

U.S. Moves Closer to Freeing Iran Detainees, Hawks Protest

The Headline

This month, [news broke](#) that Iran and the United States reached an agreement to release five Americans from Iranian detention, all falsely accused of spying. Three of the detainees are Siamak Namazi, Emad Sharghi, and Morad Tahbaz, while the families of the other two elected to keep their names private. Their imprisonment is reprehensible and should have never occurred, so this agreement is the first step in the long road toward justice for the families of these five individuals. In return, the United States will unfreeze \$6 billion of Iranian government funds, which will be restricted to use for humanitarian purchases only.

One would think the freedom of U.S. prisoners would be something for everyone to celebrate. However, for hawks in the GOP and for those living off of the Iran-enmity industry, the news of freed detainees is cause for condemnation. For example, Representatives Scalise, McCaul, and Stefanik released a joint [letter](#) in which they accused the agreement of “entrenching an Iranian nuclear program that threatens U.S. national security” and “rewarding” Iran. Their solution is to “return to a policy of maximum pressure.” Nowhere do they explain how the freedom of five prisoners has anything to do with Iran’s nuclear program, nor do they contend with the fact that the so-called “policy of maximum pressure” advanced Iran’s nuclear program to [new heights](#) and created the tensions we are now dealing with.

The truth is, diplomacy works. It was [shuttle diplomacy](#) (thanks to Qatar) that led to this latest agreement and it was former President Obama’s landmark deal with the Iranian government that led to the most stringent restrictions on any nation’s nuclear program in history.

What’s next: The prisoners have been moved to house arrest within Iran while the United States and Qatar set up the financial channels for the restricted release of \$6 billion. It will be crucial for the Biden administration to receive support to push the deal through the finish line over the next several weeks. The deal is [“on track,”](#) but with enemies of diplomacy looking to sabotage this agreement, it will be important for the Biden administration and those supporting the release of the five Americans to be vigilant until this becomes a done deal.

The Happenings

August 28th, 11:00-11:45am ET: “Germany’s New China Strategy: A Conversation with German Ambassador Andreas Michaelis,” [CSIS](#)

August 29th, 10:30-11:30am ET: “Taiwan’s Economic Security: How is Chip Nationalism Affecting Taiwan,” [Stimson Center](#)

September 11th, 12:00-1:30pm ET: “Iran One Year After the Death of Mahsa Amini,” [Stimson Center](#)

The Spotlight

In today's spotlight, we interview [Esther Im](#), Peace and Security Policy Advisor at Foreign Policy for America (FP4A) where she covers China, Iran, North Korea, and nuclear issues. You can follow her on Twitter [here](#).

1): What was the first moment you realized you were interested in U.S. foreign policy? What is one thing you wish was better understood about how diplomacy can produce progress even on challenging international issues?

My interest in foreign policy started in Middle School when I learned about the World War II Japanese-American Internment Camps. This experience was particularly jarring as a young Asian American growing up in Arkansas--made even more shocking by the realization that two internment camps were operated in southern Arkansas, just a few hours from where I lived. It was a personal exposure to how broken our democracy can be and the direct ways in which foreign policy is connected to domestic policy. I was gripped with the fear of how that could have easily been my family. The contemporary lessons of this felt particularly acute given, at the time, we were grappling with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States and the rise of xenophobia and racism against Muslim and Arab Americans. It wasn't lost on me that to be a person of color in the United States meant also running the risk of being targeted or otherized for looking like the "foreign enemy" of the day. We see this today with a significant rise in anti-Asian hate resulting from COVID-19 misinformation and fueled by inflammatory anti-China rhetoric by some political leaders. Leadership matters so much in these moments to ensure that our foreign policy is also grounded in our core values.

I wish that it was better understood that diplomacy is fundamentally about managing international relations and a way to engage with those that you disagree with. It is not a gift, as the late Secretary Madeline Albright used to say, but a way to resolve differences. Our most pressing international issues require diplomacy not to condone or celebrate those regimes but to firmly and clearly articulate U.S. policy and values, better understand the other side's intentions and motivations and find a way forward. To that end, it's important to recognize that diplomacy is not a zero-sum game; if we don't, we may end up in a negative-sum scenario where everyone is worse off. Diplomacy also takes time and is context-specific. There is a tendency to brush off continued diplomacy "because it didn't work" or view it in a vacuum or snapshot without acknowledging the specific political, geostrategic, and leadership issues that contributed to stalemate or recognizing how new contexts may reshape the diplomatic environment.

2): You recently helped organize a Congressional panel at FP4A's Leadership Summit on the U.S.-China relationship. What are some ways Congress can lessen the likelihood of an armed conflict with China?

We had an amazing group of Congressional foreign policy champions—Representatives Veronica Escobar (TX), Andy Kim (NJ), Elissa Slotkin (MI), and Lauren Underwood (IL)--join us

for our Leadership Summit to discuss how to communicate about the U.S.-China relationship. I think Members of Congress have an important role as co-managers of U.S. foreign policy to ensure that we are not playing politics in this consequential and important relationship. As multiple panelists noted, China is a competitor, but it is not our enemy or adversary. Yet much of the rhetoric coming from the Hill has been escalatory and reactionary. Representative Andy Kim (D-NJ) argued that increasing tensions and our deep concerns about China should spur us to engage with it even more. The labeling of China as an existential threat, he argued, limits our policy options and space for engagement. We saw this with the spy balloon incident clearly, where the political reaction limited a reasonable response and ways to de-escalate. The same kind of reactionary and inflammatory response to a much larger crisis like a confrontation in the Taiwan Strait, for example, could escalate to conflict and harm American national security. I would like to see a less reactive Congress that is focused on articulating a vision for what the future of the U.S.-China relationship should be and a strategy for how to get there. Part of this is also reframing a more positive vision for much-needed industrial policy or international assistance based on what is objectively good for the United States and not just in terms of U.S.-China competition.

Buried Ledes

Be careful not to eat a microchip! Because you very well might. The makers of Parmigiano-Reggiano are [inserting microchips](#) into their 90-pound cheese wheel casings to protect their parmesan from counterfeiters. The Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium has been looking for ways to protect Parmigiano-Reggiano — one of the most counterfeited cheeses in the world due to the strict rules for attaining certification — for a century. The cheese's producers have [integrated tiny food-safe microtransponders](#) into the labels on the cheese's rind of 120,000 wheels. Luckily, because they're situated on the rind, these microchips are unlikely to be eaten.

In Tanygrisiau, North Wales, a disused Victorian slate mine [offers the deepest sleep in the world](#) — literally! Go Below Underground Adventures says it hosts the deepest underground accommodation in the world at 1,375 feet underground. The mine used to employ hundreds of men, but was closed down in the mid-20th century like much of the slate industry in North Wales. Now, in the deepest, lowest chamber, there are cabins — but getting there is a difficult adventure and includes a two-hour hike, zip lines, and flood slate chambers to walk through. Guests have been [impressed](#), with one saying, "It's really nice to wake up in a cave!"

India's Chandrayaan-3 successfully landed near the moon's south pole, marking history as the first spacecraft to do so. This is India's third lunar mission and comes just two days after Russia's Luna-25 spacecraft [spun out of control](#) and crashed into the moon. Scientists believe the region targeted by the mission, the South Pole, has [water ice deposits](#) that could be turned into rocket fuel or potentially even drinking water, making it an area of key scientific and strategic interest. The world's next moon mission — the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon — will launch [today \(Friday!\)](#) from Japan's space agency. The lander aims to demonstrate accurate lunar landing techniques in order to [make challenging areas more accessible](#).

The voice actor who played Nintendo's Mario for 27 years, Charles Martinet, is now retiring. He will instead be moving into a [brand-new role of Mario Ambassador](#). In response to a statement by Nintendo revealing the news, Martinet said: "My new Adventure begins! You are all Numba One in my heart! Woohoo!!!!!!!" The news came after Nintendo fans noticed that the Mario character's voice sounded different in promotional videos for the upcoming game Super Mario Bros Wonder.

Tomorrow is the first of 21 stages of the [Vuelta a España](#), the third of pro-road cycling's three annual grand tours. Less well-known to U.S. audiences than the more famous Tour de France, La Vuelta is equally, if not more, challenging – organizers load the course with brutal climbs across Spain's numerous mountain ranges, and its placement near the end of the cycling calendar attracts a field of hungry riders looking for a last-gasp victory to make their season. Kicking off in Barcelona and ending in Madrid, this year's Vuelta has an even more impressive start list than the French tour – with aging stars Primož Roglič and Geraint Thomas contending against the bulldozing power of a young and rising Remco Evenepoel, and all riders trying to plan around the late entry of Jonas Vingegaard – the winner of the last two Tours de France and, inarguably, the best climber in the world.

Mike Check!

A GOP-led House means a Congress in which congressmen named Michael [outnumber](#) women as committee chairs. Here's Mike Check, an occasional series dedicated to keeping track of what the Mikes are doing with all that power.

Congressman Mike McCaul (TX-10), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, [told Fox News Sunday](#) that the Biden administration is "now starting to talk about the JCPOA all over again, which in my judgment, will lead us down a course to a legal nuclear bomb and Iran." Well, despite his very best judgment, the JCPOA did the exact opposite: it [blocked](#) every path Iran had to create a bomb. It was President Trump, enacting Chairman McCaul's preferred "maximum pressure" strategy, who repaved the Iranian government's nuclear path. We should be entrusting U.S. diplomats to do their jobs and make progress with the Iranian government in order to prevent war and the development of any new nuclear weapons. After all, despite that *Fox News* tough talk, our diplomats are the only ones who've achieved results.