

# **"Blame Israel and pale the Iranian regime's anti-Semitism"**

## **The pro-Tehran lobby and its anti-Israeli crusade**



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## **Introduction**

In 2007, Trita Parsi, the president of National Iranian American Council (NIAC), published a book titled [Treacherous Alliance – The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the US](#). In his book and numerous articles, political statements and interviews since 1997, Parsi has depicted Israel as the main hurdle preventing any possible rapprochement between Iran and the US, because “*From the Israeli perspective, every step Washington takes toward Tehran is a step away from Tel Aviv.*” Israeli is “*the sole force behind the lobby efforts to impose and extend the sanctions*” against Iran and is “*forcing Congress to pursue a policy that contradicts US interest.*”

Parsi's book and statements about Israel go beyond scholarly works because they theorize and legitimize a large scale 15 years old lobby to "remove sanctions against Iran" and "pressure US lawmakers to pose a more Iran friendly position".

Parsi has always tried to frame his lobby as a battle against AIPAC, "*David versus Goliath: a smaller grassroots Iranian-American movement (NIAC) on one side and the hawkish American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) mega-lobby on the other.*"

While probably not the intended outcome, nevertheless, Parsi's anti-Israeli crusade has effectively helped institutionalization of anti-Semitism in two ways:

1- By presenting the Iranian regime as a victim rather than partly responsible for the Middle East turmoil and hostilities toward United State, Parsi has influenced US policy towards easing pressure against Iran. This has tremendously assisted Iran to advance its nuclear program and its hegemonic drive in the region. This has resulted in the spread of fundamentalism and anti-Semitism in the region.

2- In an effort to acquit Iran and blame Israel, Parsi helps solidify deceptive myths about Israel's extraordinary power to impose its will on the entire civilized world. The US, Europe and United Nations seem to be forced to fulfill Israeli dictate.

Here we go briefly through his book that is a fair reflection of what he has been telling since 1997 when he started his lobby to "pressure the US for a more friendly policy with Iran."

## **Part One: Presenting Israel as the spoiler of US-Iran relation**

Parsi's book is a long story about why and how Israel has seen a US-Iran rapprochement as a threat to its security. Therefore, Israel and its lobby (AIPAC) have used their influences to prevent such a scenario from happening. All started in 1991 when the cold war ended and Israel felt that it had lost its usefulness for America. Hence, it needed new glue, a pretext, to maintain its privileged relation with US.

Israel depicted Iran as a threat (while it was not) and sold this idea to the US. Israel forced the Clinton administration to adopt the policy of dual containment and keep Iran isolated.

In order to create obstacles to US-Iran dialogue, Israel forced the Congress to impose sanctions on Iran. Regarding the nuclear issue, Israel has forced the US to counter the Iranian program and take it to the Security Council. We examine briefly Parsi's book.

### **Israeli motivations to prevent a US-Iran rapprochement**

- During the Cold War, Israel played a key strategic role as a pro-Western outpost in a Middle East. But with the Soviet Union gone, and U.S.-Arab r/relations at a peak, the Israeli alliance risked becoming obsolete to Washington. (P. 148)
- The old order no longer existed, and Israel would have no future in the new order unless it could find a rationale for Washington to continue the strategic relationship. (158)
- Israel was convinced that Iran, which emerged as one of the winners of the Persian Gulf War, would seek to impose its own order on the Middle East—particularly if it came to terms with America (159)
- The US-Iran negotiations could damage Israel's strategic standing, since common interests shared by Iran and the US would overshadow Israel's concerns with Tehran and leave Israel alone in facing its Iranian rival....Israel is playing hardball to prevent Washington from cutting a deal with Tehran that could benefit America, but deprive Israel of its military and strategic supremacy." ( "A challenge to Israel's strategic primacy"
- From the Israeli perspective, every step Washington takes toward Tehran is a step away from Tel Aviv.” (Iran Analysis 2001 05)

### **Parsi: Israel painted Iran as fanatical, suicidal and a threat to the world**

- Fearing that Israel’s strategic weight would suffer if Iran emerged as the undisputed power in the Middle East, Israeli politicians began painting the regime in Tehran as fanatical and irrational.
- But for Israel, rallying Western states to its side was best achieved by bringing attention to the alleged suicidal tendencies of the clergy and to Iran’s apparent infatuation with the idea of destroying Israel. If the Iranian leadership was viewed as irrational, conventional tactics such as deterrence would be impossible, leaving the international community with no option but to have zero tolerance for Iranian military capabilities. (Introduction 2)
- The Israeli strategy was to convince the world—particularly Washington—that the Israeli-Iranian conflict wasn’t one between two rivals for military preeminence in a fundamentally disordered region that lacked a clear pecking order. Rather, Israel framed the clash as one between the sole democracy in the Middle East and a totalitarian theocracy that hated everything the West stood for. (Introduction 3)
- Swiftly, a campaign was organized to convince the United States and the EU that Iran was a global threat. (161)

### **The US bowed to Israel and adopted the policy to isolate Iran**

- Israel wanted the United States to put Iran under economic and political siege. Shimon Peres’s New Middle East and the American policy of Dual Containment that went into effect in 1993 after more than a year of Israeli pressure would all but write Iran’s isolation into law. (181)
- By October 1994, Washington started to adopt the Israeli line on Iran. In response to Israeli pressure—and not to Iranian actions—Washington’s rhetoric on Iran began to mirror Israel’s talking points.<sup>85</sup>

- Washington started to adopt the Israeli line on Iran. In response to Israeli pressure—and not to Iranian actions—Washington’s rhetoric on Iran began to mirror Israel’s talking points... Washington’s recycling of Israel’s argument back to Tel Aviv reflected the success of Rabin and Peres’s campaign against Iran. Washington’s turnaround was a direct result of Israel’s pressure .(p. 185)

- There was a feeling in Israel that because of the end of the Cold War, relations with the U.S. were cooling and we needed some new glue for the alliance,” Inbar said. “And the new glue . . . was radical Islam. And Iran was radical Islam.” It didn’t take long before the new glue started to stick. Only a few months into Clinton’s first term—and only eight months after the Rabin-Peres government embarked on a campaign to isolate Iran—Washington adopted the policy of Dual Containment. (170)

- Israel was now a spoiler of the US-Iran dialogue that both Presidents Clinton and Khatami sought. A thaw in US-Iran ties could have significantly advanced US national interests at this time, but the Israeli-Iranian rivalry effectively sabotaged the opportunity. The powerful pro-Israeli lobby, headed by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, made a US-Iran rapprochement politically impossible

### **Israel is the sole force behind the sanctions against Iran**

- The main purpose of the sanctions are not to halt Iran’s alleged attempt to acquire WMD or halt its alleged support to terrorist groups. The main purpose is to constitute a political obstacle to a US-Iran dialogue and improved US-Iran relations. Conference call 2001

- But neither America’s adoption of the Israeli line on Iran nor Dual Containment was sufficient. Having achieved these goals, Israel raised the bar and requested additional pressure on Iran. After all, while the Clinton administration had adopted Israel’s rhetoric and hard stance on Iran in the political sphere, U.S.-Iran trade remained unaffected by Dual Containment. (185)

- AIPAC organized a campaign to bridge the gap between Washington’s political and economic approach to Iran. Together with the Israeli government, it pressured the Clinton administration to lead by example, because American efforts to shut down Russian and European trade with Iran would fail unless America’s political and economic policies were aligned. (186)

- Pressured by Congress, AIPAC, and the Israelis, President Clinton prohibited all trade with Iran. But the initial sanctions weren’t enough. AIPAC launched a formidable lobbying campaign and managed to win extensive support for the bill—the Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA)—on Capitol Hill. The Clinton administration balked. But Clinton was no match for AIPAC’s influence in Congress. The bill passed the House of Representatives 415 votes to 0 and was reluctantly signed into law by the president in August 1996. (187-188)

- The success of ILSA lay in the almost irremovable political obstacle it created to any effort at improving U.S.-Iran relations— a critical objective of Israel as a result of its fear that a dialogue between Washington and Tehran would come at the expense of Israel’s strategic role. (189)

- AIPAC checkmated George Bush: Immediately, fears spread in Israel that Washington would soften its stand on Iran, ease Clinton’s economic sanctions, and narrow its efforts to block Tehran’s nuclear program. Instead of waiting for Bush and Powell to make their move, AIPAC took advantage of the disorganization in the White House that followed the election conflict. The pro- Israel lobby began laying the groundwork for ILSA’s renewal on Capitol Hill, and by mid-

March—before Bush had even formulated a position on ILSA—AIPAC had gathered more than three hundred cosponsors in the House, The Bush administration was quickly outmaneuvered; through its preemptive work on Capitol Hill, AIPAC checkmated Bush and saw the sanctions bill pass with overwhelming numbers in both chambers.

## **Israel has forced the US and the UN to counter Iranian nuclear program**

For Parsi, the Iranian nuclear issue is a perfect example of how Israel has bullied the US and international community to accept the dictate of Jewish state. Iran is according to him, in compliance with its rights granted by international treaties (NPT). But, Israel has compelled the US and Europe to accept the Israeli redlines (and not international redlines) and counter Iran's legitimate program. He wrote:

- For more than 14 years, Israel has been the primary force countering Iran's nuclear advances. Though Israel presents the prospect of a nuclear Iran as a global rather than an Israeli problem, it has compelled Washington to adopt its own red lines and not those of the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) "[A challenge to Israel's strategic primacy](#)" )

- "With the issue of Iran's nuclear program being taken up by the U.N. Security Council, Israel's hawkish policy and AIPAC's support for Bush administration hard-liners would appear to be paying dividends. ([A Modus Vivendi Between Jerusalem and Tehran](#)", Forward, March 17, 2006)

Parsi's campaign to depict Israel as the sole force behind the American pressure to stop the Iranian nuclear program reached its summit in 2007 when the US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) declared that Iran had halted the military part of its nuclear program in 2003. For Parsi, this was a blow to the Israel that for so long had falsely presented the Iranian program as a threat to the world. The NIE proved that the Israeli campaign was baseless and as a result, NIE got Israel into a strategic paralysis. Parsi [wrote](#):

"Israel is in state of strategic paralysis. Its longstanding policy on Iran - depict Tehran as a global threat, pressure Washington to prevent Iran from going nuclear, and evade an American-Iranian dialogue - has been dealt a severe blow by the recently released National Intelligence Estimate. The Iran policy Israel has pursued to date must now be put aside and a genuine effort must be made to develop a Plan B that recognizes the new strategic realities in the region. A broad diplomatic opening between Washington and Tehran is increasingly likely.

Indeed, Israel will not have many backers in the United States publicly pushing for a more bellicose approach toward Tehran. The Europeans may sound tough, but in reality, Europe has drawn a big sigh of relief over the National Intelligence Estimate.

The reality is that Israel's Iran policy is now dead, no matter how hard some Israeli politicians try to keep it on life support. But is there any Plan B that can compel Iran to shift its hard line on Israel? The short answer is yes. Today, Tehran perceives its ideological and strategic imperatives as being aligned with regard to the Jewish state. The only factor that can rearrange these forces is a larger American-Iranian arrangement in which Iran can gain political reintegration into the region in return for significant changes in its foreign policy - including on Israel."

Ironically, three years later it was president Obama who [declared](#) that the Iranian program is to acquire the nuclear bomb:

“Iran and its potential possession of a nuclear weapon has been my number one foreign policy priority over the course of the last 18 months. What I've also tried to do is build an international consensus so that Iran can't somehow play a victim, can't suggest somehow that they're being singled out by the West. They are the only country that has not been able to convince the International Atomic Energy Agency that they are pursuing nuclear power for peaceful means. It's not hard to do, but they haven't been able to do it because all indicators are that they are in fact pursuing a nuclear weapon.”

## **Parsi misrepresents the reality of US-Iran relations**

The central message of Parsi's book is the claim that since 1992, Israel has tried to prevent a US-Iran rapprochement. And because the Israeli lobby is according to Parsi influential, powerful and in full control of US policy with Iran, therefore, the Israeli desire to isolate and confront Iran, has been translated into US policy with Iran. Consequently, Parsi and his partners in the peace movement [declared](#) in 2007 that “the US has refused to start a dialogue with Iran for the past 26 years.”

But the reality of US-Iran relations is astonishingly in total contradiction to Parsi's claim. It is noteworthy to remember Parsi's own declaration in 2000 when he praised US Secretary of State's overture toward Iran for dialogue. In a statement titled “IIC welcome's US's olive branch” he wrote: “Secretary Albright's speech at the Asia Society is the first indication of a genuine willingness from the US Administration to improve ties with the Iranian government... the Iranian Government should seize this opportunity to speed up the slow train of dialogue.” In a second statement titled “Ball in Iran's court: Will Iran grasp the opening offered by the U.S.?” He wrote:

“This past Friday, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright finally gave an appropriate response to President Khatami's address to the American people two years ago, and by that, clearly put the ball in Iran's court. In an impressive speech, she made it clear and for all, that any concerns that the U.S. may have with Iran are best addressed through dialogue, and not sanctions.” (prjune2098)

This episode happened after four years of President Clinton's unilateral overture towards Iran. In 2000, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made a speech and declared:

“Surely the time has come for America and Iran to enter a new season in which mutual trust may grow and a quality of warmth supplants the long, cold winter of our mutual discontent... This morning on behalf of the government and the people of the United States, I call upon Iran to join us in writing a new chapter in our shared history. Let us be open about our differences and strive to overcome them. Let us acknowledge our common interests and strive to advance them. Let us think boldly about future possibilities and strive to achieve them, and thereby turn this new year and season of hope into the reality of a safer and better life for our two peoples. To that mission I pledge my own best efforts this morning.

Certainly, in our view, there are no obstacles that wise and competent leadership cannot remove. As some Iranians have pointed out, the United States has cordial relations with a number of countries that are less democratic than Iran.

The US is prepared to take things slowly and step-by-step, or to engage in fast track diplomacy towards rapprochement via direct dialogue. Given Leader Khamenei's strong statements, it is clear that the fast track route is not a realistic option".

But Tehran did not respond to this overture as it ignored many similar openings. In September 2008, the actual Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who has been personally involved in dealing with Iran from the very beginning of the Islamic Republic, gave a speech in Washington and declared: (official transcript)

"I have been involved in the search for the elusive Iranian moderate for 30 years. (Laughter.) I was in the first meeting that took place between a senior U.S. government official and the leadership of the Iranian government in Algiers at the end of October, 1979.

Every administration since then has reached out to the Iranians in one way or another and all have failed. Some have gotten into deep trouble associated with their failures, but the reality is the Iranian leadership has been consistently unyielding over a very long period of time in response to repeated overtures from the United States about having a different and better kind of relationship."

Well before Secretary Gates, many other US politicians had come forward and admitted similar failures. Kenneth Pollack, the Director for Persian Gulf affairs at the National Security Council under President Clinton in 2004, described Clinton's efforts to engage Iran:

"In the Clinton Administration in 1999 and 2000, we tried, very hard, to put the grand bargain on the table. And we tried. We made 12 separate gestures to Iran to try to demonstrate to them that we really meant it, and we were really willing to go the full nine yards and put all of these big carrots on the table if the Iranians were willing to give us what we needed. And the Iranians couldn't."

There are many such declarations by American politicians explaining how the US tried to dialogue with Tehran and failed. With no surprise, many of the Iranian diplomats have also admitted to this fact and criticized the Iranian regime's obsession to reject US overtures for dialogue. I bring only few examples:

- Abbas Maleki, deputy foreign minister under Rafsanjani (1989-1997) wrote in March 2008 in "Iranian Diplomacy"

*"For the past 28 years, consecutive American administrations sought to negotiate with Iran and paid heavy prices for it but the Iranian governments have refused to enter such negotiations."*

- Article titled "Three decades of Iranian diplomacy" by Baztab newspaper controlled by Mohsen Rezai, the former head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and actual Secretary of the Expediency Council

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007

"In early 1990s, Rafsanjani's presidency coincided with the collapse of Russian block and the defeat of Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait. Therefore, two of the Iran's main foreign policy concerns were removed and the US, as the sole world power became Iran's primary foreign policy preoccupation.

Mohajeran who was Rafsanjani's assistant expressed government's intention to resolve US-Iran impasse but the Supreme Leader reacted negatively and therefore, the negotiation with US became Iran's foreign policy redline for the next 16 years (till 2006).

Even some US gestures like Clinton's public overture toward Iran and Madeline Albright's apology for American coup in 1953 could not change this situation."

- Mohsen Aminzadeh, the deputy foreign minister under Khatami (1997-2005), Nameh monthly # 49

"Mohammad Khatami's government was allowed to negotiate with US about Afghanistan and Iraq but was denied the permission to negotiate about more fundamental issues between Iran and US, notably the sanctions.

Why was not Khatami allowed to profit from those opportunities to improve US-Iran relations? Some people answer that powerful centers in Iran did not want to resolve this important during Khatami's presidency."

- Statement by Mojahedine Enghelabe Eslami, a prominent political party participating in Khatami's government. Emrooz, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007

"We should remember that during Mohammad Khatami's presidency (1997-2005), it was the United States that was exploring every possible way to negotiate with Iran but some powerful circles in our country did not allow Khatami to take effective steps to respond to the US overtures."

A cursory review of US-Iran relations shows clearly that the alleged Israeli dictate to prevent US overture toward Iran is far from reality. Obama's failure to engage Iran demonstrates that the reason for Iran-US impasse should be sought in Tehran and not Tel Aviv. Obviously, it has not been Israel that spoiled US-Iran friendship but instead the Iranian regime's incapacity to have a normal relation with United States.

## Part two: Presenting Iran as a victim

The large-scale campaign to blame Israel has another side: acquitting Iran from major responsibility in regional problems, hostility with Israel, the spread of fundamentalist terrorism in the Islamic world and destabilizing the entire Middle East. Parsi's book and writings defend the Iranian regime in a whole range of issues, specially its actions against Israel.

He claims that the Iranian regime seeks its legitimate place in the region, could live peacefully with the US and does not pose a threat to any nation or country. Iran has been making goodwill gestures towards US but was never compensated for its friendly acts. Whenever Iran did an action against Israel, it was simply in reaction to Israeli bellicose attitudes. Prior to 1991 and the start of Israeli campaign to isolate Iran, the Clerical regime had done nothing against Israel and limited itself to mere harsh rhetoric and lip service to the Palestinian movement. Here are some of Parsi's writings to put the blame of hostility between Iran and Israel on the Jewish state:

**Israel started the rivalry:** But it wasn't Iran that turned the Israeli-Iranian cold war warm – it was Israel. In October 1992, prior to Iran's material support for Palestinian rejectionists, the Shimon Peres/Yitzhak Rabin government undertook a major campaign to depict Iran and *Shi'a* Islamic fundamentalism as a global threat. (The Israeli reversal)

**Iran's goodwill gesture remained unnoticed:** Though the United States had failed to reciprocate Iran's goodwill measures in Lebanon, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait provided Iran with another opportunity to show that the United States could benefit from improved relations with Tehran. (141)

**US did not appreciate Iran's pragmatism:** In many ways, Washington failed to appreciate Iran's pragmatism. The signals from Rafsanjani tended to be dismissed. (152)

**US non-response to Iran's pragmatism strengthened the hardliners:** Washington's failure to reciprocate Iranian gestures—even though Tehran's expectations may have been exaggerated—strengthened the hands of Iranian rejectionists, who argued that Washington would never come to terms with Iran voluntarily.

- Convinced that Washington wouldn't grant Iran its legitimate role in the region, Tehran concluded that it was left with no choice but to make America's non-recognition as costly as possible by sabotaging its policies. (155)

**US did not invite Iran to the Madrid peace conference:** The non-invitation to Madrid was in many ways the last straw for Rafsanjani's policy of détente with Washington. (154)

**Iran reacted negatively to not being included in the regional process:** Tehran reacted bitterly to Washington's snub. Madrid was, after all, not seen as just a conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but as the defining moment in forming the new Middle East order—one in which Tehran hoped to play a role commensurate with its geopolitical weight. (153)

**Iran decision to lead the anti-peace camp was in reaction to not being invited to Madrid:** As soon as it became clear that an invitation to the conference wasn't forthcoming, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, gave a green light to Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour to organize a conference in opposition to Madrid. This was a watershed moment, as Iran for the first time started to seriously reach out to rejectionist Palestinian groups. Iran took the political lead against the Madrid conference, a position it wouldn't have taken had Washington invited it to participate (155)

- Iran intensified its efforts to overcome differences with radical Palestinian groups. Oslo helped create a marriage of convenience between Iran and Islamic Jihad, but it would still take a few more years before relations with Hamas began to thaw. (177)

- The attempts to isolate Iran prompted it to oppose the peace in the Middle East Peace between the Arabs and the Israelis. (175)

**For the first time, Iran started to act against Israel:** For the first time, Iran began to translate its anti-Israel rhetoric into operational policy. (176)

### **Prior to 1991, Iran had done nothing for Palestinians except lip services**

In the 1980s, Iran made itself the most vocal regional supporter of the Palestinian cause. Yet its rhetoric was seldom followed up with action, since Tehran's strategic interest—reducing tensions with Israel and using the Jewish State to reestablish relations with the United States—contradicted Iran's ideological imperatives. After 1991 and the efforts by the United States and Israel to create a new Middle East order based on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and on Iran's prolonged isolation, however, Iran's ideological and strategic interests overlapped, and Tehran decided for the first time to become a front-line opponent of the Jewish State. (Preface - XI)

•The Labor Party's campaign to isolate Iran took Tehran by surprise. The Iranians thought Israel would continue to dismiss Iran's usual tirades against the Jewish State, just as it had in the 1980s. The unspoken understanding between the two was still valid as far as the Iranians were concerned: Iran would remain nothing more than an armchair critic; it would continue to issue colorful diatribes against Israel while paying lip service to the Palestinian cause. Israel, in turn, would turn a deaf ear to Iran's rhetoric and remember that Tehran's slogans did not reflect Iran's real policy. (181)

### **Hezbollah terrorist bombing in Argentine was a reaction to Israeli provocation**

On March 17, 1992, a bomb had destroyed the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 people. Though other groups had claimed responsibility for this bombing, Israel still suspected a Hezbollah link. According to Israeli accounts, these terror attacks were retaliations for Israeli operations in South Lebanon. Israeli forces had assassinated the leader of Hezbollah, Sheikh Abbas Mussawi, and his family a month before the embassy bombing. Three months before the AMIA attack, (1994) Israel had bombed a Hezbollah camp deep inside Lebanon and kidnapped Lebanese Shia leader Mustafa Dirani in an attempt to extract information on a missing Israeli soldier. "There is no doubt that the [embassy] bombing was connected to the Mussawi operation and that the government at the time was unaware of possible consequences for Jews abroad," said Avinoam Bar- Yosef, the director general of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, a Jerusalem think tank affiliated with the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israeli government. Itamar Rabinovich, former adviser to Rabin and Israeli ambassador to the United States, concurred. "One was a response to the killing of Abbas Mussawi in Lebanon, one was a response to an attack on a Hezbollah camp deep in Lebanon." (p. 178)

### **Parsi masks the Islamic fundamentalism**

According to Parsi, Iran maintained the nationalistic and pragmatic foreign policy of Shah and its position toward Israel. According to him, Iran changed its position toward the Jewish state only after Israel decided to abandon the periphery strategy and isolate Iran after 1991.

Missing from Parsi's book is the Iran-led Islamic fundamentalism that has changed the political landscape in the region since 1979. This ideology uses hatred against Israel as its driving force. Rarely in the modern time have a regime (Iran) done so much in planning, investing, and dedicating resources against another nation (Israel). From the day one of the Islamic Republic, the Iranian regime has become the main contributor to the hatred and terror against Israel, has spent enormous amount of money and other resources to create and strengthen Hezbollah, Islamize the Palestinian movement, hijack its agenda, prevent the peace movement, weaken and destabilize the Arab nations that desire to make peace with Israel, take the international leadership to deny Holocaust, turn Iran into a home for the Neo-Nazis, white supremacists and the most reactionary groups and individuals from around the world.

It is true that the Iranian led fundamentalism found a more fertile environment after the cold war but it does by no mean imply that this radical Islam and at its center, the Iranian regime sponsored campaign against Israel started in 1991. The demise of the Soviet bloc gave Iran an ideal ground to assert its ambition to rein the region and make the Islamic fundamentalism as the dominant ideology in the Middle East. But this fundamentalism and its anti-Israeli crusade started in 1979 when Khomein took the power and not in 1991 in reaction to the Israeli provocation.

Israel was right after 1991 to see Iran and fundamentalism as a real threat to its security and regional stability. Alas, this came very late because during the 1980s, Israel had other priorities and found common ground with Iran to combat the moderate Palestinian groups and promote the radical Islamist organizations. Similarly, the US supported the Islamist groups to combat the Soviet troops in Afghanistan. The US and Israel both helped the rise of Islamic fundamentalists to

become a primary threat against their own interests. The tragic attacks of 9/11 in New York are sad examples of this strategic mistake.

The US and Israel witnessed the rise of fundamentalism during the 1980s and were subjected to a large-scale campaign of terror by Iran proxies but both the US and Israel (wrongfully) downgraded this threat to a second place because of their cold war priorities. Both countries provided Iran with arms and assistance during the 1980s and both suffered hugely from the spread of radical groups sponsored and led by Iran. **Israel did not invent the Iranian threat in 1991 to prevent a US-Iran friendship, but it only found out the extent and depth of this threat in 1991.**

### **Relation with Arafat**

Parsi claims that the Iranian regime remained neutral towards Israel until 1991 and did not harm the Jewish state. As a proof, he mentions Khomein's cool relation with Yasser Arafat. But Khomeini's refrain from helping Arafat was not a sign of his neutrality with Israel, on the contrary, because he found Arafat too soft and not enough anti-Israel.

The Iranian regime considered Arafat as an obstacle for its ambitious plan to hijack and control the Palestinian movement. The Iranian plan was to marginalize the moderate and secular factions in the PLO and at the same time, strengthen the Islamist factions. Iran believed that only Islamic Palestinian movements could contribute to the destruction of Israel.

Ali Khamenei the current Supreme Leader declared in 1992: "The Palestine has only one path to salvation: a violent struggle which must be carried out inside and outside occupied lands. This is an Islamic struggle which all Muslims are duty bound to help." (Reuters, 27 March 1992) The creation and support to Hezbollah in the 1980s was Khomein's strategic move to strengthen its hold in the region and eventually inside the Palestinian movement. Arafat and secular groups were considered as obstacles to this goal.

Ibrahim Yazdi, Iran's liberal foreign minister in 1979 explained in a long interview how Khomeini decided to celebrate the Ghods (last Friday in Ramadan) instead of Palestinians national day in October to, because he wanted to make the Palestinian issue an Islamic issue. He believed that Jerusalem did not belong to the Palestinians but the entire nation of Islam. (Ibrahim Yazdi: "Ghods and the Middle East peace" - Asre Azadegan newspaper # 70, Jan. 2, 2000)

### **Parsi misrepresents the Iranian regime's nature and goals**

Parsi asserts that Iran started to oppose the peace process because it was not invited to the Madrid conference and thought that the new regional order resulting from the peace would isolate Iran. But why a pragmatic country (as Parsi portrays Iran) should be harmed and isolated by the peace between Israel and Palestinians? Many other regional countries (like Turkey) were not invited to Madrid conference but only Iran felt endangered by the peace prospect and took the lead to (violently) oppose it. Simply because the peace would eliminate the Iranian ambition to take the leadership of the Islamic world founded on hatred and animosity with Israel.

Parsi claims that: "the more the Islamic Republic's foreign policy was presented as different from that of the Shah, the more it resembled it at its core. Achieving and sustaining a position of preeminence in the Persian Gulf—based on Iran's inclusion in all decisions of relevance to the region—was the guiding principle of the Iranian monarch's foreign policy.

The means had changed dramatically. The ideology had shifted astonishingly. But the end goal remained remarkably similar. (182)

It is difficult to incorporate the creation of Hezbollah and enormous efforts by Iran to support similar radical groups around the globe in the framework of Persian Gulf domination. Similarly, the Iranian campaign of kidnapping, terror and destabilization operations in the 1980s that targeted almost all the moderate Arab countries is in sharp contrast to a pragmatic foreign policy, which only aims to dominate the Persian Gulf region. They are indications of a more ambitious goal to dominate the Islamic world.

There is always a correlation between the means and the goals. How could a campaign of terror serve a pragmatic foreign policy? The nature of Iranian partners is a good indication of its goals. How could a country achieve a pragmatic foreign policy when all of its partners are the most radical, reactionary and terrorist groups? No country in the world has so much contributed to the spread of fundamentalism, hatred, instability and terror in the Middle East than Iran under Ayatollahs.

But Parsi's effort to misrepresent the Iranian regime's nature and goals become vain and obsolete when he tries to mask and pale its anti-Semitism. As it shows the depth of the Iranian hatred towards an entire nation, a hatred that cannot be presented as a reaction to the Israeli provocation in 1991 but rather the indication of an reactionary and dangerous ideology that seized the political power in Iran in 199 and since that, has took the leadership to make the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish crusade as the dominant doctrine in the regions and beyond.

## **Part three: Paling the Iranian regime's anti-Semitism**

### **Regime's Holocaust denying and anti-Semitism**

When in 2005 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made his infamous declaration that Israel should be wiped off the map, the international community reacted forcefully and condemned this new low in the Iranian regime's hatred towards an entire nation. For Iran observers, this was only a new step in the Iranian march to promote anti-Semitism and Holocaust denying throughout the Middle East and Islamic world. Since the start of Khomeini's rein in 1979, Iran has become the godfather anti-Semitism and supported, promoted and protected the most reactionary people and groups from around the world that were unified together in their hatred against the Jewish people and Israel.

The Iranian government has been the only regime in the world that openly and systematically assumes its anti-Semitism and Holocaust denying. The Iranian achievement also includes bridging the European Neo-Nazis to the radical Islamists in the Middle East and White Supremacists and racists in the West. Iran used the hatred against the Jewish nation as glue to stick together the most reactionary people and organizations around the world.

As the Iranian regime's unmatched record of anti-Semitism contradicts the false image presented by Trita Parsi (as a victim of Israeli provocation), he has tried to mask and pale this record.

### **Parsi: Ahmadinejad's declaration was mistranslated**

Ahmadinejad's declaration about wiping Israel (and later asking the Jews to leave Israel and settle in Alaska or Canada) were very damaging for the pro-Iran lobbyists in Washington who tried hard to present Iran as a victim of Israeli bellicose intentions. On top of them was Trita Parsi who came forward to pale Ahmadinejad's anti-Semitism. First, he argued that the Iranian president was mistranslated and he did not really mean to eradicate Israel. He wrote: (Book's introduction)

"Ahmadinejad's statement has generally been mistranslated to read, "Wipe Israel off the map." Ahmadinejad never used the word "Israel" but rather the "occupying regime of Jerusalem," which is a reference to the Israeli regime and not necessarily to the country."

However, for the Ahmadinejad's supporters in Tehran, he meant eradicating Israel. A day after his declaration, the "Jomhuri Eslami", a governmental newspaper dedicated its [front page](#) to an organized rally in support of President's speech. The headline read: "Iranian people: Israel (country) should be eradicated" and a big picture of demonstrators showed a similar sign with the word "Israel", leaving no doubt what the Iranian president meant and said.

### **Parsi: Ahmadinejad is a unique and irrelevant case of anti-Semitism in the regime**

Parsi also tried to diminish the importance of Ahmadinejad's declaration by presenting him as a powerless politician. He [wrote](#) "For a few days, the media spoke of Ahmadinejad as if he actually determined Iran's nuclear policy, as if he was in charge of the Iranian army and as if it was up to him whether Tehran would seek Israel's destruction or not."

Then, to prove that Ahmadinejad is an irrelevant figure whose declarations merit no intention, Parsi tried to show that the Iranian state TV opposed Ahmadinejad's views on Holocaust. He wrote:

"While the former Tehran mayor questioned the veracity of the Holocaust in New York, ordinary Iranians were glued to their TVs to watch a completely different drama – an Iranian series about the Holocaust, the suffering of the Jewish people and the heroic efforts of Iranian diplomats to help French Jews escape the Nazis by providing them with Iranian passports. The contrast with Ahmadinejad's fiery rhetoric could not have been any clearer. Apparently, the Iranian President even lacks the power to enforce his Holocaust theories on Iran's state-run TV."

Contrary to Parsi's claim, these TVs have been airing many films and documentaries with clear anti-Holocaust and anti-Semitic messages. For example, they aired long documentaries to deny the Holocaust titled "Merchants of the Myth," in 2006. (See this [report](#) about these series) Prior to 2006, the state run media had devoted ample time and resource to spread anti-Semitism and hatred towards Israel and Jewish people. (See this [report](#) documenting anti-Semitism in Iranian media)

Finally, the TV series that Parsi has mentioned to his favor is far from benign. The journal that interviewed Parsi about these series [wrote](#): "It also gives a sordid portrayal of Israel's creation. At one point, a Zionist operative murders a Persian rabbi who is critical to helping Jews emigrate to his country, not Palestine, which eventually became Israel. "On the one side, they [the Iranian government] want to prove that they are not anti-Semites," said Dr. Wahied Wahdat-Hagh, who is senior research fellow at the European Foundation for Democracy. "Judaism is a recognized religion in Islam. On the other hand, destroying Israel is state program."

## **NIAC's internal email**

NIAC's campaign to pale the regime's anti-Semitism is well illustrated in one of NIAC's internal emails obtained during a defamation lawsuit. In this [email](#), Babak Talebi of NIAC explained to his lobby partners the best response to Ahmadinejad's anti-Semitic declarations:

"Mitra is 100% correct that this (AN declaration to wipe Israel off the map) was a mistranslation – whether in the official Iranian press, or intentionally on the part of the US media is a point that can (and is) argued... but what is important for today is to realize that it is now (almost) set-in-stone and the fact is that every time Ahmadinejad speaks he only confirms the mis-translation by repeating similar lines. The point is that for both the US public AND the US media, the interpretation of this utterance is ‘believable’ and it would require a HUGE political force to change that mindset – and EVEN IF accomplished, it would not challenge or change the perception of Ahmadinejad as anti-Israeli or anti-Semitic.

So – a far more effective response with an actual chance at success and at stemming the possibility of this type of mentality leading to conflict is to ‘frame’ the issue in a different manner. Arguing that Ahmadinejad is irrelevant to actual Iranian foreign policy is one such example. Arguing that *EVEN IF* Iran had an ‘intent’ to harm Israel it does not have the capacity or political will to do so. Etc.

As we discussed in the Seminar, in order to frame your issue successfully, you have to “go fishing with the bait that the fish likes, not the bait that you like”. Another words, arguments that convince us that Iran will not attack Israel (ie it has not attacked anyone in 150 years, Iranians love Jews, its just empty rhetoric) would not necessarily work with the audience we are trying to convince."

## **Ignoring three decades of state-sponsored anti-Semitism and Holocaust denying**

Parsi tries to show that Ahmadinejad is a unique and irrelevant case of anti-Semitism in the Iranian regime. In fact, Parsi’s book is missing any reference to the long list of the regime’s practical contribution to anti-Semitism in all possible forms.

In 1986, the French authorities [discovered](#) that Vahid Gorji, the Iranian charge d’affaires at Iranian embassy in Parsi had paid 120.000 to the infamous Neo-Nazis publication and bookshop “Ogmios” to print anti-Semitic and Holocaust denying booklets.

This was simply an example of Iran’s contribution to anti-Jewish hatred. When in 1988 Roger Garaudy, the French revisionist and Holocaust denier was convicted by a Court in France, 160 Iranian MPs released a [statement](#) to support him. He [travelled](#) to Iran and met with the Supreme Leader. He was assisted by the Iranian regime to publish his work and give speeches.

Since the mid-1980s, Iran has been instrumental to bridge between the European Neo-Nazis and Islamist fundamentalists. Khomeini’s adept [Ahmad Huber](#) the famous Swiss neo-Nazi who converted to Islam served this cause. Since then, Iran has become the home to the most infamous figures of anti-Semitism on the planet (see this [report](#))

## Denying the discrimination against the Jewish community in Iran

Parsi wrote in his book that “Few Iranian Jews take Ahmadinejad’s anti-Israel rhetoric seriously, and they point to the fact that little has changed for Iranian Jews under him. “Anti-Semitism is not an eastern phenomenon, it’s not an Islamic or Iranian phenomenon—anti-Semitism is a European phenomenon,” (Introduction, p.9)

“Since the Iranian revolution there has been an unwritten understanding between Iran’s Jewish minority and the Iranian authorities. As long as the Jews of Iran oppose Zionism and the Israeli state, they would be protected in Iran and given a great deal of religious freedom. “This arrangement, which makes a clear separation between being a Jew and being a Zionist, was the community’s idea; they brought it to the Khomeini regime after the revolution,” noted David Menashri, Israel’s most prominent expert on Iran, himself an Iranian-born Jew. Khomeini issued a “fatwa,” a religious decree, declaring that Jews were to be protected. Iran’s forty synagogues, many of them with Hebrew schools, haven’t been touched. Neither has the Jewish library, which boasts twenty thousand titles, or Jewish hospitals and cemeteries.”

Obviously, as long as these schools are not closed and the remaining Jews have not left the country, Parsi will continue to claim that anti-Semitism and discrimination are absent in Iran.

More shocking has been the campaign by Parsi’s partner in CNAPI coalition to deny the Iranian regime’s mistreatment of religious minorities in Iran. For over three years, hundreds of anti-war activists were selected by CASMII and FOR (two of Parsi’s lobby partners) to visit Iran and upon their return praise the situation in Iran. The most disgraceful part of these pro-Tehran campaigns was related to pale the violation of human rights and discrimination against the religious minorities. For example, FOR’s [2006 report](#) about the trip to Tehran painted a “striving Jewish community” in Tehran:

“A thriving Jewish Community in Teheran

The main synagogue of Teheran – there are 20 of them – is tucked away in a quite Jewish neighborhood. The temple is large and beautifully designed, with gold-leaf Hebrew scrolls, bimah, yartzheit board and crystal chandeliers. Arash Abadi, head of religious and cultural activities for the synagogue, author, editor of a Persian-Jewish magazine, representative at interfaith conferences and co-editor with Muslim writers, gave the FOR delegation an overview of the Jews of Iran.

Jews have lived in Iran for 2,500 years, arriving as refugees at the invitation of Cyrus the Great, following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Half of the country’s 20,000 Jews live in Teheran. Iran’s 100-year-old constitution allots one seat in Parliament for each religious minority (Jews, Armenians, Assyrians and Zoroastrians).

Because they consider themselves Iranians first and Jews second, men and women sit in separate sections during services. Women are required to wear a headscarf in public. There are four Jewish schools and, following Iranian custom and law, they are gender-segregated. Jews can attend either public or private schools. Those who attend public school can substitute Jewish studies for Islamic ones in the required religion class.

As in other Middle Eastern countries, non-Jews tend to separate the Jewish religion from the politics of Zionism, During the last few years, interest in Jewish life among non-Jews in Iran has increased and the Jewish community has been busy responding to speaking requests at universities and civic groups.”

But the Iranian religious minorities are not striving in Iran as Parsi and his lobby partners claimed? Here is a detailed [report](#) about the systematic discrimination against religious minorities in Iran. This report was prepared by one of the most respected human rights organization in the world. The US department of State's latest [annual report](#) released in October 2009 is very clear about systematic discrimination against these communities:

“During the reporting period, respect for religious freedom in the country continued to deteriorate. Government rhetoric and actions created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all non-Shi'a religious groups, most notably for Baha'is, as well as Sufi Muslims, evangelical Christians, and members of the Jewish community. Reports of government imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs continued during the reporting period.

Government-controlled broadcast and print media intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities.

Although the Constitution gives Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians the status of "protected" religious minorities, in practice non-Shi'a Muslims faced substantial societal discrimination, and government actions continued to support elements of society who created a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.”

Discrimination against the Jewish community in Iran is doubled with daily fear that the Jews could be accused of working for “Zionism” or Israel, a charge that could bring persecution, jail and death penalty to the victim. Here too, Trita Parsi has tried to play the PR campaigner for the regime's actions. For example in 2000, thirteen Iranian Jews including women and children were arrested and accused of espionage for Israel. The international community condemned this barbaric action and pressured Iran. In the US, some of the Senators, notably Schumer [intervened](#) and tried to send a strong message to Tehran. Parsi was outraged, attacked Senator Schummer and tried to minimize the regime's action as a mere inter-regime factional and not a sign of its anti-Jewish policies. Parsi wrote: [\(analysis jun99\)](#)

“Unfortunately, it seems that the premature reactions in the capitals of Western countries complicated and even hindered the reformists' delicate task of preventing the conservatives from making political capital out of these arrests. Some Western states demanded that Iran release the suspects even before a trial, which the conservatives happily pointed to as foreign meddling in Iran's internal affairs. Driven by the undue influence of some lobby groups, the overreaction of the West has been seen by the conservatives as a sign of US and Israeli support for their "agents".

After the trial show and the heavy verdicts against the victims, Parsi intervened again and attacked the US politicians who tried to pressure Iran. He wrote: [\(analysis jul2000\)](#)

“Reelect or Not Reelect? That is what Sherman's sanctions are all about

Some Congressmen are willing to go to any lengths to get reelected. Even if that means fabricating lies, making racist remarks on the House floor and jeopardizing the lives and well being of their co-religionists in other countries. Congressman Brad Sherman, Congressman Peter Deutsch and Senator Charles Schumer are the latest addition to this sad list of power hungry Machiavellians.

Interpreting the importance of judicial decisions and other development in Iran may have much to do with "the eye of the beholder". The trial of the Iranian Muslims and Jews accused of spying for Israel ended with relatively lenient sentences considering the seriousness of the charges. But on the other hand,

the sentences can also be seen as extremely harsh mindful of the unreliability of the Iranian judiciary system.

Nonetheless, the activities undertaken by opportunists such as Congressman Sherman have not helped the accused. On the contrary, the more he uses this sad incident to get reelected, the worse the fate of these individuals becomes. The biggest losers in this cynical campaign are American taxpayers, the Iranian people and not the least, the Iranians charged with spying. Let us not forget that the trial is continuing, since the accused have appealed. Further politicizing the trial at this sensitive stage only serves to entrench the position of all parties, rendering a solution more difficult.”

Reading Parsi’s statements, one should wonder how differently could a pro-regime advocate pale the persecution against the Jewish population in Iran?

## Conclusion

### Framing the debate: Iranian regime versus Israel, NIAC versus AIPAC

Parsi’s book paints the Middle East as the battlefield between two main rivals, Iran and Israel that compete for power and hegemony. Similarly, Washington is also a battlefield between two main players, the Israeli lobby and those who resist its dominance. With no surprise, Parsi presents himself as a champion who fights the Israeli influence in the US.

His lobby to remove sanctions against Iran is presented as a heroic battle against AIPAC, a harmful force that undermines US national interests. When Parsi is successful in his lobby, this is presented as a victory over AIPAC. And inversely, when he is criticized, he portrays himself as a victim of AIPAC and its allies. For example, in June 2008, NIAC and its partners in CNAPI were successful to defeat the sanction resolution H.R.362 against Iran. NIAC’s chief lobbyist sent an email and defined how this victory should be presented to the public:

“Good news! We’re making headway on the blockade resolution. Per your conversation with Babak, it would be great if you could do an op-ed geared to the Iranian American community. It could frame our crusade against H Con Res 362 as a “David and Goliath” type deal with NIAC taking on the big boys (AIPAC) and making warmongers nervous.”

Later, NIAC’s article was published and it portrayed an epic battle in Washington, a battle between the Iran lobby and the Israeli lobby:

#### **“NIAC beats AIPAC”**

*“It was David versus Goliath: the classic underdog matchup. In the battle over a Congressional resolution calling for war with Iran, the lines were drawn between the smaller grassroots Iranian-American movement (NIAC) on one side and the hawkish American Israel Public Affairs Committee*

*(AIPAC) mega-lobby on the other. No one expected the Iranian Americans and their coalition partners to be able to stand up to the belligerent giant intent on amplifying hostility with Iran.*

*But with the Congressional session expiring this week, our proverbial David in Washington has delivered the knock-out blow to the pro-war forces' Goliath. The Iran war resolution is down for the count. Yes, you read that right - NIAC beat AIPAC."*

On the other hand, when NIAC is under criticism, the blame is on Israel, AIPAC and Neoconservative warmongers. For example, when in April 2007 this author published a report about NIAC, several government-related newspapers in Tehran came out to defend Parsi and wrote that AIPAC and Neoconservatives have attacked NIAC. Similarly, the same line of defense has been adopted by Parsi and NIAC in Washington to depict their critics as warmongers who serve the pro-Israeli neoconservatives.

Whether Parsi's campaign to present his lobby as a battle against AIPAC is a mere practical tactic to profit from the anti-AIPAC mood during the Bush presidency and hence advance his anti-sanction lobby or, it reflects a more profound resentment against Israeli influence, is hard to respond.

It is noteworthy to remember that he has always tried to present his lobby in "attractive" terms. In 2002, few months after the start of NIAC, he sent a letter to a Wahington lobbyist and explained him how to give a human face to the anti-sanction lobby. He wrote:

"Although the mission of the proposed lobby should be to improve relations between the US and Iran and open up opportunities for trade, the initial targets should be less controversial issues such as visas and racial profiling/discrimination..."

Despite its predominantly business oriented constituency, it is essential that the lobby creates a "human face" for its aims and goals. AIPAC successfully painted the opponents of the Iran Libya Sanctions Act as "greedy businessmen who had no scruples when it came to doing business with terrorist regimes." The oil companies failed to characterize their campaign with "human concern for the well-being of innocent Iranians stuck with a dictatorial regime" or "support for the poor mid-Western family father who lost his job due the sanctions." The human element is essential both when it comes to attracting support among Iranian-Americans and when it comes to winning the debate and the votes on the Hill. "

Practical tactic or genuine belief, the results are identical. Parsi has greatly contributed to present AIPAC and Israel as the powerful and bullying giants in Washington that harm US interests. Consequently, those who fight against AIPAC, are patriots who should be honored as David of modern time.

## **Remembering the Nazi radio broadcast**

One could easily note that Parsi's argument to present Israel as a powerful and bullying force that controls the American decision making system and at the same time mask the Iranian regime's intention to dominate the Middle East resembles to the same old rhetoric used 70 years ago, when the Natzi radio broadcast to the Arab world tried hard to mask the third Reich's design for the region and put the blame on Jewish unchecked

influence. Adam Kirsch who has recently reviewed Jeffrey Herf's new book, "*Nazi Propaganda in the Arab World*" [wrote](#):

"What is most striking in the Nazis' Arabic-language propaganda is the unquestioning assumption of Jewish power. Again and again, the British and the Americans are described as pawns of the Jews; Roosevelt is alternately said to be Jewish or surrounded by Jews (including Eleanor); Chaim Weizmann is considered as powerful as Roosevelt and Churchill put together. "Had it not been for the Jews, neither London, Washington, nor Moscow would have been linked together," explained one broadcast in December 1943. It is a perfect example of the Nazi "Big Lie," for of course the truth is exactly the opposite: it was Germany's aggression that brought together those unlikely allies."