

From: Emily Blout [eblout@niacouncil.org]
Sent: Monday, December 03, 2007 2:12 PM
To: Trita Parsi
Cc: 'Shabnam Sahandy'; 'Babak Talebi'
Subject: Debrief on Obey meeting

Good news: Obey is looking to scrap the Iran democracy funding rather than tinker around with funding levels/re-programming. They are way over budget and need ways of cutting back. If they were to reprogram, the danger is that some of the funds would actually get spent- thus effecting their bottom line.

His staffer suggested we make the rounds to the republicans and most importantly, the House and Senate leadership- ultimately it's in their hands. He called the state and foreign opps a "must pass" bill by the end of the year (non withstanding a bush veto). Obey is very concerned about oversight on state appropriations and thinks that the subcommittee is not doing enough to resolve the bill's problems. He also identified Christians United for Israel as likely backers of this funding (which we knew).

I'm going to get a head count on who is with us on the House side (I think we are good on the senate side). Lowey is still non-committal, but Sam says she's likely to go along with the rest of the dems. Still working on getting a meeting with her staff. Going to call Steve Lopes....

Regards,

Emily Blout

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From: Emily Blout [eblout@niacouncil.org]
Sent: Thursday, August 30, 2007 2:33 PM
To: Lynn M. Kunkle; michaelдостроленк@gmail.com
Cc: Trita Parsi; 'Babak Talebi'; Sara Shokravi; 'Shabnam Sahandy'
Subject: De-briefing on the meetings on Wednesday

Michael and Lynn,

Thank you for joining us for the meeting on democracy funding yesterday. Your commentary and insight was extremely valuable. The following is a summary of all of yesterday's meetings. Please make any additions/corrections necessary.

The meeting with Ven Neralla from Rep. Barbara Lee's office was positive, although the discussion was not as focused as we would have liked on the democracy funding. When I follow-up with Ven today with the promised information on sanctions (Ivan Eland's report, the report by Dewey Ballantine (commissioned by Jake Colvin's group), NIAC's analysis of HR 1400, and the report by Terror Free Tomorrow), I will reiterate our message on the democracy funding.

I think the meeting with the appropriations staffer from Nita Lowey's office went well. Trita and I were pleased to find Steve Lopes, who works specifically on the democracy program funding, willing to consider our concerns and suggestions. He asked that we get back to him with information about how other countries have approached democracy funding in Iran.

After you departed, Trita and I met with Paul Grove, minority clerk for the Senate state and foreign operations sub-committee (Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH)). Trita and Paul hit it off right away. We were delighted to find Mr. Grove's views in line with our own, as he has had extensive knowledge of the problems posed by explicit "democracy" funding programs enacted by congress in the past and present, most recently in the case of Egypt. He was extremely critical of the state department's administration of middle east democracy initiatives such as MEPI and said such operations/funding would be better left to the National Endowment for Democracy (as that was what it was created for). As for what could be done, he brought up the idea of "burying the money" in the greater context of funding for the Middle East, rather than specifically appropriating it to "democracy programs in Iran". Specifically, he talked about providing NED "not withstanding authority" to appropriate funding for Iran- thus deflating the role of the State department and USAID. He also raised the possibility of including a "blanket waiver" for non-profit NGO exchanges between the US and Iran. He asked me to identify and analyze all of the provisions of law necessary for inclusion in such a waiver. Hopefully, I'll have this analysis to him soon.

Following the meeting with Paul, I attended a meeting with two staffers, Chris Homan, Foreign Policy Legislative Assistant, and Reema Dodin, Legislative Aide, from Senator Dick Durbin's office. Durbin (D-IL) is the assistant majority leader in the Senate and sits on the state and foreign operations sub-committee. He is also the co-sponsor of the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act of 2007 (S970).

This meeting was also very productive. Homan used to work for USAID and his wife works for NED. Homan was very responsive to our concerns and pointed out that this had been a problem in regards to other countries in the past. He said it was important to get a meeting with Tim Rieser, the majority clerk on the sub-committee (Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT)) and said we could use his name to get one. He also expressed interested in including a provision in HR1400 that would lift sanctions on NGO-NGO exchanges. He said he would be willing to pitch our argument to reduce or remove the democracy funding appropriation (or to take other positive measures) to the Senator, provided that he felt he had all the necessary information to make his case. He asked me to get back to him with a summary of the cultural exchange programs currently being conducted, including what types of exchanges are being done (not just those conducted by NGOs) and what is and what is not allowed under current law.

I also attended a meeting in the morning with Tim Morrissey and Peter Frosch from Representative Betty McCullum's office. McCullum is on the House sub-committee and voted 'yes' on Iran sanctions. Other than that, she has not been active on Iran. Frosch worked on the state and foreign opps bill when it was being debated by the House, but was unaware of our concerns and the problems with VOA. He asked me to provide him with a breakdown of the Iran-related funding in the bill as well as some numbers on VOA Persian listenership historically and compared to other broadcasters in Iran (such as BBC). He also said to keep him up to date on who else from the committee is on-board, and said that the congresswomen might be able to make a few calls to members (say,when its in conference).

Emily Blout

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From: Emily Blout [eblout@niacouncil.org]
Sent: Monday, December 17, 2007 11:49 AM
To: Trita Parsi
Cc: btalebi@niacouncil.org; 'Shabnam Sahandy'
Subject: democracy funding update: 60million

The house will be voting on State and foreign opps at 12pm. It includes 60million for Iran democracy. This is a small win for us- but members should do more- specifically making a speech on the floor or some other public statement. Leahy/Lowey should be held accountable for not reprogramming and conceding to the demands of APAC on this one.

Regards,

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From: Emily Blout <eblout@niacouncil.org>
To: 'Trita Parsi'; 'Babak Talebi'
Cc:
Subject: Em's blog entry (highlighted parts will have links)

Sent: Tue 9/25/2007 11:50 AM

I couldn't understand why so many Congressional staffers agreed that there was a problem, but were unwilling to do anything about it. Granted it is not every day that a group walks into their office and asks for less money, not more. But that is exactly what NIAC and our allies have been doing in our outreach to congress about the Iran Democracy funding in the Department of State and Foreign Operations. Appropriations Act. We are asking them to eliminate funding for a program that has proven both ineffective and a waste of taxpayer's money. (Of the \$25 million obligated for groups inside Iran last year, only \$2 million has been spent, the House reported.)

Almost every staffer we talked to, it seemed, agreed with our position. Those who knew about failed US democracy programs in the past were quick to join us in lamenting the counterproductive and dangerous implications of this funding on Iranian democracy activists and American policy. If they did not know about the provision, they were quick to realize- based on the facts on the ground- that this was the wrong way to go about democracy promotion. The committees in both chambers decided to significantly reduce funding for the program for precisely these reasons.

But Senator Joe Lieberman and Representative Ander Crenshaw challenged the committees' decision, introducing amendments to provide \$75 million and \$50 million respectively. Both amendments passed without objection. Now, the two amounts must be reconciled during conference, which is estimated to convene in October, at the latest mid-month. Now, we are approaching conferees asking them to eliminate the money or see that it is directed to other programs.

So why has Congress been so reluctant to take a stand? After all this is a relatively minor change and would be done behind the scenes in conference. More important it would be a POSITIVE step on the part of Congress amid the flurry of negative legislation and rhetoric. It would signal that Congress is- like Lieberman claimed in support of the \$75 million- is standing with the Iranian people and is listening to their protests against this program.

The reason that no one is willing to oppose this program, I've learned, is because of pressure that is coming from the other side. The State Department has joined forces with the all powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee (APAC) to lobby hard for this funding. We've learned that the Senate Liaison to the State Department had been combing the Senate halls trying to find a sponsor for this amendment. Lieberman was the perfect choice, and with a little prodding from APAC, the Senator picked up the cause as vehemently as he does any other measure to incite war and undermine diplomacy with Iran. His track record speaks for itself.

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From: Emily L Blout <eblout@niacouncil.org>
To: 'Babak Talebi'
Cc:
Subject: FW: Regarding our conversation this afternoon

Sent: Tue 1/29/2008 10:48 AM

From: Coberly, Carolyn H [mailto:CoberlyCH@state.gov]
Sent: Monday, January 28, 2008 11:44 AM
To: Emily Blout
Subject: RE: Regarding our conversation this afternoon

Emily,

This email is off the record (no quotes, no attribution).

I don't have a problem with NIAC writing a report or with NIAC lobbying against the program based on the issues. My problem is that you issued a report without fully accurate information and with language that does little to dispel the "mystery" surrounding the program. I personally don't see how that benefits anyone.

To clarify:

- 1) Congress did not earmark \$60 million to "promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Iran." The language from the Omnibus appropriations bill is as follows: "Of the funds appropriated in this Act, \$60,000,000 should be made available for programs to promote democracy, the rule of law, and governance in Iran." When Congress earmarks funds, it says: \$60 million "shall" be made available, not "should." As you note, Congress did earmark around \$30 million for NEA and DRL to spend on democracy promotion. As to the rest, Rep. Lowey's spokesman had it exactly right: "the remainder of the funds has been embedded into other accounts."
- 2) BBG isn't receiving the rest of the account because no account exists. There is no special account for democracy funding that anyone can draw down from. BBG, as part of its regular budget, is spending around \$27 million on Persian language broadcasting.
- 3) While there is no requirement in the bill that we spend \$60 million on Iran democracy promotion, the Administration wants to meet Congressional intent on this. We intend to meet that by reporting by the end of the fiscal year that State spent over \$30 million on Iran and BBG spent around \$27 million. At the moment, we're still a few million short of Congress' goal, but don't have final figures yet on our spending. Just so you know, after Congress appropriates money, the figures go back to OMB, then to the Department/BBG, then to bureaus, who have the flexibility to negotiate for changes in the details. We may not have final figures for weeks or months.
- 4) Your section on management of the democracy program, in my view, needlessly personalizes the issue. I thought it was important to explain to you all who does what to demystify things a bit, but I'm a low-level bureaucrat and it's never good for me to have my name out there on anything specific. It's happened before, and will happen again, but it seems to me that you would want to argue against the goals and purposes of the program if you have a problem with it, not worry about who is running it.

We are working on a fact sheet on how we are spending democracy funds and I will forward it to you, but as I mentioned on the phone, I haven't found the results of our meeting and conversations to be very useful, and won't be looking to NIAC as a potential partner to review how we approach these issues in the future.

Regards,

Carrie

Carolyn Coberly
Desk Officer
Office of Iranian Affairs
U.S. Department of State
Tel: 202-647-2513
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