

# HINT: IF HILLARY'S INVOLVED WITH NEGOTIATIONS, THEY'VE STARTED ALREADY

A bizarre little October Surprise just happened—and then un-happened.

The NYT released a blockbuster story—bylined by current White House and former diplomatic correspondents Helene Cooper and Mark Landler, with a “David Sanger contributed reporting” hidden at the bottom—claiming Iran had agreed to one-on-one negotiations to take place—at Iran’s insistence—after the election.

The United States and Iran have agreed in principle for the first time to one-on-one negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program, according to Obama administration officials, setting the stage for what could be a last-ditch diplomatic effort to avert a military strike on Iran.

Iranian officials have insisted that the talks wait until after the presidential election, a senior administration official said, telling their American counterparts that they want to know with whom they would be negotiating.

Shortly after the story broke, however, all sorts of other journalists published firm denials from the White House, and the NYT story now includes this denial from Tommy Vietor.

The White House publicly denied the report on Saturday evening. “It’s not true that the United States and Iran have agreed to one-on-one talks or any meeting after the American elections,” said Tommy Vietor, a White House spokesman. He added, however, that the

administration was open to such talks, and has “said from the outset that we would be prepared to meet bilaterally.”

But note the grammar of the denial: It’s not true that the US and Iran have agreed to one-on-one talks after the American elections.

The whole sentence is modified by “after the American elections.” Leaving open the possibility that Iran has agreed to one-on-one negotiations, end of sentence.

And there are hints in the article that that’s what’s going on. First of all, note who’s involved in this.

Among those involved in the deliberations, an official said, are Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, two of her deputies – William J. Burns and Wendy Sherman – and key White House officials, including the national security adviser, Thomas E. Donilon, and two of his lieutenants, Denis R. McDonough and Gary Samore.

Hillary has about two and a half months left on this job. If she intends to craft a deal—and the deal does seem to originate in her State Department—she’s not about to delay a month before beginning the deal. (Though in the aftermath of the Susan Rice testimony, Donilon has been discussed as a replacement for Hillary.)

Then there’s the admission that the parties have held off on multiparty talks because of the “prospect” of one-on-one talks.

A senior American official said that the prospect of direct talks is why there has not been another meeting of the major-powers group on Iran.

If you’re holding off on another forum, chances are good the agreement—if not the talks

themselves—have already begun.

Finally, there's the report—like the last quote hidden way at the end of the article—suggesting the Iran asked for talks after the European oil embargo went into place. But look at the odd logic of these two paragraphs.

But economic pressure may be forcing their hand. In June, when the major powers met in Moscow, American officials say that Iran was desperate to stave off a crippling European oil embargo. After that failed, these officials now say, Iranian officials delivered a message that Tehran would be willing to hold direct talks.

In New York in September, Mr. Ahmadinejad hinted as much. "Experience has shown that important and key decisions are not made in the U.S. leading up to the national elections," he said.

The Ahmadinejad quote doesn't follow from a decision in June to hold talks—at least not at first glance—because it seems to suggest a delay in talks. Unless Ahmadinejad was suggesting that decisions were made before the immediate run-up to the election.

Indeed, the structure of these two paragraphs parallels the first two: with a statement suggesting talks are ongoing, followed by a statement suggesting they won't happen until after the election.

Besides the fact, if you're Iran, looking at the possibility that Sheldon Adelson's paid lackey might take the White House, would you really wait around to get a better deal?

Which brings me to the timing of this article, like the many layers of Libya surprises, just in time for Monday's debate.

Not only does the article suggest the initial news of the negotiations may have come from

Nicholas Burns and Dennis Ross—who are named and quoted in the article.

Reports of the agreement have circulated among a small group of diplomats involved with Iran.

Then there's the bit that's presumably David Sanger's contribution.

Israeli officials initially expressed an awareness of, and openness to, a diplomatic initiative. But when asked for a response on Saturday, Israel's ambassador to the United States, Michael B. Oren, said the administration had not informed Israel, and that the Israeli government feared Iran would use new talks to "advance their nuclear weapons program."

"We do not think Iran should be rewarded with direct talks," Mr. Oren said, "rather that sanctions and all other possible pressures on Iran must be increased."

When this first came out, many Obama supporters were declaring Obama the victor in Monday's debate. I, on the other hand, was imagining the attacks Mitt make out of this news:

"Obama is going to get suckered by Iran, making our allies the Israelis less safe."

"Why would we hold negotiations now after Iran's allies in Lebanon just assassinated a key figure?"

"Obama is negotiating with terrorists. In the same way he let terrorist-linked militias take over Libya, he's now letting Iranian terrorists take over the Middle East."

And all that's before PapaDick and/or Liz

BabyDick Cheney take to the airwaves to call Obama weak for capitulating to Iran.

That is, as excellent as the news might be that Iran will negotiate, an attack on such negotiations fits perfectly with all the other attacks Mitt has been making.

Besides, if you're Bibi Netanyahu—even if you've already agreed to such talks—you want Mitt to make the attacks to raise the price Iran will have to pay for the negotiations.

I read this article and surmise that sometime in June one-on-one negotiations may well have started. And all the chat about after the elections—which makes not one ounce of sense, given the pressures involved—is just cover.

Ah well, whatever is happening, we're continuing the fight against dental care in Iran.