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Prisoner exchange between Stockholm and Tehran

Report on the Prisoner Exchange Involving Johan Floderus and Saaed Azizi

After almost 800 days in the infamous prison in Tehran, Evin prison, EU official Johan Floderus has now landed at Stockholm airport. Alongside with the Swedish-Iranian Saaed Azizi who was arrested in November 2023, who has also been allowed to come home to Sweden, both have taken part in a prisoner exchange with the Islamic Republic of Iran. In exchange, the "Iranian executioner", Hamid Noury, who was convicted in Sweden for crimes against international law and murder that took place in the late 1980s in Iran, was now released in exchange for Floderus and Azizi's freedom.

The exchange took place in Muscat, the capital of Oman. Only after Floderus and Azizi were in Swedish custody at the airport, not until then did the Swedish government grant Hamid Noury a pardon to prevent possible repercussions from Iran. Sweden invoked its universal jurisdiction, which allows it to try cases of crimes committed outside its borders. Hamid Noury landed in Sweden in 2019 and was then arrested shortly after, which later resulted in a sentence for murder and crimes against humanity due to participation in the execution of a large number of political prisoners in Iran in 1988.

After the prisoner exchange report, there has been criticism of the Swedish government for having excluded Ahmadreza Djalali from the release, who is in Iran, sentenced to death. According to Sweden's Prime Minister, Mr. Kristersson, he has replied that that case has been "impossible" with reference to Swedish media as Djalali has Iranian citizenship and received Swedish citizenship when he was imprisoned, and Iran does not recognize dual citizenship.

Was it right or wrong by Sweden's government?

I believe that it was a "difficult" trade-off between letting Hamid Noury be pardoned and allowed to live freely in Iran, on the other hand a very obvious and simple decision. To bring home Floderus and Azizi who have been imprisoned without any grounds for their false accusations of crimes. I would rather see them released and Noury go free than Swedish

innocents to live on the concrete floor of Evin prison. Critics even say that this will only benefit the Islamic Republic to continue with their state's hostage diplomacy and something they can repeatedly exploit if they seek to gain leverage over a specific individual or country.

Belgium recently faced a similar situation, changing its law to facilitate a prisoner exchange involving Olivier Vandecasteele, a Belgian aid worker who spent 455 days in Iran accused of espionage and was then exchanged for the Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi.

Conclusion

The risk that Tehran will continue its arrest of innocent foreign nationals who can benefit Iran in prisoner swaps or to release frozen money I believe is a fact. Even though there is a risk that Iran will continue with this hostage diplomacy, I do believe that it was the right way for the Swedish government to act in order to get its two citizens home. States, especially in the West, who know that the Islamic Republic can use “hostages” to bring home its own citizens or frozen assets, should make it explicitly clear that citizens should avoid traveling to Iran, as the countries have extremely limited resources to facilitate their return. The primary goal should be to avoid situations where individuals can be used as pawns in international diplomacy.