

**Minutes of NIAC Board Meeting
UCLA – Los Angeles, California
February 22, 2008 10:30-4:30 pm**

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 am

Additions to the agenda:

- Reza mentioned that NIAC should pursue system upgrades on membership.
- Voter registration added to the agenda.

Agenda approved.

Trita reported on the recent event in Beverly Hills sponsored by Amnesty USA. Amnesty did a very poor job in planning for the event and did not implement NIAC's recommendations on how to plan for and prevent major disturbances. Amnesty canceled the event after members of the audience disrupted the event. The individuals then claimed victory in the Persian press and blogosphere. NIAC's message is that the victims were Amnesty International and the human rights agenda. NIAC will follow up with Amnesty.

Marsha debriefed the Board on the planning and execution of the fundraiser held the previous night in Palos Verdes. Marsha and other Board members mentioned the following points:

- Good turn out, but more people should have been there given LA's population
- Celebrities are key for future fundraisers in LA
- Agenda was rich despite changes throughout the night
- Board member presence was extremely important
- Important to show through Board member presence that NIAC is operating on a national level
- Importance of Maz for the event and other names – NIAC should post Maz's remarks, post photos, short clips of video, post radio clips
- Demographics and prior commitments should determine whether fundraisers should be done in a top down or bottom up fashion. LA experience should not be replicated given the high initial bar without previous commitments.
- Fundraiser in LA was a significant success having said all of the above and in more ways than financial. Leaders of the LA community were there.
- People think the war issue is now gone, but 90k still raised.
- Fundraisers are important; they take pressure of Trita and show all the faces of NIAC.
- Need another prominent person at NIAC – a right hand man.

Trita reported that NIAC's membership has risen to approximately 2000 members
Current members - 1068 (902 expired)

Subscriptions to the newsletter has dropped; Topica newsletter system needs to be changed to prevent subscribers from being dropped.

Outsourcing of membership/mailings is important and should be done.

Membership committee agreed to examine membership structure and make recommendations.

Trita reported that NIAC's consultant, Tome Dines, has advised the following on keeping members and supporters:

- Members must be ideologically committed to an organization's cause, and if the organization fights for this cause, they will continue their support.
- The organization must give top donors access to members of Congress
- Annual meetings are important; AIPAC raises 60-70% of funds during annual meeting

Trita reported that a financial report was not prepared for the Board meeting.

Sean J. pointed out that it was very difficult to find the financial page on our website. It was decided that it should be placed under the webpage tab "About" so it is easier to find.

Reza raised the issue of including a budget line for indemnity insurance for the Board of Directors.

Trita reported on staff performance and changes:

- Sarah Shokhravi, Babak Talebi, and Emily Blout are performing very well. Babak's performance has improved despite ongoing health concerns;
- Shabnam has been promoted from office manager to legislative researcher;
- Pam Maeda, a new office manager, has been hired;
- Shadi Makalou has been hired as communications associate;
- NIAC is interviewing for assistant legislative person, ideally an Iranian American; NIAC will have a three-person legislative team.

The Board discussed media presence at NIAC events and agreed that the media should be invited to events around the country; NIAC should be much more cautious in LA.

Trita reported that so far, 250 responses have been received to the poll on human rights and it was important to push hard for more responses from the membership. So far:

- 90% want us to ease NGO sanctions;
- 70% want us to take a position on the human rights issue;
- 52% want more active engagement on the human rights issue;
- 48% want less active engagement on the human rights issue;

The Board decided that it may use its discretion on the second question on human rights if the final results of the vote remain as close as it is currently. Board members shared views on the issue and expressed concerns about active involvement by NIAC on HR issues. Most Board members felt NIAC should only offer occasional commentary, and should base that commentary on assessments and analysis of professional human rights organizations.

Reza raised the question of whether NIAC should only engage on human rights issues in the context of the war. There were mixed views on that. Dokhi mentioned that the issue would not necessarily go away even if the war issue was resolved.

Several Board members raised the issue of the wording of the ballot sent to the membership, specifically whether the wording was clear. It was pointed out that the “No” votes to the first human rights question must be subtracted from those included in the second question to reach accurate results. Trita said that this recalculation will be done once the final results are in.

Trita received approval from the Board to approach it on issues and opportunities related to human rights on a case by case basis that extends beyond occasional commentary.

The Board will hold a March 11 conference call after the human rights poll results are in. The call will be held at 10 am EST/7 am Pacific time/4 pm Geneva time.

Trita briefed the Board about a recent incident at CCSU (university in Connecticut) where an Iranian-American dean of the school made accusatory remarks and then went on KRSI and commented erroneously on the event and made derogatory and false accusations against Trita and NIAC. If efforts to dismiss the dean succeed, Trita will hand the victory over to NIAC.

Cease and desists have been sent to KRSI, Pars TV, and Mehr. VOA and Dae’i have already been served with cease and desists; Dae’i has violated it but VOA has not.

Full lawsuit will be finalized in a week or two against Dae’i. He is considered to have a large amount of resources. Trita will work with Noriman to find out more information about Dae’i.

Reza suggested that someone shadow Trita in the legal effort – Reza nominated Kamy to fill that role.

Reza also suggested more people from NIAC need to be in the public eye. He also suggested that the Board have a contingency plan in the event that Dae’i does not fold.

Ahmad Sadri was mentioned as a good person to pull in the media to defend NIAC.

The Board agreed that the default mode in the media should be to attack.

There was a discussion about increasing the number of faces in the media. It was agreed that the American media is more important than Persian media due to the Persian media's low credibility and journalistic standards. With the new communications associate and other staffers getting up to speed, such as Emily and Babak, new board members are being quoted in the press. Board members who are able to speak on certain issues should also be brought to speak to media on issues they are intimately involved in.

The Board considered the suggested vision statements and voted to adopt the following:

- Advancing the interests of the Iranian-American community.

Trita presented NIAC consultant's strategic plan for 2008 to the Board, highlighting that he thinks it is an effective plan, but that our community may not be ready for it. Sean echoed that point.

The Board discussed the various pros and cons of engaging in dialogue or opening a line of communication with the Iranian government and how that dialogue should be shaped. Trita made the point that there is no need to get permission to speak to the government if needed. Nothing is prohibiting us now.

Reza posed the question of whether we can we could effectively succeed in our anti-war work without engaging one side? Dokhi made the point that a line of communication should be a goal as we are promoting dialogue between the US and Iran.

Some Board members expressed concerns about not straying to far from our core work. Kaveh expressed his desire to proceed very cautiously and conservatively.

Bijan made the point that NIAC needed to shift its message from anti-war to pro-diplomacy – i. e. diplomacy to prevent war.

Based on feedback from the Board, Trita will re-phrase point D in the strategic plan to be softer in language and tone.

The Board agreed with the need for a development director. Trita will consult with NIAC's consultant on how this position should be shaped.

The Board agreed to hold an annual dinner in Washington, D.C. for top tier members, local and regional IA leaders. The meeting will be held simultaneously with an annual D.C. fundraiser, board meeting, and possible Congressional meetings – to be held in October or November. Trita will consult about whether it makes sense to do it near the elections.

Sean mentioned that point (E) of the strategic plan would likely be irrelevant given the feedback coming in from NIAC members on human rights.

Additional comments to the strategic plan should be sent to Trita ahead of the March 11 call; a revised version will be sent around for review and final adoption during the call.

Sean raised the issue of requiring Board members to give an annual gift each year which he said would exclude many valuable members who may not have such personal gifts to give. He also made the point that valuable Board members who offer many other qualities would be lost as a result. Trita will reword this language to reflect that the gift can come in various forms and is a goal versus a strict requirement.

Trita will look into indemnification insurance for the NIAC Board of Directors.

The Governance committee presented its recommendations after reviewing the By-Laws.

The Board agreed to remove “classes” of board members and all board members will have a two year term and be eligible for re-election.

A Chairman will be selected to head the Board. Reza was nominated as Board Chairman until the end of his term. Dokhi will continue to serve as secretary and Djamshid will continue to serve as Treasurer. The Chairman will be allowed staff time to prepare for Board meetings under his supervision.

The Governance Committee presented regional NIAC regional governance scheme. There was a discussion about how to start this process and a possible test case in Seattle. It was decided that it was preferable to have a staff person hired – even if part-time – to begin local organization and keep professional control. It was also believed that an appointment process should be kept in place and Board control over nominations may be necessary still to continue quality control.

Trita will have Babak Talebi look at the proposed NIAC regions with an eye to the country’s political map and provide feedback to the Board.

The Board discussed how NIAC is preparing for succession if and when Trita is no longer at the head of the organization. No decisions were made but options were suggested about how to go about such preparation such as identifying the right qualifications of a successor and searches at top universities.

A proposal for the creation of a NIAC Academic Advisory Board was distributed by the Advocacy Committee for feedback from the Board. The proposal will be discussed during the March 11 call.

The next Board meeting - to be held in September - will be scheduled either in Chicago or Boston in conjunction with a local fundraiser.

Marsha will follow up with Mr. Hashemian about his offer to hold a fundraiser in Orange County in July.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.

2/22/08