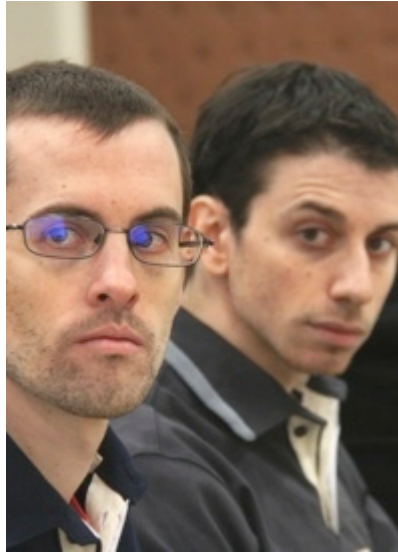




Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 13, 2011

Iran to Release American Prisoners

In an effort touted as one to reduce tensions with the rest of the world, Iran has pledged to release two Americans held hostage in the country. The announcement comes just as Iranian President Ahmadinejad plans to visit the United Nations in New York to discuss nuclear talks.



The *Guardian* [reports](#):

The pair [Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal], both now 29 (at left), were arrested by Iranian security officials in July 2009 along with a friend, Sarah Shourd, 33, after walking across an unmarked border between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan. Shourd who became engaged to Bauer while in jail, was [released last September](#) on health grounds and for the same bail sum.

Both American hostages were sentenced to eight years in jail for espionage and for illegally crossing the border. A lawyer for the men submitted an appeal against the sentences and Amnesty International called the conviction a “mockery of justice.”

The court’s verdict reportedly indicated a divide between Iran’s judiciary and Ahmadinejad’s government, since the Iranian foreign ministry officials at the time of trial indicated that the two men would be freed.

The Americans are now to be released on bail of \$500,000. The *Guardian* notes that Iran has a “long history of asking for large amounts of money as bail.” Last December, for example, Iranian blogger Hossein Derakhshan was released on bail of \$1.5 million.

Details of the arrangement followed an announcement by Ahmadinejad revealed that he would be permitting Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal to return home.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton indicates that the federal government is “encouraged by what the Iranian government has said.” She adds, “We obviously hope that we will see a positive outcome from what appears to be a decision by the government.”

The families have reportedly been informed of the news, but the family has been discouraged from making public statements on the ordeal, as to avoid placing the two men in greater danger. However, a website devoted to freeing the two hikers, called FreetheHikers, has excitedly announced on the webpage, “Iran Says Shane and Josh to be Freed by Thursday!”

Ahmadinejad clearly hopes to garner some positive public attention from this endeavor, as he has announced that he has granted Bauer and Fattal a “unilateral pardon.” He said, “I am helping to arrange for their release in a couple of days so they will be able to return home. This is of course going to be a unilateral humanitarian gesture.”



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Some are questioning Ahmadinjad's motives, though some believe the decision is a result of international pressure. Others believe it may have something to do with the recent announcement by Iran's nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili to resume nuclear talks with the European Union.

According to Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast, Iran is ready for further talks with world power "with respect to cooperation on common ground" and asserts that the talks will likely clear up any "misunderstandings" about the nuclear program through "positive, constructive" contracts.

The *New York Times* [reports](#), "Fereydoon Abbasi, the head of Iran's atomic energy agency, offered to allow international inspectors "full supervision" of the country's nuclear activities for the next five years in return for the lifting of the mounting international sanctions against his country."

While Iran contends its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, many in Western nations fear it is intended to build atomic weapons.

Photo: In this Feb. 6, 2011 file photo, U.S. hikers Shane Bauer, left, and Josh Fattal, attend their trial at the Tehran Revolutionary Court,

Iran: AP Image



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