

Diplomacy a safer ...

Simultaneously, certain Israeli officials confided to the New York Times that this prisoner exchange deal is part of a broader arrangement between Iran and the US, encompassing matters relating to nuclear affairs and regional developments. However, this was refuted by the US secretary of state, who asserted that the prisoner swap was devoid of any linkage to the nuclear issue.

The method of utilizing the newly-released assets of Iran has also generated contention and debate. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has, nonetheless, emphasized that "the modality of employing these released financial resources and assets is within the purview of the Islamic Republic of Iran and are earmarked for the country's diverse needs, as determined by competent authorities".

Divergent accounts and varying interpretations of the agreement were not unexpected, particularly given the involvement of two historically non-diplomatic entities, Iran and the United States. Their lack of diplomatic ties over four decades underscores the complexity of such a deal.

Of greater significance than these marginal issues is securing respective national interests by Tehran and Washington. It is crucial to note that the pathway to realizing these gains has been through dialogue and diplomacy. Although protracted, these talks have ultimately yielded either complete or partial satisfaction for both parties involved. The success of this diplomatic feat transpires against a backdrop of ongoing pronounced differences between Iran and America across a multitude of issues and mutual reproaches and allegations that persisted over the past two years.

Amidst this environment of continual disagreements and fluctuating tensions, the prisoner exchange deal imparts a significant lesson. It underscores that diplomacy, albeit time-taking, stands as a more reliable and less costly avenue for securing benefits. According to some experts, this agreement could serve the dual purpose of mitigating and confining tensions between the two parties while also fostering further dialogues on other contentious subjects, including the nuclear issue and the lifting of US sanctions on Iran.

However, it is prudent for both Iran and the United States to exercise caution in the face of potentially destabilizing actions and maneuvers undertaken by certain political factions and states. Such entities may harbor vested interests in stoking tensions between Tehran and Washington. It is imperative to remain vigilant and resolute in ensuring that the path of diplomacy remains unobstructed until an opportune juncture for discussions regarding sanctions and the nuclear issue presents itself.

Blinken's 'Lie'

Tehran, Washington reach deal on prisoners, frozen funds



By Javad
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Iran and the United States have reached an agreement that would see the release of prisoners from both sides and unfreezing \$6 billion in Iranian funds illegally held in South Korea for years.

According to a statement released by Iran's Foreign Ministry on Thursday, the process of the freeing several billion dollars of Iran's oil revenues blocked in South Korea is underway. The statement added that the release of several Iranians illegally imprisoned in US prisons under the pretext of violation of US sanctions will be realized soon. The Foreign Ministry noted that Tehran had received

the necessary guarantee for Washington's commitment to the deal.

The ministry underlined that it is up to Iran and Iranian authorities on how to utilize the funds.

That assertion is at odds with comments made by the officials in the US.

John Kirby, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said on Thursday that Iran is "only going to be able to use that money for humanitarian purposes."

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also claimed that Iran's own funds would be used and transferred to restricted accounts such that the monies can only be used for humanitarian purposes. He said that the United States would offer no sanctions relief to Iran under the deal.

It seems that the US administration is not saying the truth to US politicians about the details of the agreement and wants to show that it has not violated the sanctions the US itself imposed on Iran. It also seems that a recent US military buildup in the Persian Gulf is a move by the Biden administration to appease Republicans before the unveiling of the deal with Iran.

The potential release of Iranian assets has drawn fierce criticism in the US, with top Republicans claiming that President Joseph Biden had paid a ransom for the US citizens, and that the deal would embolden the Islamic Republic.

The New York Times had earlier reported that under the deal, the US will unfreeze nearly \$6 billion



John Kirby, a spokesman for the US National Security Council

of Iran's assets in South Korea, putting the funds in an account in the Central Bank of Qatar. According to officials at the US State Department and the National Security Council, Iran has already transferred five American prisoners into

house arrest as a first step in the agreement.

Iran's mission to the United Nations also confirmed the transfer of American prisoners into house arrest, saying, "As part of a humanitarian cooperation agreement mediated by a

third-party government, Iran and the US have agreed to reciprocally release and pardon five prisoners. The transfer of these prisoners [to house arrest] marks a significant initial step in the implementation of this agreement."

BRICS membership...

Although the conflict in Ukraine seems to recreate the division of the world into two blocks as during the Cold War period, the Western world appears cohesive while a second block is formed by a heterogeneous set of powers with very different political systems, economies, cultures, and religious profiles. The goal of these powers is to sit at the negotiating table as equals and create economic growth and a balance for the benefit of the interests of all countries involved.

Against the backdrop of these momentous changes are new organisations such as the BRICS. Established in 2010, the original acronym 'BRIC' was coined in 2001 by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill to describe fast-growing economies that would collectively dominate the global economy by 2050. According to Aaron O'Neill, combined, the BRICS bloc had a GDP of over \$26.03 trillion in 2022, which is slightly more than

the United States. It is predicted that China's GDP will overtake that of the US by the end of the 2020s to become the largest economy in the world. Meanwhile, some estimate that India will also overtake the US around the middle of the century. One of the key topics on the BRICS agenda is to conduct more trade among member nations in local currencies and reduce the reliance on the US dollar. As a consequence of Washington removing Russian banks from SWIFT, several Eurasian countries already exchanged gas with local currencies last year.

According to Jo Sullivan, a former White House economist, BRICS countries collectively export more than they import. They do not need to borrow money from non-BRICS nations like the US or the EU to import goods. So, the rest of the world would have no source of leverage on them.

At the closing ceremony of the BRICS summit dubbed "Iran and BRICS: Prospects

for Partnership and Cooperation" at the Foreign Ministry's Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran on August 8, 2023, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian renewed the country's interest in joining the economic bloc, saying the Islamic Republic can be a "reliable and influential" partner.

Amir-Abdollahian emphasized the need for collaboration among developing nations and the global south in his speech. In this regard, it is important to recall Iran's renewed African policy. Although Tehran is still working to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, the continued failures in the talks and the general lack of trust in the European interlocutors — who failed to maintain the pact alive when the US unilaterally withdrew — have pushed the Islamic Republic to emerge from Western isolation and reorganise a network of contacts with non-aligned countries. In line with this approach, in March 2023, the inaugu-

ral Economic Cooperation Summit between Iran and West African countries took place. Subsequently, President Ebrahim Raeisi embarked on a three-country trip to Africa in mid-July, marking the first time an Iranian president has undertaken such a visit in over 11 years. Cooperation has increased also with Latin American countries and Eurasia, including Central Asia, the Caucasus, and recently, the Gulf.

Amir-Abdollahian further added that the economic and political alliances in the developing world aim to strengthen their bargaining power during international negotiations, especially at the United Nations. Recent Iranian foreign policies marked an improvement in the country's economic performance despite decades of sanctions. The development of existing free trade zones and the establishment of new ones has become one of the major economic approaches of the Iranian government. Secretary of Iran's Free Zones High Council Hojatollah Abdolmaleki said the value of exports from Ira-

nian free trade and special economic zones last year was close to \$18 billion, with a trade balance of these zones reaching \$700 million positive for the first time. Oil export has also increased, and Iran secured membership or free trade agreements with important economic organisations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Undoubtedly, Tehran has proved an unexpected resilience, developing an ability to positively leverage the unique set of circumstances surrounding the Islamic Republic, particularly isolation, because of international sanctions. Joining BRICS, which includes Russia and China, could help Tehran bypass economic sanctions and take part in global growth. Vice versa, for BRICS, Iran represents a great opportunity. Europe has long looked at the Islamic Republic with interest given its enormous unexploited potential but wasn't able to access it due to sanctions. The Islamic Republic has the second worldwide re-

serves of gas and is rich in oil. It shares borders with 13 states and has strategic access to the Caspian Sea, the Persian Gulf, and central Asian and Caucasian regions, in addition to being part of international transit corridors. Its strong commitment to multilateralism, its focus on the growth of production and trade, and its enhancement of economic ties with regional actors despite ideological or political friction proved the country might be a valuable candidate for the bloc and contribute to balancing the Group of Seven (G7) sphere of influence.

It is also important to underline that in the MENA area, Saudi Arabia is the first trading partner of the BRICS countries and is discussing joining the New Development Bank (NDB), as the UAE did in 2021. The normalisation of relations between Riyadh and Tehran in addition to Beijing's investments in both countries will further increase the success possibility of the BRICS bloc, reduce disputes, and increase Iran's international presence.



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Raeisi urges involving locals in Sistan and Baluchestan's development

National Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi stressed utilizing the talents and potentials of the locals in developing the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan. Making the remarks during a meeting with the members of the province's Strategic Development Council on Thursday, the president highlighted the valuable efforts that were taken for the flourishing and development of the border province, stressing the necessity

for the continuity of such efforts, Fars news agency reported.

He described the delegation of special authorities to the governor of Sistan and Baluchestan as essential for the day-to-day management of the province and the solution of its problems, while urging all directors to cooperate with the governor. Among the issues raised and addressed during the meeting were allocating a budget for supplying water to the province, following up on the allocated credits for the



Zahedan-Chabahar railway line, and accelerating employment projects by making mines of the province operational.