

CAIR and NIAC: Two Peas in a Pod

by Kenneth R. Timmerman

What could the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) possibly have in common?

CAIR founders had close ties to Hamas, Palestinian Sunni Islamic extremists. NIAC and its main spokesman, Trita Parsi, have become apologists for the regime in Tehran, which exports a rival Shiite brand of Islamic extremism.

Sunnis and Shias. We all know the story. They hate each other worse than Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants. Right?

Well, no. As I pointed out in *Countdown to Crisis: the Coming Nuclear Showdown with Iran*, Sunnis and Shias get along just fine when it comes to killing Americans and killing Jews.

Similarly, CAIR and NIAC get along just fine when it comes to opposing the Bush administration policies in Iraq, Iran, and the greater Middle East.

But they share much more than just an ideological affinity. They also share publicists in the redoubtable David Fenton.

Fenton Communications has repped the likes of Cindy Sheehan, moveon.org, and CAIR. And now, they have added NIAC to their client list, as this recent NIAC press release shows.

(One wonders how much of the grant monies NIAC boasts it has received from the National Endowment for Democracy, the Open Society Institute, the Kenbe Foundation, and the PARSA Community Foundation have gone to paying publicists, Congressional lobbyists, and fund-raisers).

And that's not where the similarity between CAIR and NIAC stops. The two groups have also launched energetic campaigns to intimidate their critics and the organizations that help those critics air their views.

CAIR's latest intimidation campaign against Robert Spencer has gotten considerable attention. NIAC's campaign against its chief critic, Hassan Daioleslam, has not.

In April, Daioleslam published in these pages a detailed investigative piece that exposed the origins of NIAC and its ties back to Siamak Namazi, a member of the "regime's inner circle" and a big player in the Iranian oil industry.

Their plan to establish an Iranian-American lobby "to create a balance between competing Middle Eastern lobbies" (specifically, AIPAC) dated from 1999, Daioleslam revealed, when Parsi and Namazi presented a paper on the subject at a conference in Cyprus sponsored by convicted felon Hossein Alikhani,

Ever since his release from a U.S. prison on charges of violating U.S. anti-terrorist sanctions, Alikhani has been seeking ways to get U.S. sanctions lifted. As a reward for his activism, he was recently awarded the deed to the U.S. embassy in Tehran by the Iranian regime.

One of the key goals of the new Iranian-American lobby recommended by Parsi and Namazi was – surprise-surprise – to convince Iranian-Americans that sanctions on Iran were "counterproductive." They have worked relentlessly ever since to win converts to their cause, from former Rep. Bob Ney, the convicted felon from Ohio, to Rep. Dennis Kucinich, a Democrat presidential contender.

Daioleslam unearthed damning information on Trita Parsi cohort Siamak Namazi and exposed the role his Atieh companies in Tehran have played in brokering international investment in Iran's oil and gas industry.

NIAC responded with a statement on their website, accusing Daioleslam of being “a Marxist Mujahedin-e Khalq (MKO) supporter.”

(That, by the way, probably qualifies as slander, given that the MEK is on the U.S. list of International Terrorist Organizations, making membership a crime. Daioleslam eventually put out a statement denying any connection or sympathy with the MEK, noting that the only “proof” offered by NIAC was the fact that one of his articles was picked up by an MEK website.)

Rather than address the points raised by Daioleslam (and in an earlier article, by me), NIAC created straw man arguments, accusing the two of us of advocating for war with Iran.

The Voice of America’s Persian Service took interest, and sought to organize a face-to-face debate between Hassan Daioleslam and Trita Parsi.

Daioleslam accepted the challenge, but Parsi never responded, despite repeated invitations sent to him by VOA producers by phone and by email.

The show eventually aired in June without Parsi. By all accounts, it was a devastating blow to the pro-Tehran lobby.

On June 19, NIAC got an Iranian-American lawyer in Rockville, MD, Afshin Pishevar, to send a letter of complaint to the director of Voice of America, Danforth Austin, and to the VOA office of public affairs.

The lawyer claimed that “VOA made no effort to contact Dr. Parsi directly,” which VOA producers tell me is demonstrably false, and that the Roundtable discussion violated VOA’s charter which states that “views of a single party must be challenged by the interviewer if alternative opinions are unrepresented.”

In the very next sentence, the lawyer stated that the show's host, Bijan Farhoodi, "made significant efforts to present his own understanding of the view of the missing party in the discussion, even though he had access to NIAC's detailed rebuttal of Mr. Daioleslam's false accusations to rely on. Although he briefly mentioned the rebuttal during the program, Mr. Farhoodi did not challenge a single accusation made by Mr. Daioleslam."

Gee, let's see if I understand this correctly. NIAC's Trita Parsi ducks calls from VOA producers to appear on the show, then has a lawyer criticize VOA for not having him on.

And then the lawyer criticizes VOA further because they only "mentioned" NIAC's rebuttal, which was no rebuttal at all and in fact failed to address any of the factual points raised by Daioleslam about the ties between NIAC founders and the Tehran regime.

But this is only the beginning. Following this letter, NIAC's lawyer demanded that VOA essentially ban Daioleslam from the airwaves, which they did. To my knowledge, Daioleslam has not been invited back on VOA since June 10.

Once these bullying tactics paid off, NIAC then boasted on its website that it had "taken legal action" against VOA and "against proponents of US-Iran war who have waged a defamation campaign against NIAC."

It was a stunning example of the Big Lie technique. NIAC has taken *no* legal action. It has filed no lawsuit. It has not gotten a U.S. court to issue a "cease and desist" order. And yet, that is the impression it seeks to create.

"NIAC Makes Progress in Defamation Case with VOA Persian," its website blares. Many pro-regime bloggers have picked up on it and are spreading it across the blogosphere, just as they spread the earlier slander that Daioleslam (and me!) are MKO members.

The statements have also been picked up by a website notorious for being a mouthpiece of the Iranian intelligence ministry, MOIS.

The only problem is, there is no Defamation Case. Period. Nada.

As Omid Biniaz notes at the American Thinker, "Iranians would welcome the opportunity to hear Mr. Parsi, under oath, explain his relation with Tehran and a potpourri of felons close to them."

Fat chance.

The real story here is about Voice of America. Why has VOA caved to a poorly-written letter from a lawyer who can't afford an office in downtown Washington, DC, that is packed with hyperbole, misstatements, and outright lies?

Rather than allow groups such as NIAC to continue operating in the dark, it's time to shine the light of day onto their activities.

And it's time for Voice of America to show some backbone.

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