



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
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March 25, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As you may know, on January 4, 2021, amid a dispute over sanctions relief, Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps seized a South Korean-flagged tanker and detained its crew.<sup>1</sup> Public reports suggest that the United States is involved in facilitating a \$1 billion payment to Iran by South Korea in order to free this vessel and its captain.<sup>2</sup>

On March 10, 2021, you were asked about these reports at a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Specifically, in response to a question by Rep. Steube (FL-17), you stated that these reports were "inaccurate."

On March 11, 2021, Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, issued a Tweet in which he referenced the funds in question and said they would be used for humanitarian purchases and accessed through the "Swiss Channel,"<sup>3</sup> also known as the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA). In addition, the Governor of Iran's Central Bank, Abdolnasser Hemmati, claimed that South Korea's government had "agreed to return Iran's financial resources" by allowing Iran to access its frozen assets in South Korean banks to make humanitarian purchases under the Swiss Channel.<sup>4</sup> As you are aware, the SHTA is the first operational channel established under the framework announced by the U.S. Department of State and the Treasury Department in October 2019 to facilitate humanitarian trade with Iran.

We respectfully request you answer the following questions:

1. Would the United States view the alleged transfer of \$1 billion in funds from South Korean banks to Iran, either directly or through the Swiss Channel, as sanctionable activity? If not, why not?
2. Is the State Department or the Department of the Treasury aware of any efforts to allow Iran to access funds held in South Korean financial institutions either through a direct transfer of funds or through the Swiss Channel?
3. Have there been any conversations between the United States and South Korea wherein a U.S. official suggested that Iran may be allowed to use funds held in South Korean financial institutions to make

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-tanker-int-idUSKBN299188>

<sup>2</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iran-sailors-seized-south-korean-tanker-released-75631540>

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/JZarif/status/1369982502404784133>

<sup>4</sup> <https://irandaily.ir/News/291525.html>

humanitarian purchases through the Swiss Channel before Iran re-enters into the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)?

4. Does the State Department intend to allow Iran to use funds held in South Korean financial institutions to make humanitarian purchases through the Swiss Channel before Iran re-enters into compliance with the JCPOA?
5. Will the State Department and the Department of the Treasury commit to not allowing Iran to access funds held in South Korean financial institutions through the Swiss Channel before Iran re-enters into compliance with the JCPOA?

We appreciate your prompt attention to this important request.

Sincerely,



BRYAN STEIL  
Member of Congress



W. GREGORY STEUBE  
Member of Congress



JIM BANKS  
Member of Congress