

Unknown

From: Conroy, Britt [Britt.Conroy@mail.house.gov]
Sent: Thursday, December 20, 2007 8:05 PM
To: Emily Blout
Subject: RE: Per our conversation yesterday

Hi Emily,

Thank you for the email. I apologize for not responding sooner. Are you free to meet next Thursday or Friday, 12/27 or 12/28?

Regards,
Britt

From: Emily Blout [mailto:ebout@niacouncil.org]
Sent: Thursday, December 13, 2007 11:01 AM
To: Conroy, Britt
Cc: 'Trita Parsi'
Subject: Per our conversation yesterday

Hi Britt,

It was good to meet you at NIAC's lunch briefing. Thank you for approaching Dr. Parsi regarding ways that your office can support NIAC and the Iranian American community. Per our conversation, I have attached a letter to State and Foreign Operations conferees from 26 organizations (check out the article in the [Washington Post](#)) urging them to reprogram the \$75 million Iran "democracy promotion" funding that has been so detrimental to the democracy movement in Iran. I've also attached background materials. Some talking points are below.

We'd welcome any support you could lend on this issue.

I'd also like to set up a brief meeting to formally introduce my organization and learn about the Congresswoman's priorities going forward. Are you available on Tuesday, December 18th to meet? If not, please let me know when you are available.

Thanks again,

Emily Blout

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- **Rather than promoting democracy, the US funding has narrowed the space for the pro-democracy movement to operate.** The widely publicized funding has fueled the Iranian government's paranoia of a covert US mission to institute regime change through soft revolution. It has used this threat as an excuse to create a securitized atmosphere and crack down on civil society.

- **Because the recipients of the US funding are secret, everyone is treated as a potential conspirator and target for harassment by the Iranian government.** The resulting crack-down has been broad and severe, targeting all elements of civil society and employing harsher measures to punish suspected recipients of US funding. This includes the investigation and closure of civil society organizations, as well as the interrogation and arrest of human rights activists and scholars.
- **Prominent democracy and human rights activists in Iran have called for the termination of the democracy promotion program.** Such Iranian activists include Noble Peace Prize winner, *Shirin Ebadi*, renowned investigative journalist, *Akbar Ganji*, and human rights activist and former political prisoner, *Emadeddin Baghi*. Woodrow Wilson Scholar *Haleh Esfandiari* (one of the four Iranian Americans recently released from prison in Iran) has publically opposed the program.
- **Increased funding for Voice America Persian has paradoxically contributed to the substantial decline in the quality and effectiveness of its programming.** VOA has struggled to find experienced staff and has instead hired political activists with loyalty to their agenda rather than to the VOA mandate. According to insiders at VOA, this has led to its loss of credibility among the Iranian public.

This is not to say the US should not promote democracy in Iran, rather it should employ other means towards this end. Positive steps that could be taken include:

- **Reprogram funding toward cultural exchanges, information technologies, and US broadcasting.***
- **Lift US sanctions on NGO activities: People to people exchanges should be between people; the governments should butt out.** Right now, US organizations cannot conduct cultural and academic exchanges with their counterparts in Iran without obtaining a license from the OFAC. The fastest track to an OFAC license is through acceptance of US government funding. This essentially forces American *non*-government organizations to turn to the US government to conduct their exchanges. Genuine people to people exchanges, absent of government interference, will enhance America's soft power in Iran. The US should lift its sanctions on exchanges with Iran.
- ***Reinvigorate VOA Persian's credibility by cleaning house.** The VOA's credibility has declined sharply over the last 12 months due to poor journalism. An independent review of the organization should be conducted to measure the extent of these shortcomings, including an internal survey of VOA staff and an assessment of the programming.