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Senior Obama Adviser Leads Secret Talks With Iran

By John Glaser

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President Obama's close confidant and long-time friend of First Lady Michelle Obama, Chicago lawyer Valerie Jarrett, is leading behind the scenes negotiations with representatives of Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei, Israeli officials with knowledge of the effort say.

Jarret, who was born in the Iranian city of Shiraz to American parents, is a senior advisor to US President Barack Obama and, Israeli officials claim, initiated and led secret talks with Iran in Bahrain, although she does not have any past experience with such high-stakes diplomacy.

Last month, the *New York Times* reported that the US and Iran have agreed to one-on-one negotiations over Iran's nuclear program immediately following the US presidential elections. Officials later tried to deny this, but admitted the secret talks took place for a meeting in principle.

Such high-level, one-on-one negotiations between the Iranian regime and Washington would be unprecedented, and many have hopes that a grand bargain will be agreed up.

But even if the talks do occur in the event of a victory for Obama, it's not clear they'll be fruitful. Talks have floundered at various levels throughout Obama's first term.

The closest the parties came to settlement was a deal in which Iran would halt 20 percent uranium enrichment in exchange for swapping enriched uranium for foreign-made fuel rods. Iran initially rejected the deal, but reluctantly agreed after Brazil and Turkey joined in the

discussions. By that point, the Obama administration rejected Iranian acquiescence, in favor of sanctions.

Most of the so-called diplomacy with Iran has been “predicated on intimidation, illegal threats of military action, unilateral ‘crippling’ sanctions, sabotage, and extrajudicial killings of Iran’s brightest minds,” writes Reza Nasri at PBS Frontline’s Tehran Bureau. These postures have spoiled much chance to resolve the issues.

After the failed talks in 2009 and 2010, wherein Obama ended up rejecting the very deal he demanded the Iranians accept, as Harvard professor Stephen Walt has written, the Iranian leadership “has good grounds for viewing Obama as inherently untrustworthy.” Former CIA analyst Paul Pillar has concurred, arguing that Iran has “ample reason” to believe, “ultimately the main Western interest is in regime change.”