

Agreement reached after weeks of negotiations

# The secret talks that led to Gaza hostage deal

STEVE HOLLAND  
WASHINGTON  
REUTERS

Shortly after Hamas militants took hostages during their deadly assault on southern Israel on Oct. 7, the government of Qatar contacted the White House with a request: Form a small team of advisers to help work to get the captives freed.

That work, begun in the days after the hostages were taken, finally bore fruit with the announcement of a prisoner swap deal mediated by Qatar and Egypt and agreed to by Israel, Hamas and the United States.

The secretive effort included tense personal diplomatic engagement by U.S. President Joe Biden, who held a number of urgent conversations with the emir of Qatar and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the weeks leading up to the deal.

It also involved hours of painstaking negotiations including U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, CIA Director Bill Burns, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and his deputy Jon Finan, and U.S. Middle East envoy Brett McGurk, among others.

Two officials involved in the effort provided extensive details of the work that led to an agreement in which 50 hostages are to be freed in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners during a four-day pause in fighting.

Shortly after Oct. 7, Qatar — a long-established mediator in a volatile region — approached the White House with sensitive information regarding the hostages and the potential for their release, the officials said. The Qataris asked that a small team, which they called a “cell,” be established to work the issue privately with the Israelis.

Sullivan directed McGurk and another National Security Council official, Josh Geltzer, to establish the team. This was done without telling other relevant U.S. agencies because Qatar and Israel demanded extreme secrecy with only a few people to be in the know, the officials said.

McGurk, a seasoned diplomat with deep experience in the Middle East, held daily morning calls with the prime minister of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani. He reported back to Sullivan and Biden was briefed daily on the process.

Biden got an upfront look at what the vic-



Protesters hold signs in Tel Aviv on Tuesday demanding the liberation of hostages who are being held in the Gaza Strip after they were seized by Hamas gunmen on Oct. 7. REUTERS

tims of the Hamas attack endured when he held an emotional, lengthy meeting on Oct. 13 with the families of Americans who were either being held hostage or were unaccounted for.

Days later, Biden traveled to Tel Aviv for Oct. 18 talks with Netanyahu. The official said securing the release of hostages was a central focus of his discussions with Netanyahu and his war cabinet, as well as humanitarian assistance.

Five days later, on Oct. 23, the White House team's work helped yield the release of two American hostages, Natalie and Judith Raanan.

From outside Sullivan's West Wing office

McGurk, Sullivan and Finan tracked in real time the captives' difficult, multihour journey out of Gaza.

The return of the two Americans proved it was possible to gain freedom for hostages and gave confidence to Biden that Qatar could deliver through the small team that had been established, the officials said.

Now, an intensified process started to get more hostages out. When this happened, Burns began speaking regularly with Mossad director David Barnea.

Biden saw an opportunity to gain the release of a large number of hostages and that a deal for prisoners was the only realistic path to securing a pause in the fight-

ing, the officials said. On Oct. 24, with Israel poised to launch a ground offensive in Gaza, the U.S. side got word that Hamas had agreed to the parameters of a deal to release women and children, which would mean a pause and a delay in the ground invasion.

U.S. officials debated with the Israelis whether or not the ground offensive should be delayed.

The Israelis argued that the terms were not firm enough to delay, since there was no proof of life for the hostages. Hamas claimed they could not determine who was being held until a pause in fighting began.

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## Toshiba shareholders approve plan to go private

KAZUAKI NAGATA  
STAFF WRITER

Toshiba shareholders gave the green light during an emergency meeting Wednesday to consolidate the company's shares as the industrial conglomerate aims to rebuild itself as a private firm.

The decision will allow a consortium led by Japan Industrial Partners (JIP) to buy all of Toshiba's remaining shares, marking the end of its more than 70-year history of being a public firm. Toshiba has been beset by a barrage of issues over the past eight years, and the 148-year-old firm is set to be delisted from both the Tokyo Stock Exchange and Nagoya Stock Exchange on Dec. 20.

While Toshiba will be making a fresh start, some shareholders who attended the meeting expressed their frustration at the company's failure to remain a listed firm.

“Honestly, I want to keep holding Toshiba stocks because I like Toshiba. It has a history,” one shareholder said, complaining that the firm had not been transparent enough with individual investors about its plan to go private.

Another shareholder said that while dealing with activist investors may be tough, listening to various shareholders' opinions is important for helping improve the company, saying that he hopes Toshiba will return to the stock market in the future.

Other investors expressed support and understanding regarding Toshiba's decision. Calling Toshiba “Japan's pride,” one shareholder asked the firm to treat skilled engineers well and to keep making contributions to society.

Toshiba set itself on course to go private in September after the JIP-led consortium succeeded in taking control of the firm through a ¥2 trillion (\$13.4 billion) tender offer. The JIP-led group, which had gained 78.65% of Toshiba's outstanding shares through the bid, will now be able to purchase the rest of the shares to become the sole owner.

Toshiba's downward spiral began in 2015 when an accounting scandal came to light, showing that the firm had doctored its books, padding profits over seven years to the tune of hundreds of billions of yen. The scandal forced the company's president at the time and several other directors to resign.

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## LDP faces scrutiny in parliament over underreporting of funds

GABRIELE NINIVAGGI  
STAFF WRITER

Sizable omissions in political funding reports by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party took center stage in parliamentary debate on Tuesday and Wednesday as opposition lawmakers questioned the government and sounded the alarm over widespread misconduct.

According to earlier media reports, the special investigation branch of the Tokyo Public Prosecutor's Office has started inquiring into the matter following a criminal complaint stat-

ing that the five largest factions of the LDP had failed to report income earned from fundraising parties, with this totaling approximately ¥40 million (\$270,000).

Wednesday's parliamentary session began 50 minutes behind schedule due to the ruling party's refusal to comply with the opposition's requests for more transparency over the investigation.

In early remarks to the committee, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida — LDP president and chair of the party's fourth-largest faction — said he had instructed the party's Secretary-General

Toshimitsu Motegi to ask each faction to provide a suitable explanation on the specific details of the corrections made to their earlier reports.

“I am aware that we should take appropriate measures to prevent this from happening again in the future,” Kishida said, after the party refused to comment on the matter for days on the grounds the issue was still under investigation. “As a party we'll make sure that the public won't have any (more) doubts (about the LDP).”

Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan

lawmaker Yoshihiko Noda, prime minister from 2011 to 2012, said he didn't perceive any sense of urgency in the way Kishida had been handling the matter.

“Scandals on money and politics have become frequent,” Noda said. “This might only be the tip of the iceberg. Going back in time, there's a possibility that these things have been conducted on a continuous and systematic basis.”

The Political Funds Control Act stipulates that a political group hosting a fundraising party must report the name, address and occu-

pation of every participant — including private organizations or other groups — who donate a sum higher than ¥200,000. Donors are prohibited from giving more than ¥1.5 million to the same political association in a single party.

These norms were introduced to increase transparency and accountability over the usage of political funds and to regulate private-sector donations to political parties at a time of rampant scandals and widespread corruption in the political world.

This time, according to the complaint, the

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## Questions linger over N. Korea satellite launch

Analysis  
JESSE JOHNSON  
STAFF WRITER

North Korea said early Wednesday that it had successfully put its first military spy satellite into orbit, state-run media reported, after a rocket carrying the payload passed over the Japanese archipelago late Tuesday, triggering a strong condemnation from Tokyo.

Japanese, U.S. and South Korean officials, however, said that they were continuing to analyze the launch — Pyongyang's third attempt this year to put a spy satellite into orbit — and could not immediately determine whether the rocket launch or the satellite mission had been successful.

“The government is at this point not confirming whether the satellite had entered into an orbit around the Earth,” Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told a news conference Wednesday.

Matsuno, the Japanese government's top spokesman, said making that determination could take “a considerable amount of time” since it would “require a comprehen-



sive and specialized analysis.”

Earlier Wednesday, the North characterized the launch — overseen by leader Kim Jong Un — as a “legitimate” move and said the country would launch additional satellites “in a short span of time,” the official Korean Central News Agency reported.

The reclusive nation had fallen short during launch attempts in May and August, blaming those failures on technical mishaps.

Later Wednesday, KCNA said Kim had

viewed images, shot by the newly launch satellite, of the U.S. military's base on the island of Guam during a visit to the country's space agency headquarters.

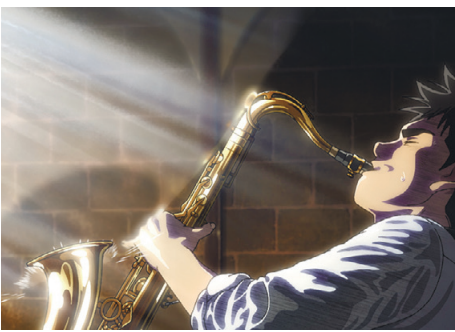
Officials told Kim that the satellite would “formally start its reconnaissance mission from December 1 after finishing 7 to 10 days' fine-tuning process.”

Meanwhile, Seoul's Cabinet announced later in the day that it would partially suspend a 2018 inter-Korean military agreement in response to the launch, and resume reconnaissance and surveillance activities around the border. That move was endorsed by President Yoon Suk-yeol.

“North Korea is clearly demonstrating that it has no will to abide by the Sept. 19 military agreement designed to reduce military tension on the Korean Peninsula and to build trust,” South Korean Prime Minister Han Duk-soo said following a Cabinet meeting.

The pact, known as the Comprehensive Military Agreement, was signed at a summit between then-South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korea's Kim. Under the deal, the two sides agreed to impose buffer zones

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