

## Conference Call June 18, 2000

Attendees: Fereydoun Taslimi (Afiliation)  
Brian Oliner (Children of Perisa)  
Esmail Ghorbani (Omeed)  
Trita Parsi (IIC)

Moderator: Fereydoun Taslimi  
Minutes: Trita Parsi

Meeting convened 07:58 PM, June 18, 2001  
Meeting adjourned 09:23 PM June 18, 2001

### **Biographies:**

*Mr. Fereydoun Taslimi*

*Mr. Brian Oliner*

*Mr. Esmail Ghorbani*

*Mr. Trita Parsi*

Mr. Trita Parsi is the founder of Iranians for International Cooperation (IIC), one of the first Iranian advocacy groups working for the lifting of sanctions on Iran and the initiation of an US-Iran dialogue. Having served as a Foreign Policy Advisor to Congressman Robert Ney of Ohio in 1997, Mr. Trita Parsi took the initiative to found IIC. Mr. Parsi has also served as a diplomat with the Swedish Mission to the UN and as a strategy consultant in Stockholm, Sweden. Mr. Parsi currently works as a Director at the American Iranian Council.

### **Topics:**

1. The issue of whether to lobby for an exemption for charitable NGOs or to lobby for the lifting of sanctions altogether was touched upon several times. Prior to the conference call, Mr. Parsi had submitted an email in which it was pointed out that the former strategy may prolong the sanctions policy in two different ways (June 17, 2001):

- Proponents of sanctions may label the exemption for NGOs a great concession and argue that Iran deserves no further concessions until it reciprocates this “goodwill” gesture.
- The exemption for NGOs may make the sanctions look smarter and give the impression that the sanctions, through the NGO exemption, only target the Iranian regime and not the people.

Furthermore, prior to the telephone conference, Sussan Tahmasebi had in an email dated June 18, 2001 argued for a “shooting small”, i.e. a lobbying effort aimed at getting an NGO exemption.

Mr. Parsi pointed out that focusing only on an NGO exemption might alienate allies within and outside of Capitol Hill, and that “shooting big” leaves us with the option of “shooting small” at a later stage if necessary.

Mr. Oliner suggested that the costs and benefits of both strategies be investigated through contacts with Congressional offices, anti-sanction lobby groups and people in the policy community.

**Decision:** Mr. Parsi agreed to do research and report back to the group. Although the majority tended to favor “shooting small”, the question was left open pending further research. [Is my impression correct?]

2. All parties expressed concerns regarding the legality of 501 C3s getting involved in lobbying. Mr. Oliner pointed out that 501 C3 are not allowed to influence legislation, whether it be a complete lifting of sanctions or getting an exemption to NGOs through law. Mr. Parsi had in the email dated June 17, 2001 pointed out that one solution was to incorporate a new and legally and financially separate organization.

Sussan Tahmasebi had in an email dated June 18, 2001 mentioned the possibility of registration a 501 C4. She also pointed that 501 C3s can lobby granted that less than 10-20% of their resources are devoted to influencing legislation.

**Decision:** The question was left open and the general feeling was that expert advice should be sought.

3. Mr. Taslimi, Oliner and Ghorbani all shared their past experiences in trying to donate money to Iran and their contacts with the Treasury and OFAC. It was uncertain whether the best strategy would be to go through the Treasury (would that require a new exemption for every organization and for every time they wish to transfer funds to Iran?), lobby Congress to pass a law, or lobby Congress to pressure the White House to modify the Executive Orders.

**Decision:** Mr. Parsi will consult with Kenneth Katzman of the Congressional Research Service, Amb. Miller of Search for Common Ground and Congressional Staffers and report back to the group.