

You Won't Believe How Far the Iran Lobby Penetrated the US Government

In the weeks since the Obama administration announced the perilous international nuclear deal with Iran, growing attention has been paid to the network of organizations and foundations that have been actively lobbying to normalize relations between the U.S. and the Islamist regime in Tehran.

Rightly, that network is being referred to as the "Iran lobby." The welcome and much-needed scrutiny of its workings and contacts provides a salutary lesson in how to identify enemies who present themselves as friends.

At the head of the pack is the Washington, National Iranian American Council (NIAC). Led by Trita Parsi, a Swedish-Iranian immigrant, NIAC has artfully worked itself into the center of the Iran policy debate. The organization has close relations with many liberal Democrat legislators and progressive outfits like J Street, the small Jewish-but-anti-Israel advocacy group, as well as minted foundations including the Ploughshares Fund and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, both of which have donated generously to NIAC's coffers. Some of its alumnae, like Sahar Nowrouzzadeh, have even made it into the White House—in her case, as desk officer for Iran.

NIAC presents itself as a moderate, thoughtful organization. It also claims to advocate on behalf of human rights in Iran, but check the page on its website ostensibly devoted to the subject, and you will see the odd press release urging the release of Iranian-Americans currently incarcerated by the mullahs interspersed with plenty of propaganda defending the nuclear deal. Executions, torture, repression of religious minorities, systemic anti-Semitism and homophobia are all

staples of the Iranian regime's outlook and behavior—but in NIAC's airbrushed world, such matters don't even exist.

Indeed, NIAC's repeated denials that it is formally connected to the Iranian regime sound increasingly hollow. As the investigative journalist Lee Smith reported a few months ago, when writing about NIAC's legal campaign against Hassan Daioleslam, an emigre Iranian who has doggedly exposed the truth about the organization, "The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia found in 2012 the work of NIAC, which wasn't registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, 'not inconsistent with the idea that [Daioleslam] was first and foremost an advocate for the regime.'"

Last week, *The Daily Beast* published a further expose on NIAC authored by "Alex Shirazi," an Iranian dissident who wrote pseudonymously out of the fear that his family back in Iran might be targeted for reprisals. Shirazi chronicled NIAC's evolution within the broader ambitions of the Namazis, a little-known but influential Iranian family that first rose to prominence under the Shah and returned to Iranian public life following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Among the consultants affiliated with Atieh Behar (AB) Consulting, a company with strong institutional ties to influential elements within the regime, was Trita Parsi.

According to Shirazi, "While serving as president of NIAC, Parsi also wrote intelligence briefings as an 'affiliate analyst in Washington, DC' for AB, focusing on such topics as whether or not the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) would revive its anti-Iran campaigning on the eve of the Iraq war." Parsi also wrote about efforts by the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MeK), the militant Iranian opposition group that exposed Iran's Natanz nuclear facility in 2002. In 2012, MeK was de-listed as a terrorist entity by the U.S. State Department.

NIAC's slipperiness is also highlighted in an interview with

Carl Gershman, the president of the Congressionally-financed National Endowment for Democracy. Expressing regret at his decision to fund NIAC and its Iranian partner Hamyaran, a regime-sanctioned NGO, to the tune of \$200,000 between 2002 and 2006, Gershman said that NIAC had misrepresented itself: "We weren't aware when these grants were made that NIAC were presenting themselves as a were trying something that might be a way to help people on the inside [of Iran]. But that quickly became unworkable; the grant didn't work. Then NIAC showed itself as a lobby organization, so we have nothing to do with them anymore."

Better late than never. Now that the truth about NIAC is emerging, one has to ask why anyone who seeks respectability in Washington would have anything to do with Parsi and his cohorts.

NIAC's overarching aim is to strengthen the Iranian regime by boosting its ability to trade with America and its allies. That's accompanied by lots of airy, disingenuous talk about how economic openness leads to more accountable government, but there is precious little sign of the regime reforming itself. If anything, the nuclear deal has persuaded the mullahs that they achieve better results by doing the exact opposite!

What is really irksome is NIAC's presentation of its agenda as somehow in accord with the national interests of the U.S. Moreover, NIAC flaks, like its Research Director Reza Marashi, have even indulged in a bit of good ol' Jew-baiting—after Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-NY, came out against the deal, Marashi accused him of putting "Israel's interests before America's interests." Students of anti-Semitism will immediately recognize this deployment of the familiar "dual loyalty" smear; what makes this example especially rich is that it comes from the stooge of a regime whose slogan is "Death to America!" and whose military interventions across the regime have claimed the lives of hundreds of American personnel. NIAC

even insults America by claiming that it works for “human rights” in Iran and “civil rights” in the U.S., insinuating that this country is on the same moral level as one of the darkest, most repressive regimes in recent history.

When the time comes to reckon with Obama’s legacy on Iran, the role of NIAC will be understood as more than a mere footnote. Yet we shouldn’t make the same mistake as the enemies of the Jews by assigning any lobby group a mystical power.

NIAC’s agenda resonates because, as Sen. Marco Rubio correctly argued during the last GOP presidential candidate debate, the Obama administration is in retreat from the Middle East and is thereby ceding vital strategic ground to the Iranians. Backed by the Russians, the Iranians have become adept at keeping their regional allies in positions of power and influence while, under Obama, we do the precise reverse with our own.

Still, the countdown to an America under new leadership has begun. There is probably no better subject than Iran with which to demonstrate a clean break with Obama’s spineless foreign policy. And that will mean going back to basics. First, that the Islamist regime in Iran is the root of the problem, not its cure: as long as it remains in place, there should be no talk of normalization. Second, that there shouldn’t even be an Iran lobby in America, if by “Iran lobby” we mean individuals and groups like NIAC, whose mission is to sell this vicious regime as an attractive partner for Western democracies.

That NIAC has even gotten to this point speaks volumes about how the Obama administration views the world. The administration can say that its policies are about peace and multilateralism and cooperation all it wants; the net result is that the tyrants and gangsters in Moscow, Damascus, and Tehran are its primary beneficiaries. And that is nothing to be proud of.

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