

The Iranian Web of Influence in the United States

By [Hassan Daioleslam](#)

On March 21, 2008, the U.S. Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) announced its decision to penalize three Iranian-connected companies as "they knowingly exported three U.S. origin aircraft to Iran in violation of the Export Administration Regulations ("EAR") and are preparing to re-export three additional U.S. origin aircraft to Iran in further violation of the EAR."¹

The principal firm among these is Balli Group PLC based in London. Iranian brothers Vahid and Hassan Alaghband own the company. Balli owns a private bank and numerous major enterprises inside Iran with strong ties to the Iranian regime. It is well understood that no company can reach the Balli's success and status in Iran without direct support of Mafia Dons inside the mullah's circle of power. The ramifications of selling a few used aircrafts to Iran transcends beyond the criminal act of a few merchants circumventing international sanctions to make hundreds of millions of dollars. It is a symptom of the broadening of the Mullah's web of influence in the US.

Five years ago, the Iranian regime tried to buy an aircraft through its London based proxies. At that time, Congressman Bob Ney was bribed by two international felons to introduce legislation to dissolve the US sanctions and facilitate the sale of a VIP airplane to Iran to be used by Hashemi Rafsanjani.²⁻³⁻⁴

Eventually, Bob Ney ended up in prison. The Syrian arm dealer, Fouad Alzayat, is sued in British courts by the Iranian regime. Some \$80M of the Iranian people's money evaporated in the process.

Similar to Ney and his circle, the Alaghband brothers are also accustomed to legal problems. After they bought out Klockner AG in Germany in 2001, Vahid was jailed in 2003 and later, a German court fined them €4M and handed down suspended jail sentences (2005). The Alaghband brothers waived their right to appeal.⁵⁻⁶

While this time around, the outcome of their encounter with US law enforcement is not that rosy, the Alaghband brothers, in previous occasions, have been more successful in circumventing the sanctions.

Shockingly, Balli Group represents the US Corporations Xerox and Caterpillar in Iran, and has numerous partnerships with other US corporations. How could US companies enter the Iranian market while there are now more sanctions against Iran than there were a decade ago? These companies have profited from the loopholes in the sanction laws. Their actions have been possible because of the lack of political will in the US in enforcing the sanctions and closing its loopholes. The indifferent and unconcerned attitude in the US roots back to the efforts of the Iranian lobby in the US for the past decade.

In 1997, many US corporations, including Caterpillar, came together and started to fight the ILSA (Iran Libya Sanction Act). This fight reached its summit in 2001 when the Act came back to the Congress for its renewal. It passed by a large majority in the Congress and the Senate, and was extended for years. In the midst of despair, Bob Ney came up with an encouraging and visionary idea:⁷

"The ILSA vote doesn't look very promising, but that doesn't mean the struggle should stop on this entire issue. It is a matter of education and re-education and people getting together and forming a citizen's lobby to make sure those members of Congress and their offices are educated on this issue."

A year later, Ney's Iranian advisor, Trita Parsi, became the president of an organization called the National Iranian American Council (NIAC). As I have explained in detail,⁸ Parsi and his Iran based partner Siamak Namazi, unmasked a roadmap in 1999 to create an Iranian lobby in the US to influence the Congress.

To this date, NIAC has not diverted a bit from the roadmap. Namazi, along with his father, brother and sister, are notorious proprietors of numerous key enterprises in Iran facilitating the mullahs' financial and business affairs. The NIAC's role in lobbying for relieving pressure off Tehran's rulers, under the disguise of empowering Iranian-Americans, is now well exposed. Even the Iranian pro-government newspaper *Aftab*, described these activities as the "Iranian lobby" acting as the regime's "unofficial diplomacy."¹⁰

In addition to this "classic" lobbying effort, mullahs have now focused on using the mafia web of businesses connected to them to influence the US policies towards their interests. Naturally, some American businesses which see financial benefits in dealing with Iran and entering Iran's markets have not resisted lining up with Iran's financial Mafia.

To recruit Iranian-American executives of the US companies as new members to its web, the Iranian regime, has undertaken a new initiative spearheaded by Siamak Namazi in Tehran. In June 2007, the newly founded organization called the "International Association of Iranian Managers (I-AIM) held a major workshop in Tehran."¹⁰

Abbas Maleki, the Iranian deputy foreign minister under Rafsanjani, advisor to the Supreme Leader and one of the chief organizers of Iranian lobby in the US, was one of the key speakers. Hassan Alaghband from Balli group was another key speaker and one of the main supporters of the event. Namazi is certainly a known figure in the Mullah's lobby machinery in the West. Following the trails from this meeting leads to the discovery of the broadening web of influence of mullahs in the US involving some new players and many of the familiar faces of the Mafia web.¹¹

The Iranian lobby in the US is financially fed by sources that are conspicuously tangled with Tehran's interests. One jaw dropping example: Vahid Alaghband (the elder brother) is a major donor (among very few) and an "ambassador and supporter extraordinaire" of US based Parsa foundation.¹²⁻¹³⁻¹⁴ This group has, in turn, been a principal financial supporter of NIAC in 2007. It is, indeed, a small world!

Certainly there is strong evidence than the Mullahs' web of influence in the US, including a number of lobby organizations, business interests and pseudo-academics are hard at work to reduce pressure on Tehran and buy them time to pursue their aspiration to gain hegemony in the region and the world. The unavoidable end result may be a catastrophic war between Iran and the US. To prevent that war, we must stop the Iranian lobby and their American cohort enterprises. This is not the case of a smuggler helping a mullah get an airplane ride. This is a matter of national security and the interest of the Iranian and American people.

Notes:

1- http://www.bis.doc.gov/news/2008/bis_tdo03212008.html

2- Bob Ney's plea agreement: http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2006/September/06_crm_622.html

3- Iranian newspaper: <http://bazztab.com/news/24835.php>

4- Iran versus Fouad ALzayat in British court

<http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/law/article3505782.ece>

5- Vahid Alaghband's 11 month prison:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000100&sid=aEodr6ltrnoQ&refer=germany>

6- Vahid and Hassan Alaghband sentenced for fiduciary duties:

<http://www.kloekner.de/investor/en/pm.php?type=pm&id=92&year=2005>

7- Ney told AIC in a June 2001 speech. <http://www.american-iranian.org/pubs/aicupdate/05262005.html>

- 8- Iran's Oil Mafia: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=b30e945b-5f1f-4a57-a7aa-f4975d12fc4c>
- 9- Aftab Newspaper, <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdcccqog2biqpp.html>
- 10- I-Aim 23-28nJune event: <http://www.i-aim.org/content/en/video-entrepreneurship/video-entrepreneurship%20.aspx>
- 11- I-Aim 23-28nJune event: <http://www.i-aim.org/content/en/video-entrepreneurship/video-entrepreneurship%20.aspx>
- 12- Parsa's major donors: <http://www.parsacf.org/honor-roll/honor-roll/avicenna/?searchterm=vahid%20alaghband>
- 13- Vahid Alaghband, Ambassador and ... **EVENING PROGRAM**
- 14- Parsa donation to NIAC: <http://www.parsacf.org/grant-seekers/past-grantees>
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