

# COVER EMAIL

I wanted to make sure you saw the below email & attachments from the Qatari Embassy highlighting Qatar's mediation role in the historic ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas and the successful effort to secure the release of two American citizens held in Afghanistan.

Please let us know if you have any questions. We are always happy to help arrange a meeting between your office and the Embassy to discuss U.S.-Qatar diplomacy and our joint efforts to advance peace and security in the Middle East.

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## **THE SUCCESS OF US-QATAR DIPLOMACY IN ACTION**

Good Morning,

We hope this email finds you well. We would like to take the opportunity to update you on two major developments out of the region.

1. Sunday, the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas went into effect, halting a conflict that has lasted over a year and facilitating the release of hostages. As you may have seen, some hostages held by Hamas were returned to Israel already. Qatar's mediation role focused from the beginning on three clear goals: release of the hostages and easing of the humanitarian crisis; preventing the conflict from spreading to the broader region; and finding a sustainable path forward for both Israel and Palestine. Qatar is immensely grateful to President Biden and President Trump for their selfless personal engagement, and the remarkable collaboration of their teams, in concluding this agreement.
2. We are pleased to announce the successful efforts of the State of Qatar in facilitating the release of two American citizens who were held in Afghanistan, in exchange for the release of an Afghan citizen who was detained in the United States. The success in the exchange of detainees and the release of prisoners extends the achievements of US-Qatar diplomacy.

Please find below more details on Qatar's role in the mediation of the Israel-Hamas conflict and the signing of the ceasefire agreement.

Please find attached the official State of Qatar announcement regarding the release of two Americans from Afghanistan, and a CNN article with more information.

As always, the Embassy welcomes the opportunity to answer any questions you may have and provide additional details. We would be pleased to meet with members of your team or arrange a meeting with our Ambassador and your member.

Kind Regards,

The Embassy of the State of Qatar

The Gaza ceasefire agreement announced January 15 is welcome news, not least for the hostages and the civilians who have endured 15 months of unspeakable misery. In committing to this agreement, Israel and Hamas have promised to manage their conflicts peacefully, and to work seriously to achieve lasting solutions. We hope and pray that they will honor these promises.

This agreement required many long months of challenging negotiations in Doha and elsewhere, often frustrating, and always accompanied by the painful realization that each day of delay meant more human tragedy. There were moments of promise, including the November 2023 temporary truce and release of 100 hostages. But the prolonged violence and slow progress at the negotiating table was heartbreaking.

Alongside our partners, Egypt and the United States, Qatar's mediation role focused from the beginning on three clear goals: release of the hostages and easing of the humanitarian crisis; preventing the conflict from spreading to the broader region; and finding a sustainable path forward for both Israel and Palestine. The January 15 agreement addresses those goals.

Qatar is immensely grateful to President Biden and President Trump for their selfless personal engagement, and the remarkable collaboration of their teams in concluding this agreement. Once again, America was an indispensable partner for peace.

As always, there were critics along the way, attacking the mediators from the comfort of a safe distance. Qatar was accused of a litany of invented claims of partiality. Many of the critics plainly preferred that the negotiations fail. From the beginning of human conflict, messengers and mediators have endured such attacks. In the end, what mattered was the hard, patient work of bringing the warring parties together to reach a deal. The results speak for themselves.

Clearly, there is more hard work ahead. Qatar will remain engaged as long as we can continue to contribute to dialogue and diplomacy.

We will continue to share information as events develop.

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**ATTACHMENT A**



وزارة الخارجية  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
دولة قطر • State of Qatar

## The State of Qatar announces the successful facilitation of a detainee swap between the United States of America and Afghanistan

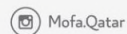
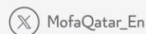
Doha | January 21, 2025

The State of Qatar announced the successful facilitation of a detainee swap between the United States of America and Afghanistan.

In a statement to Qatar News Agency, His Excellency Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh Al Khulaifi, Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that the good offices of the State of Qatar have resulted in the release of two American citizens who had been detained in Afghanistan, in exchange for the release of an Afghan citizen detained in the United States of America, stressing that all of them arrived in Doha, and the necessary arrangements were made in preparation for their return to their respective countries.

His Excellency expressed Qatar's gratitude to both the Afghan Caretaker Government and the Government of the United States of America for their positive response to the State of Qatar's efforts and their cooperation in facilitating the detainee swap process. His Excellency expressed the State of Qatar's hope that this agreement would pave the way for achieving further understandings as a means to resolve disputes through peaceful means.

Media & Communication Department



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His Excellency emphasized that the success of this Detainee swap underscores, once again, the position of the State of Qatar as a reliable partner at the regional and international levels, and reflects, as well, Qatar's effective role in the making of peace and enhancing security and stability in the region and the world.

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs pointed out that Qatar's foreign policy is based on the constructive dialogue as a strategic option to bring viewpoints closer, pointing in this regard to the successes of Qatari diplomacy in a number of important files, emphasizing Qatar's pivotal role in the field of mediation, including humanitarian efforts and the reunification of families. He also pointed out that the State of Qatar has emerged as an effective party in providing innovative diplomatic and humanitarian solutions aimed at addressing crises, and its continuous efforts have been able to alleviate the suffering of those affected, the latest of which is its efforts with partners to reach a ceasefire deal in the Gaza Strip and the swap of detainees and prisoners there.

His Excellency affirmed Qatar's steadfast support for all segments of the brotherly Afghan people and reiterated its ongoing endeavors to achieve security, stability, and prosperity in Afghanistan.

**ATTACHMENT B**

# Two Americans held in Afghanistan traded for Taliban prisoner in final Biden deal delayed until Trump took office

[Alex Marquardt](#)



CNN —

In the very last hours of [President Joe Biden's](#) time in office, a prisoner exchange years in the making was finally struck: the Taliban agreed to swap two Americans being held in Afghanistan for one Taliban member serving a life sentence in a US prison.

But there was an unexpected delay (at least in part due to bad weather in

Washington and Kabul) and [Donald Trump](#) was officially back in the White House when Americans [Ryan Corbett](#) and William McKenty were handed over and on their way home early Tuesday, exchanged for Afghan Taliban member Khan Mohammed who was convicted in 2008 on narco-terrorism charges.

Mohammed had been flown by officials from the US to Doha. Qatar facilitated the trade by hosting several rounds of US negotiations with the Taliban and also provided logistical support to the operations to get the two American men out of Kabul, according to multiple people familiar with the details of the swap.

The outgoing administration's plan for the trade with the Taliban was communicated to Trump's national security adviser Mike Waltz by Biden's adviser Jake Sullivan.

"They are on board with this deal," the Biden official said. "They have acknowledged it, and they have not objected."

A senior Trump administration official pushed back on their approval of the swap.

"While we would not do the deal that the Biden administration did at the end, we are always happy to have two Americans home," the Trump official said.

Biden's envoy for hostage affairs, Ambassador Roger Carstens, had been dispatched to Doha along with Mohammed, a person familiar with the trade said. Carstens' time in government was also supposed to end when Trump came into office, but he was already on the move during Monday's presidential transfer of power. A senior Biden administration official declined to say exactly where Mohammed would be handed over to the Taliban and the Americans would be picked up.

On top of the bad weather delaying things, one person briefed on the trade said the Taliban preferred to let Trump take the win for the deal.

"They [the Taliban] didn't want the news to die during the inauguration and they want the Trump administration to have the credit," the source said.

Carstens has been helping lead efforts to get at least four Americans released by the Taliban and recently met representatives in Doha with a [new offer](#). Publicly US officials had discussed freeing Corbett and two others, George Glezzmann and Mahmoud Habibi. All three were detained in 2022.

Little is known about McKenty and what he was doing in Afghanistan. The Biden White House declined to offer any details, saying only that his case was known to them and his family has previously asked for privacy around his case.

"The Taliban has rejected everything every single time," said a senior Biden administration official who discussed the negotiations on condition of anonymity, adding that they had "put on the table several significant offers."

"In [Biden's] waning days there's been a real push, as there always is, to try to figure out if we can make progress on those who remain, who remain top of mind for the president and the administration, even as he is walking out the door," the official said, while acknowledging that the next Trump administration likely put added pressure on the Taliban.

"The incoming administration has made several public statements about their expectation that Americans be freed from Afghanistan and that there would be consequences if that were not the case," the official said. "I think the Taliban's decision to act now with respect to Ryan [Corbett] is in part motivated by that."

Corbett and McKenty are expected to land around midday in the US, but their destination is unclear. In the past, Americans held abroad have been taken to the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, which has a specialized program for reintegration.

## Almost 2 years of negotiations

The release early Tuesday is the result of two years of negotiations and multiple trips to Doha by White House and State Department officials to meet with Taliban representatives, a Biden National Security Council spokesperson said. The CIA was also involved in the discussions and Tuesday's operation.

Biden officials expressed disappointment that the two other Americans, Glezmann and Habibi, weren't handed over but said they couldn't turn down the offer for at least Corbett and McKenty.

The Taliban has never acknowledged holding Habibi but the US still considers him a hostage.

The agreement with the Taliban appears to have been relatively sudden: earlier this month Corbett's wife, Anna, [told Fox News](#) that she had spoken with Biden and got no indication her husband would be freed before the inauguration.

"What I heard him say is he is not bringing Ryan home," said Anna Corbett, who also met with Waltz, after traveling to Mar-a-Lago, uninvited, to try to meet with Trump.

There was no deal to speak of at the time, the senior Biden official responded, as they were still working on it "right down to the very end."

Corbett and her three teenage children were invited to Monday's inauguration by Trump's incoming hostage envoy, Adam Bohler. In a statement to CNN, the family thanked members of the Trump and Biden teams as well as the Qatari government.

"It was our hope that Ryan, George and Mahmoud would be returned to their families together, and we cannot imagine the pain that our good fortune will bring them," the family said. "We recognize the immense privilege of our family's reunion today, and pledge to keep praying – and fighting – for George and Mahmoud's swift release."

The Biden administration [had previously considered](#) releasing a Guantanamo Bay prisoner, alleged to have been close to Osama bin Laden, in exchange for Ryan Corbett, Glezmann and Habibi. The prisoner, Muhammad Rahim al Afghani, who has never been charged, was not part of Tuesday's trade.

Instead, it was Mohammed who was freed in the swap, after being arrested in late 2006 and extradited from Afghanistan to the United States in 2007, according to the [Justice Department](#). The department called Mohammed a "violent jihadist" and said he was a member of the Taliban who tried to kill US soldiers with rockets.

In secretly recorded conversations with an informant, Mohammed said that selling drugs that would be shipped to the United States, including heroin, was a form of jihad: "Whether it is by opium or by shooting, this is our common goal."

"May God turn all the infidels to dead corpses," Mohammed said, according to the Justice Department.

He was sentenced to two life sentences in prison in 2008 after being convicted on drug and narco-terrorism charges for distributing heroin and

opium in order to provide value to “a person or group that has engaged or is engaging in terrorist activity.”

The Taliban welcomed the prisoner exchange deal, with Afghanistan’s Foreign Ministry calling it “a good example of resolving issues through dialogue.”

“The Islamic Emirate views positively those measures taken by the United States that contribute to the normalization and expansion of relations between the two countries,” the Foreign Ministry concluded.

## **Latest Americans to be freed**

The prisoner exchange is one of the final moves made by an administration whose legacy will in part be defined by the disastrous and deadly [US withdrawal in August 2021](#) from Afghanistan that saw the Taliban come to power. Biden has argued the withdrawal was forced on his administration by Trump who struck a deal in early 2020 with the Taliban to pull all US troops out.

This deal comes in the first days of a tenuous ceasefire and hostage agreement in Gaza that the US and Qatar were central in mediating. Biden – and Carstens – has seen a string of successes in securing the releases of Americans wrongfully detained abroad, including recently from [China](#) and [Russia](#).

Eighty Americans deemed unjustly held around the world were freed under Biden, the White House said.

The Biden administration did not acknowledge the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan but engaged with the group in Doha to discuss issues like human rights and the detained Americans.

Corbett had lived in Afghanistan for more than a decade prior to the collapse of the Afghan government with his wife and their three children, doing non-governmental organization work. During the Taliban takeover in August 2021 the family was evacuated.

Corbett returned in January 2022 to Afghanistan to see if he could renew his business visa and to check on his business. He was greeted by the Taliban-run government with effusive praise for his business, according to Anna Corbett. So, Ryan Corbett returned in August 2022 for what was supposed to be a 10-day trip, with no indication that he was in any danger.

Roughly one week into his visit, he was asked to come in for questioning by the local police. It was then that he and a German colleague, and two local staff members were all detained. All but Corbett had been subsequently released.

The Biden White House said Corbett was never charged with a crime.

"Once the copy of his passport went down to Kabul, that that's where they saw that they had somebody with the blue passport that they might be able to use politically," Anna Corbett [previously told](#) CNN.

"His health is declining. His mental health is declining. And he is still alive, but we don't know how long and we need to bring him back home immediately," she said at the time.

The [families of other](#) detained Americans in Afghanistan have long been pressing the US government to do more to secure the release of their loved ones.

In a letter to Biden in July, Aleksandra Glezmann wrote that her husband's "health is failing," that he had a benign tumor on one side of his face, was

losing vision in one eye and had developed sores and ulcers on his body.

“We urge the Taliban to immediately release both George and Mahmood,” Biden said in a statement shared with CNN before he left office. “We also urge the next Administration to continue our efforts to deter hostage-taking and wrongful detentions and to bring all unjustly detained Americans home.”

*This story has been updated with additional details.*

*CNN’s Masoud Popalzai, Lucas Lillieholm, Jennifer Hansler and Jack Forrest contributed to this report.*