

## Flirting with the Mullahs

Prof. Mohammad Parvin, Ph.D. and Hassan Daiouleslam - 4/7/2008

Senator Dianne Feinstein is announced as the keynote speaker of an upcoming event in Capitol Hill on US-Iran relations.<sup>1</sup> (April 6<sup>th</sup>) Trita Parsi, the president of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) will moderate the conference. Parsi was the political advisor and assistant to now the federal prisoner Bob Ney. Ney's conviction was partly related to the bribes he received from two London based international felons working with the Iranian regime.

The intentions of Senator Feinstein are not in question. Preventing a disastrous war with Iran is an honorable intent. How Senator's objectives line up with those of Trita Parsi is a different issue. In 1999, Parsi and his Tehran based partner, Siamak Namazi kicked off a project to influence the US Congress and the decision making process in favor of reducing pressure off the Iranian theocratic rulers. In their famous roadmap,<sup>2</sup> they called for the creation of an Iranian American lobby in the US "to create a balance between the competing Middle Eastern lobbies. Without it, Iran-bashing may become popular in Congress again." The "competing lobby" was AIPAC (American Israeli Public Affairs Committee). NIAC has followed the decorations of the roadmap to the last dot.<sup>3</sup>

Parsi's coauthor was Siamak Namazi, an important figure in the financial mafia of the Iranian regime. Along with his brother and sister, Namazi controls the "Atieh Bahar" firm in Tehran. "Atieh" is the leading consulting firm for foreign oil companies dealing with Tehran and maintains direct collaboration with the top leaders in Iran.<sup>3</sup>

So the question to Senator Feinstein is: why are you paving the way for those who explicitly declare that they intend to lobby you and your colleagues. Do you know who they are and why they do what they do?

In 2006, the Iran's governmental newspaper, Aftab,<sup>4</sup> published an article decorated with Parsi's close-up picture. The article's title was: "Does the Iranian lobby get active"? The author concluded that this lobby in the US acts as the regime's "unofficial Diplomacy". Separately, Gholamreza Fathnejad, the head of the Iranian Interest Section in the US (in Washington DC) praised Trita Parsi's efforts and called for increased support for him.<sup>5</sup>

When the first article exposing Parsi's connections and activities, was published in US in April 2007, a large number of governmental newspapers came to his rescue, claiming that "the Jewish lobby is attacking the Iranian lobby."<sup>6</sup>

The political implications of Senator Feinstein's speech in a session organized and moderated by Trita Parsi raise the more fundamental question about Democratic Party's attitude towards the Mullahs regime and their lobbying activities in the US. A case in point is Shahriar Afshar, from Senator Feinstein's own State, California.

In 1997, Afshar, a resident of San Diego, founded the Iranian Trade Associations to lobby the removal of US sanctions on Iran. Shahriar Afshar is also the president of "Iranian American Democrats in San Diego" which is affiliated to the Democratic Party and has participated in fundraisings with Senator Feinstein in the past.<sup>7</sup> Afshar is best known for his relations with the Iranian regime. He has been a usual participant and an active organizer of the Mullahs' oil related events and conferences. For instance, Afshar's organization (ITA) actively helped to organize [The 1998 Iranian Petroleum Conference in Cyprus](#) which was sponsored and supported by the Iranian regime. Afshar pledged to the US oil companies that he was trying to lure to the conference, that: "With several high-level Iranian government officials in attendance, your company's success in Iran may well depend on your attendance at this dynamic conference."<sup>8</sup>

The Iranian community in the US and especially in California is profoundly shocked that their Senator is promoting lobbying groups with such clear agendas. In February 2008, a large number of Iranians gathered in Beverly Hill to protest Trita Parsi's presence. Parsi's scheduled speech was

consequently cancelled. While such gathering might not actually be possible in the confines of the Senate's walls, it is up to the good Senator and her staff to do the due diligence of the background check.

Senator Feinstein's participation in this meeting is also salt of the injury of the victims of human rights violations in Iran. NIAC is an organization which so far has refused to condemn human rights violations by the Iranian regime. In fact, it has taken an active role in justifying these atrocities arguing that the United States pressure for suspension of IRI's atomic activities is the main cause of these violations! The systematic persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, the ongoing repression of women, and imprisonment torture and execution of many brave Iranians who don't submit to IRI, as well as export of Islamic revolution and continuous threats of annihilating Israel are integral elements of this regime. Under the banner of opposition to war, NIAC has been promoting friendship with such a brutal regime. Two months ago, in a meeting held in the congress building, when Trita Parsi was asked why NIAC does not take any meaningful position against human rights violations by IRI, he replied: "NIAC is not a human rights organization. We do not have expertise in that area"!

Senator Feinstein, your good record in defense of human rights does not warrant your cooperation with such organization. It rather raises the expectation that you stand by freedom loving Iranian people and don't allow a lobby group to use your good name in legitimizing a terrorist regime. This can be manifested in your support for the Senate Act S-970. As we witnessed in South Africa, a smart sanction will empower the Iranian people in their struggle to replace the religious dictatorship by a secular democracy and will eliminate the danger of war. There is no need for any military intervention. The only help expected from civilized nations is to stop helping and legitimizing the Mullahs' regime until its atomic activities and human rights violations are stopped. Release of all political prisoners should be the first step.

Embracing Iranian mullahs or their lobbyists in the US will not bring us closer to peace. It emboldens the war mongers in Tehran. It buys them time to pursue their aggressive strive to gain hegemony in the region and the world. To prevent a disastrous war with Iran, stop mullah's lobbyists. We agree with you that a different approach in dealing with Iran is needed. But dear Senator Feinstein, aren't you just continuing the strategy that started with the infamous "Cake and Colt", and has so far cost us thousands of American lives and hundreds of billions of dollars in debt?

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