



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 22, 2011

American “Hikers” Freed From Iran After Two Years

In what appeared to be a political maneuver timed to coincide with a UN address by its president, Iran freed two Americans it had held for the last two years. Shane Bauer, Joshua Fattal (photo at left), and a third American, Sarah Shourd, had been arrested in 2009 while reportedly hiking along the Iran-Iraq border. Bauer and Fattal were later convicted of espionage, a move designed to set up an ultimate swap of the pair with payment of \$500,000 bail for each man.



[ForeignPolicy.com](#) reported that Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was scheduled to address the UN General Assembly on September 22, and the release of Bauer and Fattal may have been a gesture of goodwill before the speech. Foreign Policy explained that Ahmadinejad had signaled last week that Bauer and Fattal would be granted a pardon, but the Americans' release was delayed by Iranian political infighting and the fact that one of the judges in their case was on vacation. The government of Oman reportedly paid \$1 million in bail for the hikers.

Shourd, who was released last year (also for \$500,000) and is engaged to Bauer, was present in Oman to greet her friends as they stepped off the plane from Iran. “We’re so happy we are free,” Fattal said briefly before the pair and their families left the airport.

“Today can only be described as the best day of our lives,” the families of the two men said in a statement. “We have waited for nearly 26 months for this moment and the joy and relief we feel at Shane and Josh’s long-awaited freedom knows no bounds. We now all want nothing more than to wrap Shane and Josh in our arms, catch up on two lost years and make a new beginning, for them and for all of us.”

President Obama, at the United Nations for his own address to the global government body, called it “wonderful, wonderful news about the hikers; we are thrilled. It’s a wonderful day for them and for us.”

The [Associated Press](#) said of the release of the pair,

[It] capped complicated diplomatic maneuvers over a week of confusing signals by Iran’s leadership. Although the fate of Fattal and Bauer gripped America, it was on the periphery of the larger showdowns between Washington and Tehran that include Iran’s nuclear program and its ambitions to widen military and political influence in the Middle East and beyond.



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While a week before their release Ahmadinejad had said the two Americans could be freed within days, the Iranian president was apparently overruled by religious leaders in the nation, who have waged a stinging campaign against the president and his allies in recent months as part of power struggle, reported the AP. The clerics made it clear: Only they have the authority to set the timing and ground rules to release the men. After several days of halting progress, their Iranian defense attorney Masoud Shafiei secured on [September 22] the necessary judicial approval for the bail \$500,000 for each man.

According to the [Washington Post](#), the efforts to secure the release of the pair included a year-long effort by a group of Washington-based religious leaders and a former U.S. diplomat, all with prior experience dealing with clerics and officials in Iran. The *Post* explained that the efforts to free the men had gained momentum thanks to a meeting in a New York hotel conference room in September 2010, shortly after Shourds release. There, a private delegation met with Ahmadinejad and Irans U.N. ambassador, Mohammad Khazaee. Among those involved in the meeting, reported the *Post*, were Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, archbishop emeritus of the Archdiocese of Washington; the Right Rev. John Bryson Chane, an Episcopal bishop and interim dean of Washington National Cathedral; and William Miller, a former U.S. ambassador who helped bring home many Americans during the 1979 Tehran hostage crisis.

Those negotiations led to a trip to Iran, arranged and financially backed in part, reported the *Post*, by [Search for Common Ground](#), a 29-year-old nonprofit group that promotes peace in conflict zones and gained notoriety in the late 1990s for taking American wrestlers to Iran for exhibition matches. John Marks, the groups president, said that he had very strong assurance that the delegation would bring the hikers home. That was the reason, frankly, we went ahead and bought this tickets. This was the real deal. They wouldnt have gone for nothing.... We put our money on the line.

While their fellow countrymen generally applauded the release of the two Americans, their rsums revealed a political philosophy that would be out of mainstream American thought. Press accounts described Fattel as an environmental activist, while Bauer boasted a degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of California-Berkeley. That background helped to explain Bauers subtly political statement shortly after his release: Two years in prison is too long and we sincerely hope for the freedom of other political prisoners and other unjustly imprisoned people in America and Iran.

Ross Kaminsky of the neoconservative [American Spectator](#) couldnt resist a retort to Bauers equalization of those incarcerated in the two countries. Seriously? wondered Kaminsky. Someone held in Irans notorious [Evin Prison](#) for two years for and released on a half-million dollar bribe after being charged with spying for walking on the wrong side of an undrawn line in the desert is suggesting moral equivalence between those whom America imprisons and those, including hundreds of political prisoners, in Iranian jails, not least Evin?

Noting that, in addition to being a Berkley graduate, Bauer served as a free-lance journalist for the left-leaning [New America Media](#), Kaminsky drew several conclusions from the case, among them, Parents, please dont let your kids go to Berkeley, and, There is absolutely no chance that Shane Bauer is a spy at least not for the United States.

Photo: U.S. hikers Shane Bauer, left, and Josh Fattal, attend their trail in Iran: AP Images



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