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# **RISE OF THE ‘IRAN LOBBY’**

Tehran’s front groups move on—and into—  
the Obama Administration

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A complex network of individuals and organizations with ties to the clerical regime in Tehran is pressing forward in seeming synchrony to influence the new U.S. administration’s policy towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. Spearheaded by a *de facto* partnership between the National Iranian-American Council (NIAC), the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and other organizations serving as mouthpieces for the mullahs’ party line, the network includes well-known American diplomats, congressional representatives, figures from academia and the think tank world.

This report documenting the rise of what can accurately be described as the “Iran Lobby” in Washington, D.C. is derived entirely from unclassified open sources and describes in detail the activities, linkages, and objectives of this alarming alliance between NIAC, CAIR and others that is aimed at co-opting America’s foreign policy in the Middle East and specifically with Iran. Understanding the involvement of the Tehran regime in the foundation and continuing activities of organizations like these and their allies will become increasingly important to understanding the extent of the regime’s influence on American foreign policy decisions regarding Iran.

As these organizations expand, multiply and, in the process, intensify their efforts to promote a shared and ominous agenda, it is imperative to recognize the role being played by what amount to their interlocking (or at least overlapping) boards of directors, donations from the same foundations and growing access to some key members of Congress and top levels of US policymaking circles. Of special concern is the growing penetration of the Obama administration by a number of individuals with such associations.

To be sure, efforts at influencing U.S. decision-making are common among a host of legitimate interest groups, including many foreign countries. But in this context, where the guiding force behind such influence operations emanate from the senior-most levels of a regime like Iran’s – which holds the top spot on the State Department list of state-sponsors of terror, makes no secret of its hatred and enmity for the United States and its ally, Israel, and acts in myriad ways to support those who have assassinated, held hostage, kidnapped, killed and tortured American civilians and military personnel over a 30-year period – such operations must be viewed with serious concern.

Specifically, the *de facto* alliance between CAIR, one of the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates named by the U.S. Department of Justice as an unindicted co-conspirator in the 2007 and 2008 Holy Land Foundation trials, and groups such as NIAC and its predecessor, the American-Iranian Council (AIC), which long have functioned openly as apologists for the Iranian regime, must arouse deep concern that U.S. national security policy is being successfully targeted by Jihadist entities hostile to American interests.

## Background

This paper is meant to provide a *Who’s Who*-style catalogue of the organizations and individuals associated with the Iran Lobby in America. Some of the most influential figures involved are surely witting that their actions serve to support the objectives of the mullahs in Tehran, while others may not realize that their actions inevitably result in such consequences. Either way, the group as a whole is openly portrayed in the Iranian media as the regime’s “Iranian lobby” in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Some of these entities also share another connection – to Iranian and international business interests, especially in the oil industry. Whatever their differences, the members of the Iran lobby have one thing in common: They insist that the United States must adopt a new policy towards Iran of conciliatory negotiations without preconditions.

Known supporters of the Tehran regime such as NIAC (founded in 2002), CAIR (founded in 1994), the Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran (CASMI, founded in December 2005) and their associates have methodically fostered an expansive web engaged in influence operations in the United States. In recent years, they have been joined in promoting appeasement of Iran by several newer organizations, including the Center for a New American Security (CNAS, founded in February 2007), the Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran (CNAPI, founded in June 2008), and the American Foreign Policy Project (AFPP, founded in December 2008).

A number of these groups count prominent Middle East and Iran experts among their boards and advisory councils, as well as a shifting cast of pro-regime advocates who periodically swap leadership positions in these and other organizations. What is more, whether directly influenced by the pro-Iran lobby network or not, several established fixtures on the Washington and New York think tank landscape – such as the Brookings Institution’s Saban Center, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Institute for Science and International Security and the Woodrow Wilson Center – have also weighed in urging the United States to eschew any consideration of a military option to deal with Iran’s nuclear weapons program, in favor of diplomatic measures in preparation for living with a nuclear Iran.

It has taken at least a decade of maneuvering behind the scenes of Washington policymaking to create this “Iranian Lobby” for the purpose of edging U.S. foreign policy on Iran closer to the preferred positions of the clerical regime in Tehran. Participating organizations have benefited from the support of powerful business interests associated with and/or seeking the favor of the mullahs that have a deep stake in perpetuating the *status quo*. Some may even view expansion of Iranian dominance in the Persian Gulf as to their benefit. Available evidence, moreover, suggests that the Iran Lobby in America is coordinated in Iran at various government levels and within establishment circles both governmental and industrial. An official agency of the Iranian regime called The Supreme Council for Iranians Living Abroad was formed at the highest levels of the Iranian regime at some point in the early part of

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<sup>1</sup> “Iran Lobby in the U.S.: Becoming Active?” *Aftab News*, 7 December 2007.

the decade with the specific objective of “establishing specialized groups and non-governmental bodies among Iranians living abroad.”<sup>2</sup> This should come as no surprise since the Iranian government’s has sought to influence U.S. policy from the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

A glimpse of Tehran’s more recent role in the establishment and activities of its lobby in America can be found in frank discussions about the National Iranian-American Council in regime-controlled media such as the *Fars News* daily. For example, in a March 2007 piece, *Fars News* describes NIAC as a “non-profit” organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C. that was established to counter the influence of the American-Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC), a legal lobby group, and to enlist the support of Iranian expatriates living in the United States in order to “penetrate U.S. politics.”<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the same *Fars News* article drew a comparison between what it termed “harassment” against NIAC by so-called American “neocons” and an “increase in negative publicity” against CAIR, implying at the least the two share a common agenda.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, while details about the full extent of CAIR’s partnership with advocates for the Iranian regime in the United States are difficult to pin down, it is easy to document CAIR’s public support for the Islamic Republic, which closely parallels and sometimes overlaps that of NIAC and other affiliates in the Iran Lobby network. CAIR as an organization, as well as individual CAIR representatives, long have taken a public stance that minimizes the criminality of Tehran’s human rights abuses, its non-compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions, violations of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, threats of genocide against the state of Israel and support for terrorism throughout the Middle East. CAIR’s public positions also have advocated a policy of acquiescence, diplomacy, incentives and negotiations with the Tehran regime, while strongly opposing coercive diplomacy, sanctions or the threat of military action.

Sometimes, CAIR (or other Muslim Brotherhood affiliates) and other members of the Iran Lobby make joint public appearances or statements, as when former Iranian president Khatami visited the U.S. in 2006. Another example also dates from 2006, when an interfaith group of religious figures joined in drafting and signing a statement entitled, “Words, Not War, With Iran.” Among the signatories was Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, secretary general of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate and unindicted co-conspirator in the 2007 and 2008 Holy Land Foundation federal terrorism funding trials.<sup>5</sup> The statement’s core message urged “that the U.S. engage in direct negotiations with Iran as an alternative to military action in resolving the crisis.”<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, as will be described later in this report, a similar statement under the same title was issued by a group of former military leaders and foreign policy officials in August 2006. Among those signatories are two names that are prominent among the Iran Lobby network of influential Washington-based organizations. They are Ambassador Charles “Chas” W. Freeman, a member of the AIC’s Board of Directors, and retired Lieutenant General Robert G. Gard, one of the Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran’s experts.

<sup>2</sup> The foundation of this organization is reported variously to have occurred sometime between 2000 and 2006. According to Daiioleslam, Hassan, “Iran’s Oil Mafia,” *Front Page Magazine*, 16 April 2007, it was formed in 2000. But elsewhere its foundation date is reported to be 2006. See “Supreme Council on Iranians Living Abroad holds first meeting,” *Payvand Iran News*, 14 March 2006. See also “Dr. Assefi: Nations are Interdependent to One Another”, 21 August 2004. Website at <http://web-srv.mfa.gov.ir/output/English/documents/doc4565.htm> (Accessed 25 February 2009).

<sup>3</sup> “AIPAC, NIAC and IAPAC”, *Fars News*, 28 March 2007. Website at <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8601280492> (Accessed 22 Dec 08).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> The statement was carried on the *Sojourners Magazine* website, at [http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&mode=printer\\_friendly&issue=Soj0608&article=060811](http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=magazine.article&mode=printer_friendly&issue=Soj0608&article=060811) (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

## Representative Keith Ellison

The case of Congressman Keith Ellison (D-MN) is a prime example of how the Iran Lobby achieves and exerts influence in Washington through groups like NIAC and CAIR and at the highest levels of U.S. policymaking. The first Muslim representative elected to Congress, Rep. Ellison makes appearances at both NIAC and CAIR events and expresses support for an agenda that opposes U.S. involvement in Iraq and pressure of any kind against the Tehran regime.

During the 2006 congressional campaign, CAIR threw at least one fundraiser for Ellison, held at a Crowne Plaza hotel outside Minneapolis.<sup>7</sup> Ellison accepted thousands of dollars in campaign donations from Nihad Awad, CAIR’s executive director, and Parvez Ahmed, then CAIR chairman.<sup>8</sup> In a short piece defending their campaign donations to Ellison, the two wrote, “We are proud of our personal donations to Ellison’s campaign” and criticized what they called “Muslim-bashing” during the campaign season.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly after his election in November 2006, Ellison appeared at a CAIR fundraising event in Arlington, Virginia where he was a featured speaker.<sup>10</sup> In December 2008, Congressman Ellison made the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca; according to his hometown Minneapolis daily, the *Star Tribune*, “his expenses were paid for by the Muslim American Society of Minnesota.”<sup>11</sup> The MAS was founded in 1992 by the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in America and is identified as its representative in the U.S.<sup>12</sup>

Rep. Ellison moves easily between his NIAC associations and CAIR connections. One theme that bridges the two for Ellison is his consistent support for “peaceful resolutions” to conflicts in the Middle East. This takes the form of vocal opposition to Operation Iraqi Freedom and any coercive measures, whether sanctions or military action, to bring Iran into compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions or its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

In February 2008, Ellison spoke at a NIAC-hosted event in Palos Verdes, California that was chaired by Marsha Ershaghi, a member of NIAC’s board of directors. “The [Dec 2007 Iran] NIE estimate shows that engaging in dialogue can work,” Ellison reportedly said.<sup>13</sup> The press release advertising the event was posted on both the NIAC website<sup>14</sup> and the *Payvand Iran News* website.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Teslik, Lee Hudson, ‘A Muslim for the Hill?’, *Newsweek*, September 11, 2006. Website at [http://www.amren.com/mtnews/archives/2006/09/a\\_muslim\\_for\\_th.php](http://www.amren.com/mtnews/archives/2006/09/a_muslim_for_th.php) and (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>8</sup> “GOP’s attack on Ellison focuses on U.S. Muslim”, *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* (September 17, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Parvez Ahmed and Nihad Awad: Reject the Political Muslim-bashing smears’, *Star Tribune*, October 20, 2006. Website at <http://www.pluralism.org/news/article.php?id=13936> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>10</sup> Isikoff, Michael and Mark Hosenball, ‘CAIR Play?’, *Newsweek*, December 29, 2006. Website at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/44338/page/1> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, Mitch, “Ellison: Hajj was transformative,” *Star Tribune*, December 18, 2008. [http://www.startribune.com/templates/Print\\_This\\_Story?sid=36417549](http://www.startribune.com/templates/Print_This_Story?sid=36417549) (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>12</sup> Muslim American Society (MAS), Discover the Network. <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/printgroupProfile.asp?grpid=6263> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>13</sup> “Ellison to Host Forum on Iran,” A Press Release, *Payvand Iran News*, May 23, 2008. <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/may/1225.html> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>14</sup> “Los Angeles Iranian Americans say talks, not war, will solve US-Iran tensions,” March 4, 2008. [http://www.niacouncil.org/index.php?Itemid=2&id=1054&option=com\\_content&task=view](http://www.niacouncil.org/index.php?Itemid=2&id=1054&option=com_content&task=view) (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, *Payvand Iran News*

Then, on May 28, 2008, Rep. Ellison hosted a group of Iran “scholars” for a Minneapolis community forum dedicated to the U.S.-Iran relationship. One of his invited co-panelists was NIAC president Trita Parsi. Commenting on his purpose in holding the forum, Ellison said: “Nary a day goes by that someone isn’t saying something about Iran in the media. Part of my responsibility as a U.S. congressman is to be [sic] a forum to discuss the critical issues we face and to promote dialogue about the most pressing issues.”<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Ellison said the forum was in preparation for a national call-in day on June 10, 2008 when Americans were asked to phone their representatives and senators, urging that the U.S. not attack Iran. That event was co-sponsored by the Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran, an Iran Lobby organization founded in February 2008 together with official Partner organization, NIAC.

Ellison’s support for the non-confrontational U.S. policy towards Iran favored by the Tehran regime was spelled out in a June 2008 article carried by the website of the Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran – a NIAC affiliate described in greater detail below. The article is entitled, “Congressman slams U.S.’s Iran policies,” and notes that Ellison “pointed out that he always votes ‘nay’ to sanctions against Iran in the U.S. Congress. He maintains that the sanctions are fruitless and only worsen the situation.”<sup>17</sup> Ellison’s ideological position spanning his support for the Iranian regime and as a unalloyed apologist for Islam in general is captured in his final comment, expressing criticism “of the U.S. and Western mass media, which generally offer a pre-judgmental image of Iran and a negative view of Islam.”<sup>18</sup>

## The American-Iranian Council

The American-Iranian Council (AIC) was established in the United States in the 1990s with backing from multinational oil companies such as Aramco, Chevron Texaco, and Conoco Phillips. Leadership figures of these corporations have served on the AIC’s board of directors. The AIC’s founder and president, Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi, is an Iranian regime insider and close associate of its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Amirahmadi also ran as a presidential candidate in the same June 2005 elections that ultimately brought Ahmadinejad to power.

While the AIC’s website states that its mission “...Provides for a sustainable dialogue and a more comprehensive understanding of US-Iran relations” and claims that, according to its vision, “The United States and Iran should and will work together, as their common interests far outweigh their differences,” its apparent unofficial objective was to create a U.S. lobbying web to further the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>19</sup>

The following are among the prominent figures associated with this arm of the Iran lobby:

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<sup>16</sup> Howell, Lydia, “Preventing the next war? Keith Ellison’s Iran Forum and the June 10 Call-in to Congress,” *Engage Minnesota*, June 6, 2008. <http://engagemn.com/2008/06/06/preventing-the-next-war/> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>17</sup> “Congressman slams US’s Iran policies,” June 14, 2008. <http://www.campaigniran.org/casmii/index.php?q=node/5284> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> American Iranian Council website <http://www.american-iranian.org/about/index.php#mission> (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

### *‘Chas’ Freeman*

Ambassador Charles (“Chas”) W. Freeman Jr., president of the Middle East Policy Council, was a member of the AIC board of directors. Freeman is reportedly the Obama administration’s pick to be the next chairman of the hugely sensitive National Intelligence Council, a position from which he would be able to exercise profound influence on U.S. policies towards Iran.<sup>20</sup> Freeman served as ambassador to Saudi Arabia during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He maintains close ties to members of the Saudi royal family and is a member of the Saudi-American Forum and a frequent contributor to the Saudi-U.S. Relations Information Service. In August 2006, Amb. Freeman was one of nearly two dozen diplomatic and military notables who signed the “Words, Not War, with Iran” statement. Its short petition directed itself to the Bush administration and called for direct talks without preconditions with the terror regime in Tehran:

As former military leaders and foreign policy officials, we call on the Bush administration to engage immediately in direct talks with the government of Iran without preconditions to help resolve the current crisis in the Middle East and settle differences over the Iranian nuclear program.

We strongly caution against any consideration of the use of military force against Iran. The current crises must be resolved through diplomacy, not military action. An attack on Iran would have disastrous consequences for security in the region and U.S. forces in Iraq, and it would inflame hatred and violence in the Middle East and among Muslims elsewhere.

A strategy of diplomatic engagement with Iran will serve the interests of the U.S. and its allies, and would enhance regional and international security.<sup>21</sup>

### *Richard Matzke*

A former vice chairman of the Chevron Texaco Corporation, Richard Matzke, served as a co-chairman of the AIC. Matzke, who retired from Chevron Texaco in 2002 after some 40 years with the oil company, called in 2001 for a complete review of U.S. sanctions against energy investment in Iran saying, “It’s clearly time to re-evaluate all sanctions but it’s a little early to tell what the Bush administration will do....They have serious issues to contend with. Iran’s not the highest thing on the priority list. *But it will get there.*” (Emphasis added.)<sup>22</sup>

At that time, Matzke added that he thought the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act was the “driver” behind existing sanctions on business with Iran, and noted that oil companies such as Chevron could play an influential role. “We’ve got to look beyond oil companies, but oil companies can be used as a framework for national dialogue,” he said.<sup>23</sup> Matzke also was present, together with Exxon Mobil and Conoco representatives, at a September 2000 meeting in New York City with the speaker of the Iranian Majles (parliament), Mehdi Karroubi. According to the accompanying announcement made by AIC President Hooshang Amirahmadi, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss ways of working against U.S. trade sanctions on Iran.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Schoenfeld, Gabriel, “Obama’s Intelligence Choice,” *Wall Street Journal*, 25 February 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123552619980465801.html> (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.uni-kassel.de/fb5/frieden/regionen/Iran/stimmen/us-generale.html>

<sup>22</sup> “CHEVRON: Effort can aid development, official says,” *The Russia Journal*, March 23-29, 2001 (pg. 10)

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, *The Russia Journal* (pg. 10)

<sup>24</sup> “Exxon Mobil at anti-Iran sanctions meet-trade group,” *Reuters*, September 1, 2000

## Michael Stinson

Another AIC board member, J. Michael Stinson, is also retired from the Conoco Phillips Company, where he was senior vice president for government affairs. He, too, looked forward to the possibility that companies like Conoco might one day gain access to Iranian oil fields. Speaking in November 2001 about the relationship between Iran and the U.S., he said: “We’ve been encouraged in the last couple of months...We see evidence of things going on, like very quiet government-to-government talks about the issues that are separating us. If they succeed, we have a bright future.”<sup>25</sup>

## Bill Miller

One of the other prominent fixtures in the Iran Lobby is Ambassador William G. Miller. He too was a member of the AIC’s board of directors and advisory council. Miller is currently Senior Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington and Senior Advisor to the US-Iran Program at Search for Common Ground since 1998.

Miller served as political officer for the U.S. Embassy in Tehran from 1962 to 1964 and at the U.S. Consulate in Isfahan, Iran from 1959 to 1962. His affinity for the mullahs was evident when he subsequently served as chief of staff for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 1979. During that era, Miller actually recommended that the U.S. support the Ayatollah Khomeini, whom he thought would be a “progressive force for human rights.”<sup>26</sup>

A fluent Farsi speaker, Miller travels regularly to Tehran, where he maintains a relationship with the chairman of the Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Miller was an attendee at the April 2006 Pugwash Conference held in Tehran and entitled “Iran’s Nuclear Energy Program: Policies and Prospects.”<sup>27</sup> Miller is also a close associate of NIAC President Trita Parsi.

In the decades since the Khomeini Revolution, Miller has been a consistent advocate for a more convivial relationship between the U.S. and Iran. In a 1999 statement broadcast by the Voice of America, Miller said that “the more Americans and Iranians interact the better.” Incredibly, he added his belief that “Iran is not fundamentalist. Iran is a very complicated society which has a varied approach to many of the aspects of life. Its religion is led by people of great learning and distinction. It has men of great openness and character among the religious leadership with whom you can have a very direct and constructive dialogue.”<sup>28</sup> On this and other issues involving the U.S.-Iran relationship, Miller’s position regularly and reliably reflects that of the Iranian clerical regime.

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<http://www.forbes.com/2000/09/01/rtr35617.html> (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

<sup>25</sup> Banerjee, Neela, “Conoco Plays Security Card in Promoting its Merger,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2001.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C00E2D81F3BF932A15752C1A9679C8B63> (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

<sup>26</sup> Spencer, Robert, “Kerry: Carter Redux?” *Front Page Magazine*, August 20, 2004.

<http://frontpagemagazine.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=D24BF5D4-59E5-4921-BEEC-353963BDB821> (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

<sup>27</sup> Pugwash Online, *Iran’s Nuclear Energy Program: Policies and Prospects*, Tehran, Iran, 25 April 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Voice of America, 22 October 1990, 18:01 PM EDT <http://www.fas.org/news/iran/1999/991022-iran1.htm> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)



## Thomas Pickering

One of the most prominent names among AIC’s board of directors that reappears repeatedly in legitimating positions elsewhere in the Iran Lobby network, is that of Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering. A career diplomat, Pickering served as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs from May 1997 through the end of 2000. He subsequently was a senior vice president with the Boeing Company until 2006. Currently he is vice chairman of the international business consulting firm, Hills & Co. and co-chairman of the board of directors of the International Crisis Group (whose executive committee includes, interestingly, George Soros).

Ambassador Pickering’s positions on Iran include calls for bilateral talks without preconditions and a plan for a multinational uranium enrichment consortium in Iran. Iran has proposed a similar plan to the UN Security Council. Ambassador Pickering advocates a process leading to mutual diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States. He also cites positive experiences as a tourist in Iran, where he recalls that ordinary Iranians on the streets expressed friendliness towards him.<sup>29</sup>

## John Esposito

Another AIC board member was John Esposito, the director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. Esposito is perhaps best known as an apologist for radical Islamism; his Center is the recipient of a \$20 million grant from Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal.

According to Prof. Esposito, it was actually the 1979 Iranian Revolution that catapulted his academic career into national prominence, as his books and articles about the Iranian clergy suddenly took on new relevance. “I owe my Lexus and my career to the Ayatollah Khomeini,” he tells his students at Georgetown.<sup>30</sup>

Illustrative of Esposito’s thinking about Iran is the following comment from his introduction to *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, the book he co-edited with Francois Burgat: “...Iran, long regarded as a terrorist threat, has in fact provided a major example of the mobilizing power of an appeal to democratization and civil society.”<sup>31</sup> Esposito’s rose-colored formulations about Iran’s terrorist regime continue with commentary about the presidency of Mohammed Khatami: “Khatami’s support for civil society, the rule of law, and democratization, though not imposed, has become part of the political culture and debate within Iran.”<sup>32</sup>

Esposito manages to garner plaudits from both sides of the Sunni-Shia split, as demonstrated by his August 2005 award from the Saudi-associated Islamic Society of North America. ISNA honored Esposito for his contributions to the understanding of Islam. Sayyid Syeed, ISNA’s secretary general even went so far as to compare Esposito to Abu Taleb, the uncle of the Prophet Mohammad, who never converted to Islam, but defended the new faith nevertheless.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> An interview with Ambassador Thomas Pickering, courtesy of [www.culturesofresistance.org](http://www.culturesofresistance.org) YouTube interview posted at <http://capwiz.com/justforeignpolicy/issues/alert/?alertid=11567451&type=CO> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>30</sup> Jaschik, Scott, “Professor John L. Esposito: A Profile, *The Muslim Weekly* as posted on *Campus Watch*, March 21, 2005. <http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/2118> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

<sup>31</sup> Esposito, John L., “Introduction to *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*”, Published by Rutgers University Press, London, 2003 (pg. 6).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Jaschik

## Bruce Laingen

Ambassador Lowell Bruce Laingen, a former Tehran Embassy hostage and another AIC board member, is president of the American Academy of Diplomacy. He appeared on a December 2007 panel with NIAC founder and president Trita Parsi at the National Cathedral in Washington called “The Dialogue Conference.” The event was sponsored by Episcopal Bishop John Bryson Chane (and is described in greater detail later in this paper).

Surprisingly for the American Charge d’Affaires at the Tehran Embassy in 1979 who, together with his staff, saw his country’s embassy overrun and was then held hostage for 444 days, Laingen consistently displays a lack of outrage over that assault on American sovereignty. In an extensive interview he gave in 1993, for instance, Laingen expressed regret that the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Iran had not yet returned to normal:

...The hostage crisis, if you will, is still with us, now 14 years after the taking of the Embassy. Still with us in the sense that we don't have now after all those years a relationship with Iran. In many ways that is unnatural....It will be very difficult for Washington, even when the time comes to try to reestablish a relationship, to deal with this public distaste out there among the American public. It is a burden on the future and is going to require some very deft handling on the part of Washington to overcome. Both we and Iran, both governments today, will be bringing a lot of emotional, political baggage to the negotiating table when we sit down eventually and try to talk. I think this is overdue. We should be talking to put this business behind us.<sup>34</sup>

One of the American-Iranian Council’s most intensive, but ultimately unsuccessful, campaigns was an effort to prevent the renewal of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) in 2001 and to achieve the lifting of U.S. sanctions on Iran. Perhaps Amirahmadi’s most noteworthy achievement as part of this campaign was his recruitment of then-U.S. Congressman Robert William (Bob) Ney (R-OH). On behalf of AIC and its Iranian masters, Ney led congressional efforts to defeat ILSA and encourage a more Tehran-friendly U.S. foreign policy.<sup>35</sup>

Ney was subsequently convicted and sentenced to a federal prison term for conspiracy and making false statements in relation to the Jack Abramoff lobbying and bribery scandal of 2006. Ney reportedly accepted bribes from Abramoff and two foreign businessmen in return for using his congressional position to assist their illegal circumvention of U.S. sanctions on selling U.S.-made aircraft parts to Tehran.

Amirahmadi served more recently as professor of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy and Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University in New Jersey. In late 2008, however, he left Rutgers and now teaches in the Department of Sociology at Kings College, Cambridge.

Even before Amirahmadi’s departure from the United States left the future of the AIC in doubt, Tehran decided that a more intensive effort was required to promote the Iranian regime’s agenda in U.S. policymaking circles. In part, Tehran viewed AIC shortcomings as due to a failure to attract the Iranian expatriate community to its program. The 2000 formation of the Supreme Council for Iranians Living Abroad (a.k.a. the Secretariat of Supreme Council for Iranian Expatriates) established the official authority that henceforth would direct the Iranian regime’s program to infiltrate Iranian communities abroad, create entities to pose as their ostensible representatives and work

<sup>34</sup> Amb. Laingen spoke for the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program at Georgetown University on several days between January 9 and May 27, 1993. <http://library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/laingen.htm> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>35</sup> Daiouleslam, Hassan, “Iran’s Oil Mafia,” *Front Page Magazine*, 16 April 2007. <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=27787> (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

to promote policies favorable to the regime. The Iranian president heads the Council and the Ministers of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and Intelligence are Council members who collaborate to implement Council initiatives.<sup>37</sup>

## The National Iranian-American Council

The National Iranian-American Council began its existence as a concept proposed in a 1999 paper written by Trita Parsi, then a young Iranian-Swede living in Stockholm, and Siamak Namazi, a young businessman who lived in Tehran. The title of the paper was “Iranian-Americans: The Bridge Between Two Nations.” It was presented at a conference organized by the Iranian regime in Cyprus. (The paper is listed on Trita Parsi’s personal website at [www.tritaparsi.com](http://www.tritaparsi.com) but is blocked to readers.)

The Parsi-Namazi paper explicitly proposed the formation of an Iranian lobby in the U.S. capital to promote Tehran’s interests in Congress and oppose the powerful Israeli lobby, the American Israeli Political Action Committee. Two years later, in 2001, Parsi came to the United States to pursue his graduate studies but also went to work as a managing director for Hooshang Amirahmadi at AIC.

As it happens, Parsi took a second position as an assistant in the Capitol Hill office of Rep. Bob Ney. Even though Parsi and his friends were unable to prevent the renewal of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) in 2001, Tehran seems to have had faith in the Iranian-Swede’s abilities. The mullahs chose in 2003 to transmit what was purported to be a proposal originated by the Swiss Ambassador to Tehran, Tim Guldemann, for negotiations between Iran and the United States through Parsi and his boss, Rep. Ney. The latter delivered it to the White House.<sup>38</sup>

While nothing came of the initiative at the time, Parsi’s usefulness had been established. And so the National Iranian-American Council was created. Parsi and three other individuals named on the NIAC website formed the organization as a tax-exempt 501(c)3 entity in 2002, claiming its “express mission [is] to promote Iranian-American civic participation.” Importantly, such a tax status is not supposed to be used by lobbying organizations.

Yet, among NIAC’s founders were Roy Coffee and Dave DiStefano, both Washington lobbyists who were later investigated by the Justice Department for activities conducted on behalf of Bob Ney. DiStefano was Ney’s Chief of Staff in the mid-late 1990s. In fact, Rep. Ney, Amirahmadi’s long-time man on the Hill, was instrumental in helping their mutual protégé, Trita Parsi, launch NIAC and establish it as an influential player in Washington. The regime in Tehran was thrilled. In an August 5, 2008 interview with Parsi, Iran’s *Aftab News* openly described him and his organization as the successors to the AIC and its founder/president, Hooshang Amirahmadi.<sup>39</sup>

Another key NIAC co-founder and friend of Parsi is Siamak Namazi, the Tehran-based political analyst who graduated from Tufts University (B.A., International Relations) and Rutgers University (M.S. Planning). Namazi began his professional work at Tehran’s Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning from 1994-98. In 1998, he founded the Future Alliance International, a Washington-based consulting company with a focus on the risks of doing business with Iran. This was a rather peculiar choice of venue for such a venture given that Executive Order 12959 of May 6, 1995 had banned all U.S. trade with and investment in Iran.

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<sup>38</sup> Porter, Gareth, “Rove Said to Have Received 2003 Iranian Proposal,” *Inter Press Service (IPS)*, February 16, 2006.

<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=36609> (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

<sup>39</sup> *Aftab News*, Aug 5, 2008. <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdccc10q2b0q4m.html> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

Namazi’s career really took off after he co-authored the 1999 Cyprus conference paper with Trita Parsi. Doors in Washington opened and Namazi served in a succession of think tank appointments, including as a visiting scholar at the Center for Strategic and Intelligence Studies (CSIS), a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center (2005) and a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), where he studied the role of the private sector in promoting good governance. Namazi’s affiliation with Trita Parsi and NIAC, however, is curiously absent from the NIAC website. The relationship is only fleetingly apparent online from a single photograph of Trita Parsi that is included in a photo gallery depicting Namazi’s August 2000 trip to Yazd, Iran.<sup>40</sup>

The relationship between the two men is important because Namazi is also a partner in and the managing director of Atieh Bahar Consulting – one component of the sprawling Atieh family business in Tehran. Indeed, Atieh is a major Iranian conglomerate, well-connected to the clerical regime, that does business in a range of key industries, including banking, finance, and energy.<sup>41</sup> The depth of regime trust in Atieh is demonstrated by its multiple contracts to provide network and computer services for Iranian banks, the Majles (parliament), and other important national institutions.<sup>42</sup>

Also noteworthy is the fact that Muhammad Baquer Namazi, Siamak’s father and a former United Nations (UN) and UNICEF representative, is currently the Director of Hamyaran, a so-called NGO Resource Center formed in March 2001. Ostensibly, Hamyaran’s mission is to serve as an Iranian NGO umbrella group. In practice, it functions as the regime’s watchdog to monitor and control other NGOs.<sup>43</sup>

Against this backdrop, the financial support provided to NIAC by the U.S. government’s National Endowment for Democracy (NED) warrants close scrutiny. NED is a private non-profit organization created in 1983 “to strengthen democratic institutions around the world.” It receives an annual congressional appropriation for this purpose.

NED has provided thousands of dollars in grants to NIAC, ostensibly “to foster cooperation between Iranian NGOs and the international civil society community and to strengthen the institutional capacity of NGOs in Iran.” With that money, NIAC has conducted weeks of training programs on project design and grant writing for Iranian “civil society leaders” inside Iran.<sup>44</sup> Iranian NGOs, though, are required to belong to the Hamyaran government umbrella organization – the one headed up by Muhammad Baquer Namazi, the father of Trita Parsi’s friend and partner, Siamak Namazi.

So, when U.S. taxpayer dollars provided to NED are granted to NIAC, the ultimate beneficiary is actually an organization closely affiliated with the Iranian regime. And NIAC, which channels these funds to Iran, is itself called an Iranian lobbying organization by that regime, whose purpose is to promote the positions of Tehran to Washington, policymaking circles.<sup>45</sup> Under the leadership of Trita Parsi, and amply funded by a host of generally left-wing foundations, NIAC conducts an active agenda of interviews, lobbying, and outreach that has succeeded in developing a complex network of influence throughout the Washington academic, legislative, media, NGO, and

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.iranian.com/SiamakNamazi/index.html> (Accessed 9 Dec 2008.)

<sup>41</sup> Atieh Bahar website <http://www.atiehbahar.com> (Accessed 9 Dec 08.)

<sup>42</sup> Atieh Dadeh Pardaz website with list of banking, IT, and other clients <http://www.adpdigital.com/en/clients.php> (Accessed 9 Dec 08.)

<sup>43</sup> Hamyaran website <http://www.hamyaran.org> (Accessed 9 Dec 08.)

<sup>44</sup> NIAC is listed among the NED 2005 grant recipients <http://www.ned.org/grants/05programs/grants-mena05.html> A training report is posted at [http://www.ned.org/mena/fa/pdfdocs/INTRAC\\_Building\\_Organizational\\_Capacity\\_in\\_Iranian\\_Civil\\_Society.pdf](http://www.ned.org/mena/fa/pdfdocs/INTRAC_Building_Organizational_Capacity_in_Iranian_Civil_Society.pdf) (Accessed 8 Dec 08.)

<sup>45</sup> “Iran Lobby in the U.S.: Becoming Active?” *Aftab News*, 7 December 2007.

policymaking communities. Thanks as well to an echo chamber it enjoys from a retinue of prominent American Middle East experts, an authority on Iranian matters has been conferred on NIAC that is unmatched by any opposing organization in the United States.

In particular, NIAC’s influence operations benefit from its association with others in the Iran Lobby network. Under the leadership of Mr. Obama’s prospective National Intelligence Council (NIC) Chairman, Chas Freeman, the Middle East Policy Council has closely aligned with Trita Parsi’s NIAC in urging the U.S. to adopt an agenda of dialogue and rapprochement with Tehran. MEPC group publishes a quarterly journal called *Middle East Policy* that often features vicious anti-Israel polemics presenting a completely skewed image of both Israel and U.S. foreign policy towards the Jewish State.

For example, recent screeds include nasty criticism of Israel’s military tactics during its latest incursion into Gaza that the journal likens to Nazi-style tactics and allege that American politicians fail to criticize Israel out of fear of being labeled “anti-Semitic.”<sup>46</sup> The visceral antipathy and extreme bias against Israel on display in this journal would be deeply disturbing from any editor; when that editor may be the next chairman of the National Intelligence Council, there are grounds for serious concern.

The Middle East Policy Council’s National Advisory Committee compounds such misgivings. The Committee includes Georgetown University’s Dr. John. Esposito; his colleague at the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Dr. Yvonne Haddad; and Gary G. Sick, Senior Research Scholar and adjunct professor at the Middle East Institute of Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs.

Esposito and Haddad both attend events sponsored by NIAC’s ally, the Council on American Islamic Relations, and Esposito has in the past called CAIR (an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation trials) “a phenomenal organization.”<sup>47</sup> A January 2008 meeting organized by the Middle East Policy Council and entitled “Iran’s Strategic Concerns and U.S. Interests” was held in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill. The panel featured presentations by Professor Sick, Council on Foreign Relations Iranian scholar Ray Takeyh, Barbara Slavin (then a U.S. Institute of Peace fellow and *USA Today* reporter),<sup>48</sup> MEPC’s Chas Freeman and Trita Parsi – every one an advocate for a U.S. government policy of more concessions, dialogue and accommodation with the Iranian regime.

To focus on just one of the experts on this panel, the positions and connections of Prof. Gary Sick illustrates the broad reach of the AIC-NIAC network. A former member of the AIC Board of Directors and currently at Columbia University, Sick served on the National Security Council under Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan. He was the principal White House aide for Iran during the 1979 Iranian Revolution and ensuing hostage crisis. He is a member of the Board of Human Rights Watch (HRW) in New York City and chairman of the advisory committee of Human Rights Watch/Middle East.

Prof. Sick was also the executive director of Gulf/2000, an international research project on political, economic, and security developments in the Persian Gulf conducted at Columbia University from 1994-95 that was

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<sup>46</sup> *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XV, No. 3, Fall 2008 and Vol. XIV, No. 3, Fall 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Fitzgerald, Hugh, “Fitzgerald: Syllabus: Islam and Global Forces (Part I) [on University of Colorado professor Anita Weiss, refs. John Esposito, Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding], *CampusWatch.org*, November 5, 2007. <http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/4216> (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Slavin currently is Assistant Managing Editor for World and National Security of *The Washington Times*. She is also the author of a 2007 book on Iran entitled *Bitter Friends, Bosom Enemies: Iran, the U.S. and the Twisted Path to Confrontation*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*

partly financed by oil interests.<sup>50</sup> The Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation and Exxon/Mobil Foundation were among the major funders.<sup>51</sup> Sick’s appearances at other conferences together with Iranian regime insiders such as Tehran’s former Ambassador to the UN, Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, are representative of his cordial connections to the Iranian regime.

Through influential positions and relationships such as these, Prof. Sick has developed over the decades an extensive network of contacts with access to both Iranian and U.S. policymaking circles at the highest levels. To his American audiences, he routinely promotes the interests of Iran’s clerical rulers, finding ways to excuse their terrorism, advocate more understanding on the part of the U.S. government and encourage accommodation with Tehran..

For example, Sick excuses Iranian support for Hamas terrorist activities: “Iran’s support for terrorist activities carried out by Hamas is a matter of dispute. Iran claims that its support for Hamas is no different than the Saudi’s support. They give money for clinics and medical needs, but that money is used for terrorism. Iran has a different view on this. So it’s a matter of dispute.”<sup>52</sup> About the 1992 and 1994 Iranian-directed terrorist bombings against Jewish targets in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the professor suggests that rogue elements of the Iranian secret service were responsible, with “little interference by the central authorities and no apparent coordination with Iran’s foreign policy agenda.”<sup>53</sup> Such statements are contradicted by specific evidence that the attacks were, in fact, coordinated out of Iran’s Embassy in Buenos Aires. Fawning comments about Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad laid the groundwork for Sick’s key role in securing the invitation for the former to speak at Columbia University following his 2007 appearance at the annual United Nations General Assembly in New York.

In yet another example of NIAC President Trita Parsi’s success in network-building, on April 8, 2008, he moderated a speakers panel entitled “Breaking the U.S.-Iran Stalemate: Reassessing the Nuclear Strategy in the Wake of the Majles Elections.” Speakers included Dr. Hans Blix, currently chairman of the UN’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission and former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); Dr. David Albright, the founder and president of the Institute for Science and International Security; Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA), who delivered the keynote address; Ambassador Thomas Pickering; and Barbara Slavin. Slavin is notable for her trips to Iran on visas she unabashedly admits are at least in part dependent on her willingness to follow her hosts’ agenda.<sup>54</sup>

Ambassador Pickering is a member of NIAC’s Advisory Board, a position he shares with former Rep. Wayne Gilchrist (R-MD). In December 2008, Congressman Gilchrist co-authored a letter to the newly installed speaker of the Iranian Majles, former Islamic Republican Guard Corps commander, and nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, to congratulate him on his election to that post and to urge dialogue between Iranian and American lawmakers.<sup>55</sup>

On February 22, 2008, Amnesty International (AI) sponsored an event in Los Angeles, under the title “Human Rights in Iran: How to Move Forward.” It is striking that, AI chose Trita Parsi to be one of their panelists. After all, at the aforementioned January 2008 meeting on Capitol Hill, Parsi publicly denied that NIAC had a human rights role. In response to a question about why NIAC never takes any meaningful stand against human rights viola-

<sup>51</sup> The Gulf/2000 website and its donors are listed at <http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/about.shtml> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>52</sup> Parvin, Mohammed and Hassan Daiouleslam, “Gary Sick, Ahmadinejad’s Best Pal,” SERENDIP blog, 21 September 2007, at <http://fleetingperusal.blogspot.com/2007/09/gary-sick-ahmadinejads-best-pal.html> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>54</sup> The author was present at a 2006 public forum at which Slavin replied to an audience question about her ability to secure repeated visas to visit Iran by noting candidly that she did accede to some degree to her hosts’ agenda.

<sup>55</sup> “Larijani would reply to letter from U.S. Congressmen,” *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)*, 7 December 2008.



tions in Iran, Parsi responded: “NIAC is not a human rights organization. That is not our expertise.”<sup>56</sup> Instead, he defends continuity for the mullahs’ regime and rejects any struggle for democracy in Iran, claiming that “...The current choice Iranians face is not between Islamic tyranny and democratic freedom. It is between chaos and stability.”<sup>57</sup>

## The Unfolding Drama

The Iranian government and its friends are making no secret of its ambitions for the Iran Lobby. AIC’s president Hooshang Amirahmadi was in Tehran in November 2008 and spoke with the *Eternad* newspaper about the importance of the presidential transition period then taking place in the United States. He warned that a contest among Arab, Iranian, and Jewish lobbies was unfolding in the U.S. capital, each trying to capture the “hearts and minds” of the new administration. He likened the scene to a “bazaar” and urged the friends of Iran to act quickly and decisively.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, Israel is central to Iranian concerns and, given that Obama is on record describing Israel as “This constant wound...this constant sore [that] does infect all of our foreign policy,”<sup>59</sup> the Tehran regime might expect an easy time with the new American president. In fact, the day after he made this statement, the Iranians scored a major coup when Sen. Obama stopped at Macomb Community College in Warren, MI. There, on May 14, 2008, he met one-on-one behind closed doors with Imam Hassan Qazwini, the smooth-talking head of the Dearborn, Michigan Islamic Center of America. Qazwini, an Iraqi Shi’ite who grew up in exile in Iran during the Saddam Hussein years, requested the meeting, which reportedly was arranged by a former U.S. congressman from Michigan with a long record of sympathy for Arab, Iranian and Muslim causes: David Bonior.<sup>60</sup> Qazwini is close to Lebanese Shi’ite Aya-tollah Fadlallah, known for his relationship with the Hizballah terrorist group.

At present, a major objective of the Iran lobby is to weaken U.S. support for Israel. The lobby advocates permitting the Iranian nuclear weapons program to push forward with no serious consequences, while urging an “evenhanded” policy that would ban all nuclear weapons from the Middle East region. An impressive array of prominent think tanks and Middle East experts has been lining up to echo this party line.

For example, the Brookings Institution’s Saban Center produced a new report in December 2008 entitled “Restoring the Balance—a Middle East Strategy for the Next President.” An overview chapter by Richard N. Haas, president of the Council on Foreign Relations (and reportedly an Obama special envoy-in-waiting) and Martin Indyk, director of the Saban Center, was followed by individual chapters devoted to the Arab-Israeli conflict, counterterrorism, Iran, Iraq, and more.

The Iran chapter was written by Council on Foreign Relations husband-wife team of Ray Takeyh and Suzanne Maloney and urges direct engagement and rapprochement with the Iranian government. Maloney, who previ-

<sup>56</sup> Trita Parsi’s response as captured on You Tube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_EthZoSTvQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_EthZoSTvQ)

<sup>57</sup> Parsi, Trita, “The Iranian Challenge,” *The Nation*, November 1, 2007. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20071119/parsi>

<sup>58</sup> *Eternad* News as carried by the Emrooz.net website, November 12, 2008.

<sup>59</sup> “Obama: Israel is a ‘constant sore’, *WorldNetDaily*, May 13, 2008 <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=64236>

<sup>60</sup> Warikoo, Niraj, “Local Muslim leader met privately with Obama,” *Free Press*, May 15, 2008.

ously had the Iran portfolio at the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, and Takeyh are among the army of scholars and experts whose gloss of authority helps legitimate the Iranian party line in U.S. policymaking circles.

Dr. Takeyh, who is featured in a number of articles carried on the NIAC website, consistently downplays the seriousness of Iran’s outlaw behavior and instead characterizes the perpetrator as victim, asserting that “the leadership in Tehran has been thoroughly demonized.” He adds that in any case, Iran’s “rhetoric is worse than its conduct”<sup>61</sup> and emphasizes the need for U.S.-Iran negotiations as well as Israeli “restraint” in the face of Iran’s genocidal threats.

A December 29, 2008 opinion piece by Takeyh was featured in the *Washington Post*. In it, he writes hopefully of the prospect of “direct dialogue” with Iran. His plaintive query, “What does Iran want?” (which, in a moment of candor, he terms “a critical unknown”) is beyond disingenuous. With not a word of condemnation for Iran’s intransigence on its nuclear weapons program, support for terrorism or continuing role in destabilizing Iraq and killing U.S. troops there, Takeyh presents a pleasantly soothing agenda for potential bilateral talks.

Blithely suggesting that “As Tehran gains power and influence in the Gulf, it may prove moderate on more distant terrain,” Dr. Takeyh also dispenses summarily with Tehran’s genocidal threats against the state of Israel. He contends, without any evident basis in fact, that “The Islamic Republic will never recognize Israel, but it may limit its mischievous interventions in Palestinian affairs.”<sup>62</sup> (This article is also featured on the home page of the *Payvand Iran News*, a news site that is never critical of the Tehran regime.)

Takeyh’s purpose, like that of his similarly-minded media and think tank associates, appears to be to lull the American public and its leadership into a false sense of security with regard to Iran by portraying its behavior as pragmatic, non-threatening and even on the road to internal reform -- if only given the chance to do so by the United States. The cumulative effect of such efforts is insidiously to edge U.S. foreign policy on Iran closer and closer to the one most preferred by Tehran’s clerical clique: acceptance of Iranian hegemony in the Middle East and an end to all pressure for the regime to comply with international norms of behavior. Such a policy would be greatly detrimental to U.S. national security interests and those of its partner and ally, Israel.

## Council for American-Iranian Relations

The Council for American-Iranian Relations (CAIR) was, like NIAC established as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, founded in Washington, DC in 1994 with a stated mission “to enhance understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.”<sup>63</sup>

In truth, CAIR has had a very different agenda. It has been linked in the Muslim Brotherhood’s own documents to the latter’s North American network and has been named in two federal terrorist trials as an unindicted co-conspirator for participation in the illicit channeling of funding to Hamas.<sup>64</sup> Based on its activities, associations,

<sup>61</sup> Solaimani, Rod, “Takeyh: Containing Iran Unfeasible,” 13 December 2007 on the NAIC website, [http://www.niacouncil.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=976&Itemid=2](http://www.niacouncil.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=976&Itemid=2) (Accessed 9 Dec 08.)

<sup>62</sup> Takeyh, Ray, “What Iran Wants,” *Washington Post*, 29 December 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/28/AR2008122801273.html>

<sup>63</sup> CAIR’s Vision and Mission Statement <http://www.cair.com/AboutUs/VisionMissionCorePrinciples.aspx> (Accessed 9 Dec 08.)

<sup>64</sup> The Investigative Project at <http://www.investigativeproject.com> for extensive documentation on CAIR and the Holy Land Foundation trials.



and statements, CAIR’s unspoken objectives seem to be directed to blurring the aggressive and violent history of Islam and attacking all official U.S. government efforts to crack down on Islamist terrorism and its associated financial and recruitment activities in the United States, as well as using America’s own legal system to silence critics.

Less well appreciated is CAIR’s *de facto* alliance with the movement to steer U.S. foreign policy towards rapprochement with the Iranian mullahs’ regime in Tehran. It is clear that senior CAIR representatives were speaking and writing actively on behalf of the mullahs’ regime as early as the late 1990s.<sup>65</sup> In fact, CAIR as an organization also has consistently supported Tehran regime positions, as in the following instances:

In December 1997, CAIR condemned the Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance for a display that featured Adolf Hitler juxtaposed with the Ayatollah Khomeini. In March 1999, CAIR attacked an article by Elaine Sciolino that appeared in the *New York Times* the previous month because the piece had criticized Iranian discrimination against women.<sup>66</sup>

Dr. Anisa Abd el Fattah (nee Caroline Keeble) was a member of CAIR’s board of directors in 1999 when she co-hosted a panel sponsored by the United Association for Studies and Research (a no-shuttered Hamas front group and another unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation trials) entitled “U.S. and Iran: Time to Talk.” The Iranian ambassador to the UN, Sayyid Hadi Najad had been invited to appear, but was barred from the event by the Department of State.

In addition, CAIR promotes the normalization of U.S. relations with Iran. Its March 17, 2000 press release applauding Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s statements of abject apology to the Tehran regime is a representative example of its views in this regard.<sup>67</sup>

As noted above, CAIR’s aggressive legal harassment of analysts, bloggers, speakers, writers and others who seek to expose the spread of the Islamic Jihad agenda in the United States is well-documented and constitutes a prime sample of the phenomenon dubbed “lawfare,” whereby litigation, treaties and international as well as domestic courts are turned into weapons used against America and its interests.

CAIR has also turned its attention to journalists and even cartoonists who have had the temerity to criticize Iranian support for terrorism across the Middle East. A case in point is the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Michael Ramirez, whose September 2007 depiction in the *Columbus Dispatch* of cockroaches scurrying out of a sewer grate labeled “Iran” and “Extremism” and across a map of the Middle East, prompted CAIR to post an Action Request up on its website, urging the organization’s members and friends to register their criticisms of the artist.<sup>68</sup>

CAIR’s consistent advocacy on behalf of Tehran kicked into high gear with the Department of State’s decision in 2006 to issue a visa to former Iranian President Mohammed Khatami so he could attend the Alliance of Civilizations meeting at the UN. The decision by then-Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns to allow Khatami to participate in the sixth annual commemoration of the 9/11 attacks seems downright obscene in light of the fact that this

<sup>65</sup> “CAIR’s Hate Crimes,” The Investigative Project on Terrorism, 4 April 2008. <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/121.pdf> This TIP report cites as its source the original *Washington Times* article, “Why the United States Should Improve Relations with Iran,” June 25, 1998 (p. 20).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, The Investigative Project.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, The Investigative Project, which cites “Easing of Sanctions Welcomed By American Muslims,” CAIR Press Release, March 17, 2000, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010423101904/cair-net.org/nr.asp?date=2000/03/17> (Accessed 9 Dec 08.)

<sup>68</sup> Poole, Patrick, “CAIR turns on the *Columbus Dhimmi Dispatch* over dreaded cartoon of blasphemy of the week,” *Central Ohioans Against Terrorism*, September 6, 2007. <http://ohioagainstterror.blogspot.com/2007/09/cair-turns-on-columbus-dhimmi-dispatch.html> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

consummate regime insider was president during the years when Iran accelerated its nuclear weapons program, that he presided over the so-called “chain murders” of Iran’s most prominent scholars and academics in 1998, that he crushed the student uprising of 1999, and that he represents a regime that provided support to the 9/11 hijackers, as well as safe haven to al-Qaeda killers fleeing Tora Bora.

That was not, of course, the way CAIR saw it. National CAIR leaders, including Ibrahim Hooper, CAIR’s director of Strategic Communications, executive director Nihad Awad, and national vice chairman of the board of directors Ahmad Al-Akhras were all on hand to welcome Khatami to a private dinner and reception at the Marriott Crystal Gateway Hotel in Crystal City, Virginia on September 8, 2006. Sharing the dais with Khatami were AIC President Hooshang Amirahmadi and the Sudanese Ambassador to the United States.

The Episcopal Bishop of Washington’s National Cathedral, John Bryson Chane, also had hosted the terror regime’s former president earlier that same day. Khatami used his “Dialogue of Civilizations” speech before a packed crowd in the cathedral of 1,200 to defend Iran’s nuclear program as “peaceful” and suggested the world should focus instead on Israel’s nuclear arsenal.<sup>69</sup> After Bishop Chane accepted a reciprocal invitation to visit Iran in 2007, he returned to convene a panel discussion on “The U.S. and Iran: A Difficult History” at the Cathedral on October 29, 2007. Featured panelists were a number of the Iran Lobby’s “usual suspects” including: former Tehran hostage Ambassador Bruce Laingen, NIAC’s Trita Parsi and the panel moderator, NIAC advisory board member and former U.S. Congressman Wayne Gilchrist.<sup>70</sup> Other participants were former *New York Times* reporter and author Stephen Kinzer and Dr. Abbas Amanat, a Yale University Professor of History and International and Area Studies.

The following interconnected organizations and their leaderships will illustrate even more clearly the varied and complex relationships nurtured both subtly and overtly by NIAC, CAIR and others on behalf of the Tehran regime.

## Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran

The Campaign Against Sanctions and Military Intervention in Iran (CASMI) was founded by Abbas Edfat, an adjunct professor at Sharif University in Tehran, and a group of “Iranian and non-Iranian academics, students and professionals of different political and ideological persuasions” at a meeting in London in December 2005.<sup>71</sup> The U.S. branch was established in early 2006 under the leadership of Rostam Pourzal, whose profile notes that he advocates direct and sustained dialogue without pre-conditions between Iran and the United States. Pourzal visits Iran regularly.<sup>72</sup>

CASMI describes itself as a campaign organization whose purpose is to oppose all forms of international pressure on Iran and identifies lobbying and public advocacy as its chosen means to disseminate its views. It is difficult to find information about the CASMI official leadership structure on its website, but what is there shows a pre-

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<sup>69</sup> “Khatami Defends Ahmadinejad, Iran’s nuke plans,” *Washington Times*, 8 September 2006. <http://www.Washingtontimes.com/news/2006/sep/08/20060908-123058-3813r> (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>70</sup> Summary account of the panel at the ‘Cathedral Events’ page on the web site of the Washington National Cathedral <http://www.nationalcathedral.org/events/iranpanel071029.shtml> (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>71</sup> CASMI website <http://www.campaigniran.org/casmii/index.php?q=about>. (Accessed 25 Feb 2009.)

<sup>72</sup> Pourzal’s profile <http://www.campaigniran.org/casmii/index.php?q=node/97> (Accessed 22 Dec 08.)

dominance of Persian names.<sup>73</sup> There is also some overlap between CASMII and NIAC. For instance, Alexander Patico, a founder of NIAC, a member of its board of directors until 2008 and currently a member of its advisory board, serves on CASMII’s board of directors. Daniel Pourkesali is listed as a member of the CASMII International Steering Committee and is also an active member of NIAC.

A perusal of articles posted on the website is more illuminating, however. Found there are pieces by Trita Parsi and articles featuring interviews with regime apologists such as the Iranian-born Carnegie Endowment analyst, Karim Sadjadpour. Typical of Sadjadpour’s pro-Tehran regime advocacy is an October 2008 Carnegie Policy Brief that he authored, entitled “Foreign Policy for the Next President.” In it, Sadjadpour opines that the “relevant question is not whether to talk to Iran but how to talk to Iran” His advice is simply to ignore those pesky areas of conflict in the U.S.-Iran relationship, such as Iran’s nuclear weapons program and Israel.<sup>74</sup> NIAC returns the favor by carrying on its website a number of pieces that feature Sadjadpour calling for more engagement with Iran.

## Center for a New American Security

Another relatively new organization on the Washington think tank scene that has weighed in with policy recommendations on Iran for the Obama administration is the Center for a New American Security, established in February 2007. Prior to her appointment as the Obama administration’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Dr. Susan Rice was among CNAS’s impressive board of directors. Dr. Rice also formerly served as a Senior Fellow for Foreign Policy and Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution, whose sympathies for rapprochement with Tehran have been addressed previously.

Among the policy experts tapped to contribute to the CNAS Iran report are names notable as much for their linkages to other individuals and groups affiliated with the Washington Iran Lobby as for their policy recommendations seeking dialogue with Tehran.

In September 2008, CNAS produced a report intended specifically for the next U.S. administration, although the Obama victory was still some six weeks in the future at its publication. Entitled “Iran: Assessing U.S. Strategic Options,” the report boasts a clutch of Iran and U.S. foreign affairs experts among its authors: James N. Miller, Christine Parthemore, Kurt M. Campbell, Dennis Ross, Suzanne Maloney, Ashton B. Carter, Vali Nasr, and Richard N. Haas.

Of these, one deserves a closer focus here: Dr. Vali Nasr (a.k.a. Dr. Sayeed Vali Reza Nasr), is a former professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He served as professor at the Fletcher School, Tufts University prior to his recent designation as a senior advisor to President Obama’s special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke. Born in Iran but raised in Scotland and the United States after his family’s departure from Iran in 1979, Nasr is the son of Iranian-American scholar Professor Sayeed Hossein Nasr, with whom he has authored several texts on Shia doctrine and philosophy. His 2006 book, *The Shia Revival*, is a study of the intra-Islamic split between Sunnis and Shiites. Glowing book reviews from Georgetown’s John Esposito and Karen Armstrong can be found on the dust jacket.

<sup>73</sup> CASMII Organization <http://www.campaigniran.org/casmii/index.php?q=node/70>

<sup>74</sup> Sadjadpour, Karim, “Iran: Is Productive Engagement Possible?” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 2008. <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22281&prog=zgp&proj=zme>

Nasr’s chapter in the CNAS report is entitled, “The Implications of Military Confrontation with Iran,” and catalogues in some detail the likely response of the Iranian regime to a military attack by the United States. Nasr emphasizes that Iran possesses substantial, if largely asymmetrical, means of causing damage to U.S. interests in retaliation for any such attack.<sup>75</sup> This conclusion leaves the impression that a strike on Iran – either to target its nuclear weapons infrastructure or to attempt regime change – is extremely ill-advised. That assessment is also in keeping with the extensive record of Nasr’s other publications, congressional committee testimony and White House briefings in which he maintains that Iran is already too powerful a regional actor for the United States even to consider taking on because of its control over Iraqi Shiite terror militias and its Lebanese Hizballah proxy. According to Nasr, the best course for future U.S. policy vis-à-vis Iran is one of accommodation with the mullahs’ regime – even if, and especially after, it achieves nuclear weapons status.

Tehran revealed its favorable view of Dr. Nasr in a glowing October 2006 article that appeared on the regime-controlled online news outlet *Baztab*. The piece notes Dr. Nasr’s esteemed family connections, his glittering academic credentials and also details his valued association as an expert advisor for the U.S. Department of State and then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

*Baztab* also approvingly characterized Dr. Nasr’s views on U.S.-Iran relations, which call for diplomacy, negotiations and a renewed political relationship.<sup>76</sup>

In keeping with themes favored by regime-controlled media such as *Baztab*, Dr. Nasr is featured elsewhere on the news site as co-author with Council on Foreign Relations Iran scholar Ray Takeyh of an opinion piece that criticizes what they call the United States’ “policy of coercion” towards Iran, while advocating instead a “policy of engagement.” Implausibly, the two also claim that Iran “... abandoned the goal of exporting its revolution to its Persian Gulf neighbors at the end of [the] 1980s and has since acted as a status-quo power.” Their bottom line might have been penned in Tehran: “the United States should propose dialogue without conditions with the aim of normalizing relations.”<sup>77</sup>

## Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran

Yet another new entrant in the Iran Lobby’s efforts is the Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran CNAPI bills itself as:

a transpartisan coalition of diverse groups which share the objective of promoting responsible and effective U.S. diplomacy and leadership in resolving long-standing tensions between the U.S. and Iran. Campaign supporters share the basic core beliefs outlined in the mission statement and urge direct, sustained, and comprehensive talks without preconditions between the governments of the United States and Iran as a realistic way to resolve all outstanding issues... Supporters of CNAPI believe sustained, direct, bilateral, and comprehensive talks without preconditions between the governments of the United States and Iran repre-

<sup>75</sup> [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/MillerParthemoreCampbell\\_Iran%20Assessing%20US%20Strategy\\_Sept08.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/MillerParthemoreCampbell_Iran%20Assessing%20US%20Strategy_Sept08.pdf) (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>76</sup> *Baztab*, October 27, 2006. Its English language homepage is at <http://en.baztab.com> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>77</sup> Nasr, Vali and Ray Takeyh, “What We Can Learn from Britain About Iran,” *Baztab*, 15 April 2007. <http://en.baztab.com/content/?cid=1743> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

sent a realistic way to resolve long-standing conflicts that destabilize the Middle East and by extension, threaten the global economy.<sup>78</sup>

CNAPI’s official partners include more than three dozen organizations, among them CASMII, CAIR, the Episcopal Church, NIAC, and the Open Society Policy Center. The list of CNAPI “Experts” is likewise an interesting one that includes: Amb. James Dobbins, Director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corporation and a retired career State Department diplomat; Lt. Gen. Robert Gard, the Senior Military Fellow at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation; Phil Giraldi, former CIA counterterrorism specialist; the writer Stephen Kinzer; Amb. William Miller, Senior Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Amb. Thomas Pickering and, of course, the ubiquitous Trita Parsi.

CNAPI launched its pro-Iran activities in February and March of 2008 with a cross-country event called “The Folly of Attacking Iran Tour” which crisscrossed the United States. NIAC was among the Tour’s “Partner Organizations”, while its “Endorsers” included: Code Pink; Common Cause; *Payvand Iran News* (a pro-Khatami news organization operated by Iranian expatriates out of the San Francisco Bay area); the American Iranian Friendship Council in Portland (whose online website suggests its affinity with NIAC and *Payvand Iran News*); Congressman Earl Blumenauer’s District Office; the Middle East Institute at Columbia University; and many others. The featured speaker at each stop along the way was Stephen Kinzer, the former *New York Times* foreign correspondent and author of *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*.

The not-so-subtle message of the “Folly” tour was: “Together, we can push our elected leaders to support real talks with Iran without pre-conditions – and to oppose a military attack. Join the effort by asking your congressional representatives to support diplomacy, not confrontation, with Iran.”<sup>79</sup>

Other tour speakers included such familiar figures associated with the Iran Lobby as: Barbara Slavin, now an editor with the *Washington Times*; retired Brig. Gen. John Johns; Rep. Earl Blumenauer; NIAC’s Trita Parsi; and retired Lt. Gen. Robert Gard. Among the other participants were author Dr. Reza Aslan, William A. Nitze, an energy and environmental policy expert, and Dr. Ervand Abrahamian, an Iranian-born Armenian scholar and author.

As an example of the Coalition for a New American Policy on Iran’s pro-Tehran stance, a snapshot of the busy schedule of Stephen Kinzer will serve. “CNAPI Expert” Kinzer, the former *New York Times* reporter who now teaches journalism and political science at Northwestern University, is an outspoken advocate of a U.S. foreign policy of rapprochement with Iran. Writing in the *Chicago Tribune* in May 2008, he beats the familiar drums for “direct, bilateral, comprehensive and unconditional negotiations” with Iran and speculates that were such talks to occur, “the U.S. might soon discover that these two countries share many security interests.”<sup>80</sup>

Kinzer may or may not be aware of the Tehran regime links and agenda among his CNAPI colleagues – or know that CNAPI official partner CAIR is a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate and unindicted co-conspirator in a federal terror funding case. Since he is a veteran foreign affairs correspondent for a paper like the *New York Times*, however, it strains credulity to suppose that he would not be knowledgeable about these facts. For instance, a simple online check shows that at the same time the *Payvand Iran News* website carried approving accounts of Kinzer’s pro-Iran activism on Capitol Hill, including his meetings with congressmen and support for a 2008 Congressional

<sup>78</sup> From the CNAPI home page <http://www.newiranpolicy.org/401.html> (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>79</sup> From the *Folly of Attacking Iran* website <http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/iran> (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>80</sup> Kinzer, Stephen, “A plea to quiet drums on Iran, and try talk,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 2008.

Resolution (Con Res 321) that called for direct diplomatic engagement between the U.S. and Iran,<sup>81</sup> *Payvand*’s homepage also carried links to Tehran regime media outlets such as *Baztab*, *Ettela’at*, *Jomhuri Eslami*, *Quds*, *Kayhan*, and *IRNA*.<sup>82</sup>

As with other Iran Lobby initiatives, CNAPI and its fellow advocates for direct talks with Iran’s mullahs have made inroads onto Capitol Hill. As described above, one key ally there is Minneapolis’ Muslim Democratic congressman, Rep. Keith Ellison, who hosted a “Public Forum on U.S. Foreign Affairs with Iran” in Minneapolis in May 2008. Ellison’s co-panelist was NIAC’s Trita Parsi.

Then on June 10, 2008, CNAPI co-sponsored a “National Call-in Day for Diplomacy with Iran” together with CAIR. The event and press conference, called “Time to Talk with Iran,” was held on Capitol Hill on the terrace outside the Cannon House Office Building. The idea of this stunt was to make live calls “to ordinary Iranians in Tehran” using a “row of 60’s-era red ‘hotline’ telephones” set up especially for the event. CAIR’s National Director Tahra Goraya plugged the call-in, saying, “Increasing understanding through dialogue is a critical step in preventing a potential U.S.-Iran conflict.”<sup>83</sup> CNAPI speakers called for direct, bilateral and comprehensive talks without pre-conditions between the governments of the United States and Iran.

## American Foreign Policy Project

Close to indistinguishable from the Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran (CNAPI) in purpose and some membership names is the American Foreign Policy Project which launched on November 18, 2008 with the issuance of a “Joint Experts’ Statement on Iran” at a Capitol Hill panel presentation held in the Senate Hart Office Building. The event was moderated by NIAC’s Trita Parsi and featured talks by: AFPP “Experts” Ambassadors Thomas Pickering and James Dobbins; arms control advocate Joseph Cirincione, who was identified in the program as “an advisor to the Obama transition team”; and several others.

Led by Executive Director Richard Parker (who is a School of Law professor at the University of Connecticut), AFPP’s Experts list reads like a remix from other Iran Lobby entities and includes: Ambassadors James Dobbins, William Miller, and Thomas Pickering; Professors Gary G. Sick and Juan R. Cole, Philip Giraldi, Stephen Kinzer, Trita Parsi, and James Walsh.

Explicitly billed as a program of advice for then President-elect Obama, the statement touted the extensive experience of its scholars, experts, and diplomats and urged the new administration to “deal successfully with Iran in the future.”<sup>84</sup> Given the complexion of the signers, it should hardly come as a surprise that their “five-step strategy” urges the United States to abandon any thought of regime change in Tehran, acknowledge and acquiesce to Iran’s bid for hegemony in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the region, and re-engage in the Arab-Israeli “peace process.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “Mr. Kinzer going to Washington, with your letters on Iran,” *Payvand Iran News*, 30 May 2008.

<sup>82</sup> *Payvand Iran News* <http://www.payvand.com/news> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>83</sup> CAIR Action Alert, “Make a Call to Oppose U.S.-Iran Conflict,” 5 June 2008. <http://www.cair.com/DesktopModules/Articles/Print.aspx?ArticleID=24921&&mid=763> (Accessed 10 Dec 08.) Also listed on the CNAPI Calendar [http://newiranpolicy.org/calendar/index.cgi?view\\_event=1&evt\\_id=158](http://newiranpolicy.org/calendar/index.cgi?view_event=1&evt_id=158) (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>84</sup> Joint Experts’ Statement on Iran <http://americanforeignpolicy.org> (Accessed 10 Dec 08.)

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*



Notable among the AFPP experts is former CIA counterterrorism expert Philip Girdali. On November 14, 2007, Girdali appeared on a panel co-hosted by the American Conservative Defense Alliance (ACDA, about which more will be said in a moment) and the Nixon Center with the theme of finding alternatives, *any* alternatives, to threats of U.S. military action against Iran.

In lockstep with fellow panelist, Trita Parsi, Girdali downplayed Iran’s progress toward acquisition of a nuclear weapon, and called on U.S. policymakers “to stop the demonization process.” In any case, he declared obligingly, “I do not believe Tehran poses a real threat to the United States.”<sup>86</sup>

Interestingly, in September 2007, Girdali had written an essay on the antiwar.com website, entitled, “What World War III May Look Like” that makes clear that Iran could certainly threaten the United States and its interests – assuming the latter attacked the former. The article presented a worst-case scenario in the event so-called neoconservatives in Washington got their way in pursuing a hard line against Iran. The article works through a cascade of unintended consequences that wind up with rioting, fighting, and suicide bombings building inexorably to a nuclear crisis across the region.<sup>87</sup>

Another of Girdali’s screeds, this one a vintage anti-Israel diatribe carried on the NIAC-affiliated CASMI website, dismisses the Iranian threat against Israel, attests to the essential rationality of the mullahs’ regime, and waxes histrionic about Washington neoconservatives.<sup>88</sup> Girdali, who served as CIA Chief of Base in Istanbul in the 1980s, should know better. In an exceptionally frank interview with Balkananalysis.com Director Christopher Deliso in September 2006, the former clandestine agent recounts working against the Iranian intelligence agencies and describes their success in discovering and assassinating the CIA’s agents in Iran, many of them regime dissidents.<sup>89</sup> Yet, this is the regime he would now have the U.S. accommodate.

The presentation of AFPP’s Joint Experts’ Statement marks the latest realization of the Iran Lobby’s concerted, multi-year effort to gain access to the top foreign policymaking circles in Washington. . Offered in the confident expectation that the Obama administration will want to stake out a foreign policy on Iran that would be distinctly different from that of the Bush administration (which “the Experts” portray as needlessly confrontational and insufficiently respectful of Iran’s developing regional stature), the Statement’s Key Steps urge an approach that is conciliatory and multilateral. The Statement also addresses what it terms “Basic Misconceptions about Iran” and devotes a 2-page annex to addressing eight so-called “myths” about Iran. The entire publication might have been written in Tehran, so closely does it hew to the regime’s own propaganda. Its authors call into question the quality of their expertise by claiming that Iran is really not such a threat to U.S. interests, does not really want to “wipe Israel off the map,” does not actually mean [to acquire] nuclear weapons and is not ideologically motivated.

<sup>86</sup> Doherty, Caitlin B., “Inside Track: The Taming of the Hawks,” *The National Interest*, 15 November 2007 <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=16154> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>87</sup> Girdali, Philip, “What World War III May Look Like,” 25 September 2007 <http://www.antiwar.com/orig/girdali.php?articleid=11666> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>88</sup> Girdali, Philip, “Father of Lies,” July 30, 2008. Originally published on [www.antiwar.com](http://www.antiwar.com), now posted at <http://www.campaigniran.org/casmii/index.php?q=node/5824> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

<sup>89</sup> “Adventures with the CIA in Turkey: Interview with Philip Girdali,” 30 July 2006. <http://www.balkananalysis.com/2006/07/30/adventures-with-the-cia-in-turkey-interview-with-philip-girdali> (Accessed 30 Dec 08.)

## American Conservative Defense Alliance (ACDA)

This public policy group is the creation of Grover Norquist, an anti-tax conservative activist with a record of ties to Muslim Brotherhood leaders and Islamist front groups.<sup>90</sup> It was founded in early 2008 and, until recently, housed in Norquist’s Americans for Tax Reform offices.<sup>91</sup> ACDA Board Members include Samah Norquist, secretary (also Grover Norquist’s wife); Peter Gemma, treasurer; and Philip Giraldi, the Francis Walsingham Fellow.

Norquist’s role in Islamist influence operations is an ominous one. He founded a front organization called the Islamic Free Market Institute in 1998 together with a Muslim activist long associated with Muslim Brotherhood operatives named Khaled Saffuri “to promote a better understanding of Islam in America.”<sup>92</sup>

Among others who contributed start-up money to the Islamic Free Market Institute was the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), a Muslim Brotherhood front group with headquarters in Herndon, Virginia. In 2008, IIIT was the focus of a Department of Justice investigation for alleged terror support activities.<sup>93</sup> Norquist’s lobbying firm, Janus-Merritt Strategies LLC, formerly was officially registered as a lobbyist for IIIT as well as for Abdurahman Alamoudi, the founder and former executive director of a prominent Brotherhood front known as the American Muslim Council (AMC).<sup>94</sup> Saffuri was Deputy Director of the AMC under its then-head, Alamoudi. The latter is currently serving a twenty-three year federal prison term on charges of terrorism financing and illicit dealings with Libya.<sup>95</sup>

During the presidential campaign of 2000, Norquist arranged a meeting between Alamoudi and then-Republican presidential candidate, Texas Governor George W. Bush.<sup>96</sup> Later, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush appeared at a prayer service with Alamoudi and apparently remained unaware of his terrorist links for a number of years after that.<sup>97</sup>

Another troubling connection is Grover Norquist’s close relationship with Faisal Gill, Policy Director of the Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection division for the Department of Homeland Security under President Bush. In 2004, it was discovered that Gill, who was a political appointee, had failed to disclose his own formerly close working relationship with Alamoudi, whom he apparently served as spokesman for the American Muslim Council. Nevertheless, Gill was permitted to retain his government position.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Gaffney, Frank, “A Troubling Influence,” *Front Page Magazine*, December 9, 2003.

<http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=C7CD908B-6D7E-49EB-A0A9-DA0A18745A29> (Accessed 24 Feb 09.)

<sup>91</sup> Americans for Tax Reform <http://web.archive.org/web/20080209145447/http://www.atr.org/index.html> was accessed via *Archive.org* (Accessed 24 Feb 09.) Its new website, is <http://www.atr.org>

<sup>92</sup> The Islamic Free Market Institute Foundation <http://www.islamicinstitute.org/pressr/pr-2003-6-11.htm> carries an 11 June 2003 *Wall Street Journal* press release that describes the mission and purpose of the Institute. The press release listed Samah Alrayyes, now Mrs. Grover Norquist, as the Institute point of contact. (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>93</sup> “Forgotten Investigation, Emails Offer Insight into IIIT Probe” *IPT News*, August 3, 2008. <http://www.investigativeproject.org/737/forgotten-investigation-emails-offer-insight-into-iiit-probe> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>94</sup> Gitell, Seth, “Strange Bedfellows: Grover Norquist and Abdurahman Alamoudi,” *Boston Phoenix*, October 4-11, 2001. [http://bostonphoenix.com/boston/news\\_features/this\\_just\\_in/documents/01848515.htm](http://bostonphoenix.com/boston/news_features/this_just_in/documents/01848515.htm)

<sup>95</sup> Timmerman, Ken, “Islamists’ Front Man,” *Insight Magazine*, 24 February 2004. <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.aspx?GUID=6BF874BB-9F0A-4D8F-9FB5-C717A1A256B0> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>96</sup> Gitell; see also Malkin, Michelle, “The GOP’s Grover Norquist problem and the RNC debate,” January 5, 2009 <http://michellemalkin.com/2009/01/05/the-gops-grover-norquist-problem> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>97</sup> “Some Muslim Leaders Seen with Bush Expressed Support for Terrorist Groups,” *Fox News.com*, October 1, 2001. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,35384,00.html> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>98</sup> Gaffney, Frank, “The Faisal Gill Affair,” *Front Page Magazine*, 19 July 2004. <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Printable.aspx?GUID=A5595219-68B6-4838-9E26-B491C3F50188> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)



Although the American Conservative Defense Alliance claims to advocate for a strong U.S. national defense policy, it eschews any initiative that would entail “imposing American-styled ‘democracy’ abroad” or engaging in “nation-building.”<sup>99</sup> ACDA’s place within the Iran Lobby network can be discerned from a look at key figures among its leadership boards, website links to other Iran Lobby entities and posted statements by its associates that scoff at evidence of the Tehran regime’s pursuit of nuclear weapons and involvement in supporting terrorist militias in Iraq.<sup>100</sup>

For example, the ACDA website homepage features a “Special Projects Campaign for a New Policy with Iran” tab that links directly to the CNAPI website. On that CNAPI page is a Welcome message that addresses the Obama Transition Team with policy recommendations for establishing a dialogue with Iran. A notice for the June 10, 2008 CNAPI “Time to Talk with Iran” event and press conference also advertises for the “National Call-In to Congress Day” and quotes the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, to the effect that the U.S. “should find a way to open dialogue with Iran.”<sup>101</sup>

Another member of the ACDA board is its Treasurer, Peter Gemma. Gemma’s ACDA bio page also features a link to the CNAPI website. Gemma also has written a glowing book review carried on the ACDA website for *Treacherous Alliances: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*, a 2007 book by NIAC President Trita Parsi. The Gemma review writes approvingly of Parsi’s position that, “It is in the best interest of the U.S., and ultimately Israel, to reconcile with Iran” and takes no issue with the latter’s claim that “Tehran is not necessarily motivated by opposition to Israeli or even religious ideology....”<sup>102</sup>

ACDA board member Philip Giraldi’s association with NIAC and Trita Parsi has been described previously in this paper. Giraldi’s contributions to the Iran Issues link at the ACDA website include several written pieces that minimize the Iranian threat to U.S. national security and urge that the U.S. adopt a policy towards Iran that “takes into account Iran’s own interests and its legitimate security concerns.”<sup>103</sup>

An April 2008 posting at the ACDA website displays a March 2007 open letter entitled “No War with Iran” and addressed to Members of Congress. The letter marshals a number of the Iran Lobby’s familiar arguments to persuade Congress to oppose consideration of a military strike against Iran and “support diplomacy between the United States and Iran without preconditions.” Among its positions are preposterous statements that “There is little credible intelligence that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon” and “Claims that Iran is directly assisting insurgents in Iraq remain unsubstantiated and implausible since the majority of identified insurgents are Sunnis (including al-Qaeda), while the Iranians are Shia.” The letter is co-signed by ten representatives of various policy groups, including Philip Giraldi, listed as “contributing editor, *The American Conservative*,” and Trita Parsi for NIAC.<sup>104</sup>

The ACDA links with NIAC’s Trita Parsi also include a November 14, 2007 event at the Nixon Center that was co-sponsored by ACDA and featured a panel discussion about U.S. foreign policy towards Iran. Panelists included Philip Giraldi and Trita Parsi. The event was posted on the personal website of Michael D. Ostrolenk, ACDA

<sup>99</sup> ACDA website <http://www.acdalliance.org/>. (Accessed 25 Feb 09.)

<sup>100</sup> American Conservative Defense Alliance <http://acdalliance.org> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>101</sup> CNAP welcome page <http://www.newiranpolicy.org> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>102</sup> Gemma, Peter B., “Middle East Mischief,” featured under the ‘Iran’ link for ACDA Issues. Book review at <http://acdalliance.org/issues/Iran> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>103</sup> Giraldi, Philip, “A Bipartisan Shell Game: False Consensus on How to Deal with Iran.” <http://acdalliance.org/issues/Iran> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

<sup>104</sup> “No War With Iran,” 21 March 2007. <http://acdalliance.org/letters/04-21-2008-no-war-with-iran> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

President and Board Member. Ostrolenk’s homepage also highlights an October 17, 2007 discussion with Trita Parsi about his then just-released book, *Treacherous Alliance*.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

The foregoing makes clear that the Iran Lobby has spawned myriad organizations, many of which are staffed or associated with the same individuals, for the purpose of advancing Tehran’s policy agenda in America. The numerous conferences, articles, panel discussions, press conferences and other gambits they initiate have in common a largely unchanging and small pool of actors but the same, consistent bottom line: The Iranian regime must be accommodated, not confronted. It poses no threat except if attacked. Those who challenge these contentions pose a threat to America and her interests, not the mullahs and their proxies.

As the Obama administration begins to staff up, it is especially disquieting to see how many of the figures named in this paper are being tapped for important jobs where they will deal directly with Iran and other critical Middle East issues. The Iran Lobby will soon no longer have to try to influence official U.S. government policy from the outside. All other things being equal, its operatives and their friends will be shaping it from *inside* key national security agencies across Washington.

Consider the implications of just one personnel decision: Former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman’s reported appointment to chair the National Intelligence Council (NIC), which prepares the Intelligence Community’s collective National Intelligence Estimates (NIE). It will be recalled that the December 2007 NIE on Iran concluded that Iran had halted its nuclear weapons program in 2003, thus effectively precluding any Bush administration military action to take out Iran’s nuclear facilities. It is inconceivable that a man as publicly and closely aligned with the views of Iran and its agents of influence in America will be able to exercise truly independent judgment about what the mullahs are up to, let alone offer objective intelligence analysis about how best to contend with them.

Others who have been associated in one way or another with the Iran Lobby who have or are expected to secure key jobs in the Obama administration include:

- Fletcher School professor and Middle East scholar, Dr. Vali Nasr, who will, as noted above, be Ambassador Richard Holbrooke’s senior advisor – a position that will assuredly involve decisions about dealings with Afghanistan’s neighbor.
- Dr. Susan Rice, the Obama administration’s new Ambassador to the United Nations. Amb. Rice served on the board of directors for the Center for a New American Security. While CNAS is not formally connected directly with either NIAC or Trita Parsi, the foreign policy positions of its affiliates correspond strongly to the preferred policy positions of Tehran’s mullahs.
- Ambassador Dennis Ross, who will be a senior advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for Iran policy, was previously an “Expert” for CNAS.
- Council on Foreign Relations Committee president and another CNAS “Expert” Richard Haas, reportedly is under consideration for a top job in the Obama foreign policy team.

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<sup>105</sup> <http://www.michaeldostrolenk.com/middle-east-seminars> (Accessed 22 Feb 09.)

In short, the pattern outlined in this paper is one of penetration of our national security infrastructure by agents of influence, be they witting or unwitting, whose actions, intentionally or unintentionally, serve to support the objectives of a hostile foreign power. To date, however, there has been no serious public review of the activities of this Iran Lobby or its affiliates from a counterintelligence perspective. And yet, given the serious nature of the complex challenges that Iran – and especially a *nuclear-armed* Iran – can be expected to pose in coming months, it is more important than ever to consider the consequences of appointing aggressive advocates, or at least apologists, for this terrorist regime to high posts within U.S. national security leadership. That so many respected Middle East and foreign policy experts seem to have bought into the Iranian regime’s agenda is testament to the extraordinarily effective information operation that has been waged against U.S. national security interests by the Iran Lobby’s network over the last several years.

If the Obama administration does not hear a persuasive alternative position, cogently presented, *and soon*, Iran’s carefully-crafted clandestine intelligence operation to exercise effective control over America’s Iran policy could succeed – to the profound detriment of U.S. national interests and those of our friends and allies in the Middle East region and around the world.

## CLARE M. LOPEZ

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