position became more rigid and the threshold of their demands higher. But the situation on the Iranian side changed too, since a very professional team was placed in charge of the negotiations with the P5+1..."^[4]

'Nuclear Iran' Website: Three Rounds Of Talks With The U.S. Took Place Before Iran's 2013 Elections

The "Nuclear Iran" website, which is affiliated with Iran's former nuclear negotiation team and which supports the ideological camp, reported on April 20, 2014 that "Two additional conditions, out of the four conditions [set out by Khamenei], were that foreign minister [Salehi] himself not take part in the talks, and that the negotiations yield tangible results at an early [stage]. The policy for these negotiations was set out by a committee of three figures, [all of them] senior government officials, though Ahmadinejad himself did not have much of a role in it. The main strategy in these negotiations was [handing] America an ultimatum and exposing its insincerity and untrustworthiness. Before the 2013 presidential elections, three rounds of talks took place in Oman, and at these talks the Americans officially recognized Iran's [right] to enrich [uranium]..."^[5]

Endnotes:

^[1] This is in contrast to what was implied by U.S. President Obama on July 14, 2015, when he announced the nuclear deal with Iran in a speech that began with the words "After two years of negotiations..." Whitehouse.gov, July 14, 2015.

^[2] Leader.ir, June 23, 2015. Ahmad Khorshidi, a relative of Ahmadinejad's, told the website Entekhab in 2014 that negotiations between Tehran and Washington did not start during President Rohani's term. He said that during the Ahmadinejad period, there were three rounds of talks between the sides, which were also attended by then-foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi. Entekhab.ir, June 11, 2014.

^[3] Tasnim (Iran), July 7, 2015.

^[4] *Iran* (Iran), August 4, 2015.

^[5] Irannuc.ir, April 20, 2014.