

# Pro-Iran-Deal Actors and US foreign policy 2011-2015

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## Abstract

During the Iran agreement from 2011 to 2015 a pro-Iran deal campaign has started in the U.S. Critical questions for Iranian are: who were these people? Who funded them? From whom do they get their information? This study tried to answer these questions by following the pro-Iran deal actors from 2011 to 2015 in the United States. Therefore, a couple of actors were found who were in favor of the Iran deal. The work then followed the money and information transformation data of these pro-Iran deal actors. The article got into a socio-diagram of the interrelation of pro-deal funders and actors with the help of NVIVO 12 software. It also followed the role of the Obama administration in this network. The social network theory of power by Castells (2007) was used that indicates the importance of the social network in gaining discourse power to program-specific networks according to the interests and values of the programmers. So, with the help of theory, the article concluded that the Obama administration programmed a significant network to have the influence and the power to seal the deal in the U.S.; besides, the network tried to influence Obama policy toward Iran. The articles also categorized the supporters of the deal into eight groups: institutions in the prevention of nuclear weapons, the Iranian community, political advocacy groups, religious groups, think tank associations, Jewish institutions, those related to the Obama administration, and free funders. **Keywords:** Iran Deal, American Civil Societies, Obama, Network Analysis, pro-Iran-deal network

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## **Introduction**

Iran's nuclear issue prompted an extraordinary level of involvement by groups outside the U.S. government. Think tanks, political advocacy organizations, nonprofit associations, pro-Israel, religious groups, media outlets, arms control organizations, and others tried on both sides of the debate to influence the outcome. In April 2015, 70 national organizations wrote a letter to Congress in support of the Iran deal. In July 2015, dozens of other organizations held a meeting opposing the agreement to make Congress vote it down. Participants on both sides used social media, advertising on Television, or got help from media personalities, retired generals, prominent former politicians, and others to rail against the deal or pro deal.

A selected history and other instruments were used extensively by opponents or supporters of the nuclear deal in both Tehran and Washington to frame the rhetoric. Many American Interest groups reinforced Iran-U.S. relations' misperceptions and dark history to the point that stepping out of this reinforcing cycle seems to be nearly impossible. They tried to downgrade the deal by different means to force the Obama administration to withdraw from the agreement. Opponents of the deal pictured Iran as an "evil regime" trying to acquire nuclear weapons at all costs. They mentioned Iran as a supporter of terrorism, an abuser of human rights, who has hurt Americans in history and should not be trusted.

Contrary to these groups, some civil societies tried to sell the Iran Deal to the masses and publish new information contrary to Iran's rigid conflicting societal beliefs. These American actors tried to develop tolerance, trust, an understanding of Persian culture,

acceptance, and understanding of the Iranian side to gain American support on the “Iran deal.” Their main job, on the one hand, was targeting lawmakers to make them support the deal. On the other hand, they targeted the U.S.’s society to push lawmakers to support the agreement. Because of the rigidity of negative societal beliefs about Iran in the United States, these actors’ job was so hard.

This study followed the pro-Iran deal content from 2011 to 2015 in the United States and found a couple of non-state actors in favor of the deal. The work also had a brief investigation on the funders against the deal. The work followed the money transformation data, the human exchange, and information transformation among the pro-deal actors and analyzed the relationship of the actors. At last, the researcher got into a network of actors who were interrelated financially or informationally. A socio-diagram of the interrelation of pro-deal funders and actors has been presented in the last part.

## **Theoretical Framework**

**Membership Network Analysis:** “Social network analysis aims to understand a community by mapping the relationships that connect them as a network and then draw individuals, groups within the web, and associations between the individuals” (Domhoff, 2002). The Social network analysis structure comprises node entities, such as humans, and ties, such as relationships. The technique will generate diagrams that will show the relationships between individuals and community (Rousseau, 2002).

Many scholars expanded the social network analysis (Leavitt, 1951; Moreno & Jennings 1938; Freeman and Webster, 1994; Barabasi & Albert 1999; Freeman, 2004). Freeman (2004) elaborates on the four characteristics of social network analysis: (1) It consists of the intuition that links among social actors (2) It is based on the acquisition and study of data that record social relations that link participants (3) It draws heavily on graphic imagery to demonstrate the patterning of those links (4) it generates mathematical and computational models to describe and explain

those patterns.

Domhoff (2002) indicated that network analysis should happen in three steps. First, the researcher should identify the members that are active in this issue - organizational affiliation and financial affiliation are the linking relations -. Second step is tracing the money flow among the members. The third step is the analysis of the verbal or written output of the network, policy recommendations, reports, advertisements, etc. That will lead us to the ideology of these members. Therefore, this work identified the members of the network, and traced the money flow among them. For the third step the work analyzed the content they published to see if their content were pro-Iran deal or not. Visual representation of social networks in a meaningful way has been presented to convey the message of the research and results. This research used NVIVO 12 to show the results.

Castells' Network Theory of Power indicates that communication and information are constantly a source of power (2007). Power has been introduced by Weber meaning imposing the will of one over another. The sources of this kind of power are oppression, domination, [threat of] violence (Ibid). Castells believes that the creation of opinion (the impact on public consciousness and thought of individuals) has always been a more effective mechanism of power than torture (2007). So, networks use soft power techniques and operate by information operation and perception management to attract rather than coerce (Fuchs, 2009).

One obvious fact in this theory is the increasing power of actors by enhancing the network. Based on network theory of Castells (2009), power network is mechanisms and processes that interact with network structures to yield certain outcomes for individuals and groups. So, network-making power is the power to program specific networks according to the interests and values of the programmers, and the power to switch different networks following the strategic alliances between the dominant actors of various networks (Sharlamanov & Demiri, 2018).

In this article researcher draw a network society that were in

favor of the deal. These people tried to make content for the public to make them agree upon dealing with Iran. This network had a good access to internet and other resources since it was funded and had connection with Obama administration. By the help of theory, we can say that, Obama and supporters of the deal for increasing their power in selling the deal to the people conducted a network and managed a soft power strategy.

## **I- American Supporters of the Deal**

Supporters had different participations, including making media content, making public panels and conferences, making public campaigns, making T.V. advertisements, and writing letters to Congress or administration. Here we will look at the prominent supporters of the deal; the ones who had significant participation in support of the deal for every year from 2011 to 2015 or funded more than \$100,000 in support of the deal. All the supporters of the deal and their typology have been listed in Appendix A. In this part, the analyze of the groups active on the issue has been presented. The supporting groups has been divided to eight categories: free funders, institutions in prevention of nuclear weapons, the Iranian community, political advocacy groups, religious groups, think tank associations, Jewish institutions and those related to Obama administration.

**Funders:** Four prominent individual funders helped the Iran deal. Number one was Eli Broad, who is also a Jewish millionaire, helped the supporters of the deal (Jett, 2018); he signed an open letter in favor of the agreement (Abramovitch, 2015). Steven Spielberg, a Jewish movie maker millionaire was the prominent financial supporter of the deal. He gave President Obama an award for his work on the Iran deal (Ho, 2015). Ted Turner, the founder of CNN, besides S. Daniel Abraham, a Jewish millionaire, supported the deal (Weisman & Confessore, 2015). George Soros by different institutions gave \$68,500 billion to Iran Deal supporters like Ploughshares or JStreet (Ho, 2015). Ploughshares Fund's annual report indicates that in 2015 Open Society – that

belongs to Gorge Soros - gave more than 100,000 to them in supporting the Iran deal (Ploughshares Fund, 2015). Soros, among the Iranians, is infamous because of his controversial support of the 2009 movements in Iran. But he was one of the most prominent supporters of negotiation (not war) with Iran through its institution Open Society since 2011 (Jett, 2018).

Many foundations related to milioners also supported the deal. Carnegie Corporation of New York, Democracy Alliance, the Rockefeller Brothers, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (Arms Control Association, 2019), the Schooner Foundation, Susan and Bill Oberndorf Funding (Ho, 2015), Colombe Foundation, Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundation was significant donors of the deal (Ploughshares Fund, 2016). Here we discuss the prominent ones.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was founded in 1910. They indicated that it was developed to promote peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decision-makers. Its prominent donors are William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Catherine James Paglia/Robert and Ardis James Foundation, Robert and Mary Carswell, and John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation (Carnegie Endowment, n.d.; Smerconish, 2015). Ploughshares Fund also funded more than 100,000 to Carnegie Endowment (Ploughshares Fund, 2015).

Democracy Alliance had supported Iran deal. George Soros, Amber, and Steve funded it (Vogel, 2014). Nahal Toosi in Politico indicated that members of Democracy Alliance, besides other democratic donors, wrote a letter to Congress and urged them to approve the Iran deal since without deal, “it will make a military strike or a nuclear-armed Iran” (Toosi, 2015a). The Alliance keeps its donations secret, but many of its recommended groups have been reported. One of the most critical receivers is the Center for American Progress and Media Matters for America, which was founded to criticize the left mainstream media and which supported the Iran deal (Markay, 2014).

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund has given at least \$425,000 to the deal's supporters (Ho, 2015). Ploughshares Fund also mentioned Rockefeller Brothers as one of its prominent donors in 2015 (Ploughshares Fund, 2015). (Rockefeller Brothers, n.d.). Brodsky (2017) from Huffington Post argued that "the Rockefeller Brothers Fund spent millions of dollars since 2003 promoting a nuclear agreement with Iran, mainly through The Iran Project." Brodsky indicates that after the 9/11 attacks, "The Rockefeller Brothers Fund's president, Stephen Heintz, became more infatuated with Iran, and he began thinking about "its geostrategic importance and its relation to the Sunni world" (Brodsky, 2017). William Luers headed Rockefeller's brothers' Iran Project in cooperation with the United Nations Association of the U.S. (Brodsky, 2017).

Washington Post indicated that Bill Oberndorf from Susan and Bill Oberndorf funding, a hedge fund manager, helped more than \$100,000 to Ploughshares in 2015 and became the most crucial sponsor of Ploughshares (Ho, 2015). Ploughshares also listed Oberndorf as the funder who gave more than 100,000 to support the deal (Ploughshares Fund, 2015). This funding made many criticisms that "such funding predates the groups' advocacy work on Iran" but in 2015 the institution replied that "the money certainly helped lay the groundwork for the groups' activism on the issue" (Ho, 2015).

Colombe Foundation funded the Arms Control Association (Arms Control Association, 2019) and Rethink media (Rethink Media, 2019) in favor of the deal. Ford Foundation also had funded supporters of the deal like Rethink Media (Rethink Media, 2019). The William and Flora Hewlett (Hewlett) is one of the wealthiest grant makers in the United States (Smerconish, 2015; Hewlett Foundation, n.d). It donated more than \$100,000 to Ploughshares in support of the deal (Ploughshares Fund, 2015). John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation gave Ploughshares more than 100,000 to support the deal (Ploughshares Fund, 2015).

**Security Institutions:** Ploughshares Fund, Arms Control Association (ACA), and Center for Arms Control and Non-



Proliferation, institutions affiliated as institutions against nuclear weapons, were active on the Iran deal. Ploughshares is the most significant organization in funding Iran nuclear deal. The Ploughshares Fund has introduced itself an international charity, which tries to increase global security and remove the world's atomic weapons or a publicly supported foundation that funds, organizes, and innovates projects to "realize a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons" (Ploughshares Fund, n.d.). Ploughshares was very active in the issue of the Iran Deal (Nichols, 2016). Joe Cirincione, its President, said on July 14, 2015, that Iran Deal was a victory for American national security since the U.S. concurred to prevent Iran from making a "nuclear bomb without a single U.S. soldier."

Ploughshares Fund assembled a network of over 85 organizations and 200 individuals in favor of the Iran deal. All the grantees wrote and responded in popular media and pooled ideas of the people. They tried to inform the public and policymakers about the merits of the deal. They have partnerships with think tanks and engaged with similar organizations, connected diplomats with social media, made conferences and panels, and raised funding from supporters of the deal.

Ploughshares' largest donors (those contributing \$100,000 or more) from 2011 to 2015 include billionaire Bill Oberndorf, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Schooner Foundation, according to Ploughshares' 2014, 2015, and 2016 annual reports. Open Society Foundation, which belongs to Soros, was previously the leading donor of Ploughshares (Rondeau, 2015). Bill Oberndorf helped more than \$100,000 to Ploughshares (Ho, 2015). Ploughshares listed 90 funders that gave it \$4.6 million (Ploughshares Fund, 2016), while in one donation, AIPAC gave \$19 million to groups against the deal (Biscobing, 2015).

Ploughshares Fund and its grantees raised and disbursed over \$11 million in grants from 2011 to 2015 (Ho, 2015). Ploughshares

Fund has given at least \$803,000 to groups supporting the deal (Ho, 2015). Approximately 60 percent of the money ploughshares received was funding for the Iran deal (Jett, 2018). The detailed financial report of Ploughshares published on its website indicates that in three constant years 2014, 2015 and 2016, Ploughshares supported the Atlantic Council, the Center for New American Security, Friends Committee on National Legislation, MoveOn.org, JStreet, the National Iranian American Council, and National Public Radio (NPR) (Ploughshares Fund, 2015, 2016), Arms Control Association (Arms Control Association, 2019), the Federation of American Scientists, The Iran Project, Stimson Center, The Jewish Chronicle, Institute for Science and International Security, and The Center for American Progress (Ploughshares Fund, 2015, 2016). Ploughshares funded National Public Radio (NPR) \$100,000 to “support national security reporting with an emphasis on themes and stories related to nuclear security topics” (The Guardian, 2016).

Ploughshares also “gave money to the Center for Public Integrity, which supports the influential nonprofit news outlet ProPublica, along with left-leaning publications such as Mother Jones and the Nation to beef-up their Iran coverage” (Hemingway, 2018). PRI’s The World, Link TV, National Public Radio, Fox News, the Hill, Huffington Post, CNN, Politico funded by Ploughshares and published the produced contents made by Ploughshares (Ploughshares Fund, 2011b).

Ploughshares is the host of many former policymakers. Joe Cirincione, a nuclear expert who served as a staff member on the House Armed Services Committee and the Committee on Government Operations, is its President. He also worked at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace as a director (Jett, 2018: p86). Secretary of State George Shultz and former Secretary of Defense William Cohen also are associated with Ploughshares. Chuck Hagel –Former Security of Defense- was on the Ploughshares board. Robert Creamer - consultant to the Democratic National Committee- was hosted by Ploughshares. Ploughshares

also had partnerships with the Institute for Policy Studies (Rondeau, 2015; Institute for Policy Studies, n.d.; Cirincione, 2015b). Former CIA covert officer Valerie Plame also worked for Ploughshares in September 2015 (Rondeau, 2011).

The relation between Ploughshares Fund and Obama administration became very problematic during the Iran deal. An interview was published in New York Times with Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications of the White House during Obama. Rhodes, in that interview, talked about how the Obama team used groups like Ploughshares Fund and Iran Project to effectively carry the message of the White House in the nuclear deal. He was quoted that “we created an echo chamber, [...]. They [the independent experts and journalists] were saying things that validated what we had given them to say” (Samuels, 2016). He directly referred to White House’s relation with Ploughshares and assured that we made opponents of the deal crazy by our echo chamber:

In the absence of rational discourse, we will discourse the [expletive] out of this. We had test drives to know who would carry our message effectively and how to use outside groups like Ploughshares, the Iran Project, and whomever else. So, we knew the tactics that worked. We drove them [an opponent of the deal] crazy (Samuels, 2016).

Arms Control Association is a think tank active in arms control. It provides information for the press and policymakers (Arms Control Association, n.d.). The group supported the Iran Deal and indicated that “a group of 30 leading nuclear nonproliferation specialists named Iran Deal a vitally important step forward for the security and stability of the world” (Arms Control Association, n.d.). On its website, ACA notes it had gotten support from the Colombe Foundation, the Ploughshares Fund (\$36,500 in 2011), and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (\$275,000 in 2010) (Arms Control Association, n.d.). It also has a monthly Journal, and many of its publications are referenced in prominent mass media. So, its products are considered in the content analysis part of this dissertation.

Council for a Livable World is a Washington-based nonprofit “advocacy organization dedicated to eliminating the U.S. arsenal of nuclear weapons” (Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, n.d.). The Council was founded in 1962. Its research center is the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, which provides research to members of Congress and their staff (Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, n.d.). They shaped “the debate on options to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, with a focus on congressional outreach and production of infographics.” They got funding from Ploughshares about \$14,800 (Ploughshares Fund, 2016).

**Iranian Community Affiliation:** National Iranian American Council<sup>1</sup> indicates that it is funded by the Iranian-American community and prominent American foundations with over 8000 donors (NIAC, 2011e; NIAC, n.d.). NIAC enclosed that it got \$591,500 between 2006 and 2015 from PARSA Community Foundation (NIAC, 2011e), Ploughshares (\$150,000) (Ploughshares Fund, 2015), and Rockefeller Brothers Fund (NIAC, n.d.). PARSA has awarded six grants, a total of \$571,000, to four enterprising nonprofits that NIAC was one of them. It also said that NIAC received money from Soros’s Open Society Institute (Rondeau, 2015). Business Insider, in an article, indicated that NIAC has been at the forefront of encouraging engagement with Iran (Rozen, 2015).

NIAC has relations with policymakers to influence them about Iran. NIAC hosted Ambassador Thomas Pickering to lead a panel discussion on “Finding the Nuclear Fix.” Trita Parsi, Reza Marashi, and Sahar Nowrouzadeh are associated with NIAC. Trita Parsi started to work in 1997 as a political consultant for Congressman Robert Ney of Ohio. Reza Marashi worked for the Office of Iranian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. Sahar Nowrouzadeh was a top adviser on Iran policy and National Security Council director

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1. From now on we use abbreviation of NIAC instead of National American Council

for Iran at the White House. NIAC created NIAC Action to run advertisements supporting the agreement (Vaez, 2015d). In September 2016, Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes spoke at the NIAC conference to highlight the White House's Alliance (NIAC, 2016). He inclined that now is the moment "when you bring the public with you, and you bring all of the organizations like NIAC and Jewish Voice for Peace, and everybody is there as a part of the deal and trying to make things happen" (NIAC, 2016).

Alan Eyre, the State Department's Persian-language spokesperson, regularly participated as a keynote speaker at the NIAC Conference (NIAC, 2015b) and, even the State Department and U.S. embassy in Jeddah arranged a series of lectures for Trita Parsi in Saudi Arabia about U.S.-Iran relations (NIAC, 2010). In an article, "Meet the Iran Lobby," Lee Smith described Parsi as "the tip of the spear of the Iran Lobby," who "won a defining battle over the direction of American foreign policy" (Smith, 2015). Influential figures had presented in NIAC like Thomas Pickering as its advisory board - Pickering was also in Iran Project. NIAC has more than 100 products every year that quite a significant number of them were reflected in U.S. mass media.

**Political Advocacy Groups:** International Crisis Group was one of the important advocates of Iran Deal. The members of Crisis Group on Iran were Gareth Evans, its then-president and a leading nonproliferation statesman; Ali Vaez as a senior analyst and core writer on Iran issue; and Robert Malley as an analyst (The International Crisis Group, n.d.; 2015). Vaez engaged in negotiations of Iran and the P5+1/E3+3 from 2013 to the previous resolution. Vaez participated in 22 rounds of talks with Iran at all levels and exchanged viewpoints with different parties. Vaez had a prominent role in elaborating both sides' viewpoints to the media or, as they say, to sell the deal to the people of the United States with the help of social and mass media like The Atlantic, New York Times, NPR, Reuters; social media like Twitter.

Crisis Group Twitter has 147,000 followers, and Ali Vaez separately has 29,000 followers with a significant number of

followers. Crisis Group indicates that “media commentaries by Vaez were circulated among negotiators as he sought to build support for the deal in public opinion, especially in the U.S.” (The International Crisis Group, 2015). Different news agencies made the Crisis Group quotations or managed interviews with the analysts. Ploughshares 2015 report shows that this institution funded the International Crisis Group “to support research and advocacy efforts to inform the debate about the P5+1 and Iran framework agreement and potential final deal to resolve concerns over Iran’s nuclear program” by \$150,000 (Ploughshares Fund, 2016).

Among the board of trustees of Crisis Group, George Soros and his son Alexander Soros are present.

As Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications of White House said in his interview with New York Times, Iran Project was one of those “echo chambers” that brought the voice of the Obama team to the people (Samuels, 2016). Rhodes indicates that the Obama team used groups like Ploughshares and Iran Project to effectively carry the message of the White House in the nuclear deal. Laura Rozen is affiliated with the institution and tried hard on the Iran issue. Iran Project was set up by former ambassador Tom Pickering and supported dozens of high-ranking U.S. foreign policymakers, including two former National Security Advisors, Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski (The Iran Project, n.d.).

Iran Project got plenty of fundings from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (Brodsky, 2017). Brodsky (2017) in Huffington Post pointed out that Stephen Heintz, the President of Rockefeller Brother, established The Iran Project in cooperation with the United Nations Association of the U.S. headed by William Luers. Iran Project was quite influential in the deal itself as well. As Hillary Clinton’s emails demonstrate, “a 10-page plan sent to her by four key members of The Iran Project provided the blueprint for America’s strategy with Iran” (Brodsky, 2017).

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Under-Secretary of State William Burns had a meeting in December 2010 with four key



leaders of The Iran Project -Heintz, Luers, Pickering, and Wisner - (Unclassified U.S. Department of States Cases, 2015). Pickering emailed Clinton their 10-page plan that “provides fuller detail on the ideas we discussed on December 22, 2010.” They called it “Toward a New Policy on Iran,” which provided an outline for U.S. policy toward the Islamic Republic, which should not be “regime change.”

We propose that you urge the President to instruct you to open a direct relationship with Iran. The burden rests on the U.S. to convince an uncertain Iranian leadership to come out of its shell. President Obama must find a way to communicate directly with the Supreme Leader a U.S. desire to open official talks,” and it should be conducted through a personal emissary he appoints to deliver oral messages (Heintz et al., 2010).

They ask for a respectful tone toward Iran, which can be mutual recognition of Iran’s legitimate interests in the area. They also assure that with Iran acting as America’s partner in the Middle East, there will be an opportunity to help establish “a regional security structure aimed at giving Iran and the Gulf states a greater sense of stability.” This would allow the U.S. and Iran “to develop together approaches to... eventually weaken Iran’s support for Hamas and Hezbollah.” They argued that the U.S. should immediately redeem Iran, end its isolation, and cooperate with Tehran on mutual interest:

A U.S. offer to cooperate with Iran as an equal partner on one or more non-nuclear issues will set the stage for [sic] more fruitful discussion of the nuclear issue. The U.S. will improve chances markedly to get Iran to deal seriously with the nuclear issues by starting with an offer to cooperate on other problems in the region (Heintz et al., 2010).

Their email to Clinton elaborated on an understanding of Fatwa, which Ayatollah Khamenei issued. They detailed that:

The Leader’s Fatwa against the building or use of nuclear weapons could establish an excellent basis for discussions with the aim of the agreement for greater IAEA access to Iran’s nuclear

program to assure the world about Iran's nuclear intentions and develop an arrangement regarding enrichment (Heintz et al., 2010).

**Religious Groups:** Lots of religious groups inside the U.S. announced their support of the Iran deal. They called their support by writing letters to Congress and sending statements to their followers to support the agreement (Gould, 2015). In 2014 a group of 340 rabbis from multiple strands of Judaism released a letter urging lawmakers to vote for the deal. Catholic groups made the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops call their anti-war stances.

Rev. Al Sharpton called on black churches to “mobilize in support of the nuclear deal” and support of Rev. Dr. David Jefferson Sr. of the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Newark, N.J., of the deal and their plans to have a conversation about the deal with one of the most prominent congregants: Democratic Sen. Cory Booker. Jefferson said the “debate around the Iran deal reminded him of the anti-Vietnam War movement and how Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out against the conflict in a famous speech at Riverside Church in New York City” (Toosi, 2015b).

Dr. Jefferson said this deal is above Republican or Democrat; this is about conscience and conviction. Toosi assured that the “conference of Catholic Bishops has long supported the deal; the Vatican also has spoken favorably of the agreement” with Iran (Toosi, 2015b). Bob Cooke, a Catholic activist with Pax Christi International, organized a letter in support of the deal to be sent to Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.)”. Top 50 Maryland Catholic leaders conducted a letter by the signature of the massive “to the Jewish senator who is the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee” to encourage him to support the deal (Toosi, 2015b).

Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, “said his group is targeting Catholic lawmakers in particular but also believes some members of Congress who have already come out against the deal could be persuaded to reconsider” (Toosi, 2015b). The Friends Committee on National Legislation is the most prominent of these active groups in the Iran discussion.



Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)<sup>1</sup> which Quakers donate was active in supporting the Iran deal. For instance, the Friends Committee arranged a letter, signed by over 50 religious' leaders, and sent to Congress urging the legislators to "remember the wisdom of Jesus" and approve the agreement (Toosi, 2015b). It also has some visibility in the house hearing. Ploughshares Fund, in its annual report in 2015, indicates that it has given \$75,000 to FCNL for gathering activists and religious leaders in support of the deal, educate and mobilize a "network to help shape the public debate about policy options to stop Iran`s nuclear program without war by educating Congress and people about possible options" (Ploughshares Fund, 2015). This institution is studied in the content analysis section.

**Think Tanks Associations:** Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) introduce itself as the "first progressive multi-issue think tank that fights for world security based on principles of mutual respect, human rights, and international law," which aims to facilitate "true democracy and challenge concentrated wealth, corporate influence, and military power" (Jett, 2018: p. 394). IPS looked deeply at the security issues in the Middle East. Phyllis Bennis, the IPS-affiliated expert, defended the nuclear agreement in an article in Al Jazeera, where she explained how the IAEA inspections worked (Bennis, 2012).

George Soros's Open Society Foundation has provided support to IPS (Joffe, 2013). IPS publishes its data on mass media or Twitter (Institute for Policy Studies, n.d.). IPS received \$36,000 from Ploughshares Fund to "support increased coverage of Iran-related issues, including rapid response reporting to debunk misinformation and investigative pieces exploring the domestic politics at play in the U.S." (Ploughshares Fund, 2015). This institution was excluded from the research since it did not meet the requirements of this study.

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1. From now on we use abbreviation of FCNL instead of Friends Committee on National Legislation

The Atlantic Council is the other American think tank in the field of international affairs which was active on the issue of Iran. They were founded in 1961. The Atlantic Council's vision is to promote constructive leadership and engagement in foreign affairs based on the Atlantic Community's central role in Meeting Global Challenges (The Atlantic Council, n.d. a). The Atlantic Council was founded to promote the collaboration between North America and Europe (Small, 1998). The Atlantic Council declared it is a nonpartisan institution, with members "from the moderate internationalist wings of both parties" in the United States (The Atlantic Council, n.d. b). The most critical funders of the Council are the U.S. government and NATO (The Atlantic Council, n.d. b). Ploughshares funded The Atlantic (Ploughshares Fund, 2015). The experts of this institution, including Barbara Slavin, had more than 20 products in U.S. Media. So, it was included in the content analysis part.

**Jewish Institutions:** The entire Jewish community in the U.S. was not against the deal. J Street—which is a pro-Israel institution—supported Iran nuclear deal. It stood beside the senators who supported the Iran Nuclear deal (Beinart, 2015). It called Iran nuclear deal a historic deal that avoided war (Beinart, 2015). George Soros, also Jewish, was the most prominent and made significant contributions to the Ploughshares Fund and J Street. He gave JStreet \$250,000 from 2007 to 2010. J Street led an inclusive campaign to support the deal the days before the final vote in Congress.

In July 2015, J Street took out a full-page advertisement in The New York Times urging Congress to refrain from "sabotaging" the nuclear agreement. J Street also ran T.V. ads and built a website to stump for the accord (Staff, 2016). The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Skoll Global Threats Fund (a Jewish organization) donated at least \$200,000 over the same three-year period to J Street (Jett, 2018).

J Street is not trying to resolve conflict with Iran, but JStreet was positive to an agreement and presented a different image of

Iran because of the deal. The Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Skoll Global Threats Fund, two Jewish organizations, donated at least \$200,000 over the same three-year period (Scribd, 2014). None of these institutions had more than ten productions every year. So, they were excluded from content analysis in this research.

**Media:** Ploughshares Fund has funded National Public Radio<sup>1</sup> \$100,000 to “support national security reporting with an emphasis on themes and stories related to nuclear security topics” (Ploughshares Fund, 2015 & The Guardian, 2016). Business Insider claimed that “a group that helped the White House sell the Iran deal - Ploughshares Fund - gave NPR \$100,000 to report on it” (Klapper, 2016). Weekly Standards assures that “Ploughshares Fund bought and paid for this favorable NPR coverage, giving the news outlet \$100,000 last year and \$700,000 in grants over a decade” (Hemingway, 2018).

Critics accused this funding as a way to influence the public mind. NPR denied such connection since NPR’s rules strictly forbid such pay-to-play arrangements (Staff, 2016). To show that Ploughshares fund did not have any changes in its policies, NPR analyzed its stories about the Iran Deal in 2015 and the first half and 2016. Their study found 118 stories neutral; in the other 136 reports, 160 people spoke in favor of the deal, and 102 were against it even though the critics didn’t convince and claimed that NPR was influenced (Staff, 2016). Cirincione, in his article in The Huffington Post, supported Ploughshares’ stood point on the Iran issue and indicated that “Our support of independent media such as NPR ... does not influence the editorial content of their coverage in any way, nor would we want it to” (Staff, 2016).

Ploughshares Fund, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Colombe Foundation, and the Open Society Foundation funded Rethink Media during Iran negotiations (Influence Watch, n.d.; Jett, 2018). Peter Ferenbach, one of the core staff of Rethink Media, explained: “the difficulty of selling the Iran

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1. From now on we use abbreviation of NPR instead of National Public Radio

nuclear deal to the American public, given Iran's long history of relations" (Vadum, 2017). Rethink provided a massive list of resources and talking points for their partners to support the Iran deal (Meir, 2015). Rethink usually uses Twitter to expand its contents.

Media Matters with the help of the Daily Beast (Rondeau, 2015) was active on Iran during nuclear deal. Media Matters conducts a counter narrative against Fox News Channel during nuclear deal. For years, conservatives have accused Media Matters of being a front organization for Mr. Soros (Shear, 2010). It was also financed from moveon.org (York, 2004).

**Obama Team:** The role of the Obama team in this partnership is also essential to investigate. An article was published in The New York Times Magazine, which conducted an interview with Ben Rhodes, the deputy national security adviser for Strategic Communications. The article implies that Ben Rhodes has "pushed Obama to sell the deal to media" (Samuels, 2016). He was the manager of the campaign to protect the Iran Deal in media to gain the support of people for it. The article also indicates that Obama made a "war room" to respond to the talks against the deal (Samuels, 2016). Jett, in his book, claims that one story that appeared in the Free Beacon did have an element of truth was about the efforts by Rhodes to work with pro-deal groups like the Ploughshares Fund to support the agreement (Jett, 2018). Rhodes seems to give the media the information that they intended to be published.

On June 2, 2011, December 8, 2011, November 19, 2013, February 27, 2014, and July 27, 2012, partners for peace-building with Iran wrote letters to Congress and President in support of Iran negotiations and expressed their anxiety about putting sanctions on Iran<sup>1</sup> (Parsi, 2011h; Abdi, 2013b). On January 14, 2014, a letter was written to the President, and seventy-two institutions supported it. In 2015, it called for some organizations' key changes to Corker-

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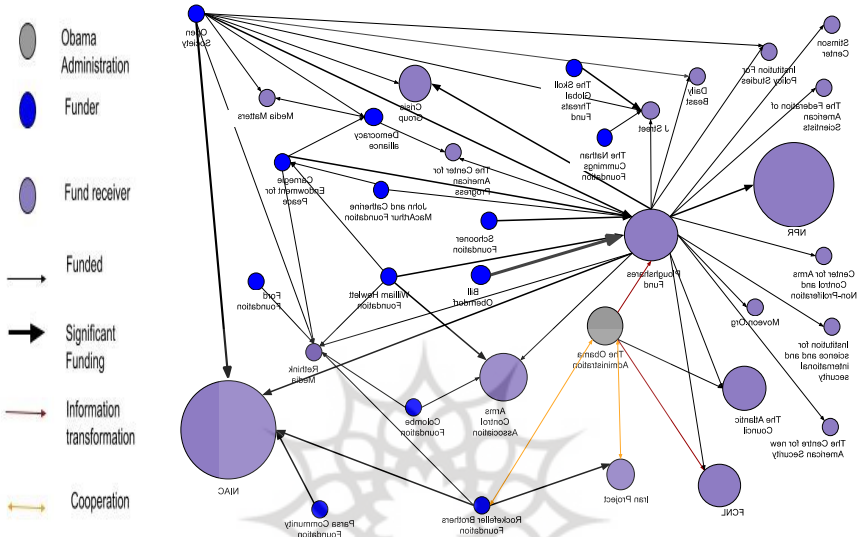
1. The names of all pro-deal agents have been attached in Appendix A

Melendez Iran Bill (NIAC, 2015c).

## **II- Socio-Diagram**

The Socio-diagram below shows the relations of prominent supporters of the Iran Deal in the U.S. The only institutions are listed here are the significant ones (got more than 50,000 from funders or had significant media participation during 2011 to 2015 on the Iran issue). The data is analyzed, mapped, and drawn by NVivo 12 software. The Socio-diagram visualizes the relations. Three types of relationships are defined: financed (black line), information deliberation (red line), associated/partnerships (yellow line). The color of lines shows the feature of relation. The direction of lines shows the direction of relations. For example, Ploughshares funded NIAC; so, a black line is directed from Ploughshares to NIAC. Yellow lines show the cooperation. Iran Project sent the “Iran Plan” to the U.S. administration, and also Ben Rhodes elaborated on the partnership of this institution with the White House that “carried the message of White House in the nuclear deal,” so a two-way yellow line is drawn between the Iran Project and Obama administration. The Redline shows the transformation of information. For example, FCNL indicates that they got their information from the White House, so a red line is directed from Obama Administration to FCNL. Since the core of this dissertation was on the published content of these institutions, I organized the mass of every bubble on the amount of published content. So, the mass of bubbles shows the amount of data that was published in mass media by that institution. NIAC and NPR had the most significant amount of published data, so they have the biggest bubbles. After that, The Arms Control Association Ploughshares Fund stands at the next level. Atlantic Council, Crisis Group, and FCNL are the next group. Others have the least content. The purple bubbles are institutions that made content for media, funded others, or got financed. The blue bubbles are the agents that mostly financed others (funders). The gray bubble shows the Obama administration. For example, Daily Beast is an institution that got

money and produced content, so its bubble is in purple. We should keep in mind that this socio-diagram just shows the network of the Pro-Iran deal lobby. The content that was produced by them cannot be put into the unfreezing perspective.



**Figure 1: Socio-Diagram of American Supporters of Nuclear Deal, Derived from NVIVO**

### Conclusion

The ones involved in pro-deal discourse had an affiliation, association, or financial partnership and constructed a network. A diverse range of institutions was involved in the pro-deal debate, even from those against the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran. But, the majority of supporters were democrats and arms control institutions. Finances of the ones opposing the deal were more significant and less transparent than the adversary group. It was tough to trace the money transferring of groups in opposition to the deal. They also had much better sponsors. Just one institution donated \$20 million against the agreement.

The number of Islamophobic organizations present in the debate was significant. The number and financial support of those who were against the deal were higher than the supporting group.

They expanded fear, xenophobia, and racism in their arguments against the agreement. They insisted on the threat of terrorism. The number and funding of the pro-Iran deal network were limited compared to those against the deal. Their funding was transparent and available. The pro-deal institutions produced data countering the present rhetoric about Iran.

Ploughshares is the core participant in organizing and collecting a network on the deal. A significant number of arrows drives from The Ploughshares Fund in socio-diagram indicate that this institution is the most active in this network. Rhode's interview shows that Ploughshares had a close relationship with the Obama administration. As they are acclaimed, the U.S. administration made the information and encouraged them to do the research. The most vital funder of the Ploughshare Fund was Bill Oberndorf. Other significant funders of the pro-deal network were Gorge Soros (Open Society) and Rockefeller's Brothers. The most productive institutions in mass media were NIAC and NPR, which got grantees from Ploughshares Fund.



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