

Did NIAC Defraud the National Endowment for Democracy and Congress?

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National Iranian American Council (NIAC) and its president Trita Parsi have arranged to receive congressional appropriated funds from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) through an expedited process. They have spent these funds on trivial activities aimed at enhancing false-flag Iranian NGOs that were in fact managed and controlled by Iranian Deputy Ministers or high level officials- making a mockery of the term "Non-Governmental". At the same time, NIAC and Trita Parsi have lobbied the congress to stop appropriating other funds meant for dissident democratic movements and NGOs in Iran through non NIAC channels. While NIAC's actions appear paradoxical, it is a cohesive, targeted and deceptive tactic that has three distinct but related goals:

to block resources to the NGOs not controlled by the government,

to provide resources to their showcase NGOs ,

and to funnel the American taxpayers' money to the Iranian lobby in the US to benefit Tehran's goals.

NIAC's actions with respect to the congressional appropriated funds are suspect of defrauding American taxpayers and deserve nothing short of a full congressional investigation.

NIAC obtained NED congressional appropriated funds

National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is a private, non-profit, grant-making organization that receives an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress through the Department of State.

In 2002 NED, in an unusually expeditious review process, provided a grant to NIAC to "design and implement a two-day media training workshop in Iran for forty staff members from five civic groups..." [1]

It is noteworthy that NIAC's published mission is focused on empowering Iranian Americans in the US civil life, and has no provision on civil life inside Iran. It is baffling why such newly founded organization as its first action item applied for funds to do capacity building in Tehran. The first grant was obtained in less than 4 weeks after NIAC was created. NED requires a two month review process after the application is submitted.

The original grant was renewed at least two more times. These grants are about \$200,000 so far. It is also unclear how a startup group, with no track record, can secure a grant from NED in four weeks. At the time, Trita Parsi's only noteworthy credential was founding the Iranian lobby organization, IIC (as Parsi himself had declared*) and being connected to Bob Ney. [2]

NIAC Spent NED's funds to work with Hamyaran

NIAC used NED funds to send two of its members (with non-technical background and experience) to work with de facto Iranian government agency Hamyaran to teach NGO members how to use computer based digital media [3]. The NIAC members conducting the training were Dokhi Fassihian

(NIAC executive at the time) and Hadi Ghaemi (NIAC member):

"Among the NGOs present were BoomIran, an environmental group, the Family Planning Association, a health-based NGO focusing on reproductive health, the Cultural Research Bureau, Hamyaran, a networking and capacity-building NGO, and the Children's Literature Council, a publishing house specializing in children's books." [3]

In fact Hamyaran which organized the workshop is not an NGO but a government initiated false flag agency incepted, initiated, founded and managed by the theocratic regime of Iran. At the time Hamyaran was managed by the Deputy Minister and Under Secretary of Health Hossein Malek-Afzali. Malek-Afzali has held high level governmental positions since 1984. Hamyaran is packed with Iranian government high level officials. Family Planning Association is again headed by Deputy Minister Malek –Afzali [4] and the Iranian high official Safieh Afshari [5]. Two of the other NGOs mentioned, were large-scale established publishing and cultural enterprises controlled by government. These two organizations have sophisticated computer and digital media infrastructures and are not in need of two non-experts to teach them how to use computers. The fifth NGO attending the workshop (BoomIran) is a small organization which shares management with Hamyaran. We will discuss these so-called independent NGOs later in this paper.

It is noteworthy that in addition to the high level management of Hamyaran by the government officials, according to Hamyaran's site, many of their daily activities such as their capacity building workshops are "under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior as part of their nationwide capacity building plan for NGOs".

NIAC's lobby to block US funds to Iranian NGOs through non NIAC channels

NIAC, while requesting and receiving the funds from NED to work with the Iranian NGOs, has lobbied congress to stop direct support for genuine and independent Iranian NGOs through non-NIAC channels. In this endeavor, they have organized petitions, congressional briefings, PR plugs and articles. Trita Parsi, shedding crocodile tears for the hardship of American taxpayers writes:

"Congress is adept at throwing money at a problem. Far better to continue doling out cash on a project than to admit it's not working. Or is it? After all, bridges are falling. We are facing major challenges in Iraq. Millions are without health insurance. In a time when the budget is increasingly stretched, Congress should reassess its spending — particularly on programs that have done more damage than good. The Iran democracy fund is a prime example of such a program. Come September, Congress will be looking for ways to fill in these budgetary potholes without increasing the budget. Where better to look for savings than in the bloated budget of the democracy program, which has hurt the very people it is aimed to assist? ... Not only would this help ensure that no more bridges fall in the American heartland, but it would also ease the burden on the most effective agent for change in Iran — the Iranian people." [6]

"The reality is that there are smart ways to help Iranian civil society and there are incredibly stupid ways. NIAC, through funding from NED, had chosen the former." [7]

Hamyaran: Iranian regime's means to control NGOs

In 1998, in an attempt to divert attention from crack down on the internal dissent, Iranian theocratic rulers created a showcase of several Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) under one umbrella organization called Hamyaran. Hamyaran, was the outcome of a conference of three sectors. The first sector, according to the conference outcomes report [8] was deputy ministers and

representatives of several Iranian ministries and the Iranian parliament. The second sector was Iranian "non-governmental organizations" headed by Malek Afzali, (an influential deputy minister himself!) The third group, according to the report, was International organizations' representatives (including United Nations). Since no representative names were included in the report, an independent determination of who these representatives were was not possible for this author. This conference of the mostly Iranian government agents decided that a new umbrella NGO, Hamyaran, will manage, coordinate and represent the showcase Iranian NGOs. This left Tehran's hands open in brutal suppression of other NGOs. Hamyaran is currently headed by Baquer Namazi (the father of Siamak Namazi who was Trita Parsi's partner in forming the Iranian lobby in the US.) Malek Afzali, remains the key member of Hamyaran management.

In addition to monitoring and controlling the Iran's NGOs, Hamyaran is charged with channeling all contacts and relations of the NGOs with the international organizations and the UN. Under the supervision of the government, Hamyaran is also charged with creating communication channels with the Iranians living in the US to utilize them as part of the Iranian lobby.

Hamyaran's report of one of their meeting in the "ministry of foreign affairs" with various government agencies attending is a clear indication of the Iranian government's strategy to use NGOs to recruit the Iranian Diaspora. The meeting was held on March 16th, 2002 to review the "grounds for mutual cooperation in the area of strengthening the ties between the Iranian Expatriates and corresponding agencies in Iran with specific emphasis on the role of NGOs in this process." In this meeting "An overall agreement was reached on the nature of cooperation between the Government Agencies, International Agencies, and concerned Iranian NGOs both domestic and abroad." According to Hamyaran's report [9] "Workshops on specific topics related to the Iranian Expatriates and the International Conference on the Role of Iranian Expatriates were considered as immediate action plans."

Baquer Namazi, Hamyaran's current leader, in 2003, the height of the brutal suppression of the Iranian civil society, said:

"... At present the new policies of the Foreign Ministry have a more facilitating role and direct cooperation of Iranian NGOs with international counterparts is smoother and easier. We invite government officials to participate, and several have come to do so. The government's professional staff has welcomed such initiatives. ... To come back to the question of the Iranian expatriates, the Foreign Ministry has been encouraging us to reach out to the Iranian experts in the Diaspora, either individually, or in a more institutionalized form such as through Iranians working at the World Bank. So in terms of policy, the trend is becoming more positive, and the regulations are being made easier, there is verbal encouragement, but there are also the banal problems such as getting visas et cetera. But generally the government is positive towards the NGOs networking with the expatriate professional Iranians who are working in Europe and in America" [10]

Conclusion

Congress and the board of National Endowment for Democracy must provide detailed information on how NIAC obtained NED funding in the first grant and in the subsequent applications. They must inquire into how the funds were spent. They must also inquire if NIAC president and members had knowledge of the active management of these NGOs by the Iranian government.

IIC site (active from 1997 to 2002 included the following statements under "Frequently Asked Questions" : Q: How long has IIC existed? A: IIC was founded in August 1997 by Trita Parsi, the present Chairman. While conducting research on Iran for US Congressmen in Washington DC in

1997, he recognized the necessity of establishing a lobbying organization in order to protect the socio-economic and political aspirations of the Iranian people on one hand, and to promote the historical and contemporary cultural and scientific contributions of people of Iranian heritage worldwide, on the other. This consequently led, in collaboration with a large number of intellectuals and experts, to the formation of Iranians for International Cooperation (IIC). "Q: What is IIC? Is it a political party or a lobby organization? A: IIC is not a political party or even a political organization. We consider ourselves a lobby organization; we use our constitutional rights to influence our elected representatives."

References:

- 1] <http://www.ned.org/grants/02programs/grants-mena.html>
- 2] <http://www.tritaparsi.com/biography.htm>
- 3] http://www.niacouncil.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=598&Itemid=2
- 4] <http://www.hamyaran.org/productinformation.php?pid=8>
- 5] <http://www.fpairi.org/org.htm>
- 6] <http://thehill.com/op-eds/fund-bridges-not-failed-policy-2007-09-11.html>
- 7] <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/trita-parsi/smells-like-desperation-b-73575.html>
- 8] <http://www.hamyaran.org/fulltext.php?tid=30>
- 9] <http://web.archive.org/web/20030402193515/www.iranngos.org/>
- 10] <http://programs.ssrc.org/gsc/publications/quarterly10/shaeryham.pdf>

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