

# U.S. Reps. Steil, Steube, Banks: Urge Secretary of State to Provide Answers Regarding U.S. Involvement in \$1 Billion Ransom Payment

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.**—Today, Congressman Bryan Steil (WI-01), Congressman Greg Steube (FL-17) and Republican Study Committee (RSC) Chairman Jim Banks (IN-03) [led a letter to U.S. State Department Secretary Antony Blinken](#) seeking answers regarding the United States' involvement in facilitating a \$1 billion ransom payment from South Korean to Iran.

“The Biden administration appears to be using loopholes when dealing with the Iranian regime. I am again asking direct, yes or no questions on the United States' involvement in facilitating a South Korean ransom payment to Iran. If the Biden administration is involved in transferring funds to Iran, Congress and the American people must be informed. Biden administration officials continue to deflect and refuse to answer questions from Members of Congress regarding this issue. I want answers. Congress must be informed of the administration's actions,” **said Steil.**

“It was reassuring to hear Secretary Blinken deny claims of the United States working with South Korea to unfreeze \$1 billion in Iranian money, despite their continued terrorist activities. However, we need a much clearer answer and for him to specifically address any plans, intent or collaboration from the United States to allow Iran to access their South Korean frozen assets to make so-called

humanitarian purchases through the Swiss Channel. I look forward to Secretary Blinken's response and urge him to remain committed to countering our adversaries in Iran," **said Steube.**

"The Biden administration has to stop stonewalling and must come clean regarding whether they facilitated sanctions relief for the thugs in Tehran. I'm glad to co-lead this letter with my colleagues Rep. Bryan Steil and Rep. Greg Steube. The RSC will continue to investigate until we get to the bottom of what is going on," **said Banks.**

Earlier this month, [Steil asked U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen for information into foreign reports](#) that the United States is facilitating this payment from South Korea to Iran. [Yellen responded to Steil](#), answering none of his questions and referring Steil to the State Department for additional information.

[Read today's letter to Secretary Blinken below:](#)

*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. 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.*

*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," 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. 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 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*

1. *Gregory Steube*

*Jim Banks*

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