

The White House Spin, J Street and Iran

In an astonishingly arrogant remark, Ben Rhodes, the spin doctor of the White House confessed to misleading the American people, media, and non-governmental organizations about the seven-nation negotiations with Iran in 2015 purportedly to stop Iran's nuclear development. He boasted of creating an "echo chamber," and using "outside groups like Ploughshares " to help carry out the Obama administration message. To their disgrace, those groups then said things in public that validated the misleading information that Rhodes and other White House officials had given them to say.

Now we have the newly published document of the non-profit Ploughshares Fund (PF) whose stated objective, like all non-lunatics, is to help make the world more safe and secure. The Fund states it does this by funding organizations and people who promote the elimination of nuclear weapons, who are devoted to prevent the emergence of new nuclear states and to build regional peace. All these activities are worthy to pursue but what the Annual Report 2015 of the Fund did not say or want to know is that it had been manipulated by the Obama administration for propaganda purposes.

Some news organizations, such as the Associated Press, have rules concerning funds they accept and are concerned to uphold journalistic integrity. Ploughshares Fund does not appear to be one of them, as Rhodes implied in his reference to it. Ploughshares indeed faithfully obeyed the spin and the message that he disseminated.

The PF 2015 Report detailed the organizations and groups it funded to carry out the Obama administration message, and reveals their subservience to the message. It is worth looking at a few of them.

Some are surprising but others are not. Not everyone will agree that National Public Radio is always objective in its reporting. Not surprisingly, NPR, which receives a small amount from Congress, has since 2005 received \$700,000 from Ploughshares (PF) to cover national security issues. In 2015 for the propaganda campaign concerning Iran, NPR received \$100,000 from PF. In this PF is less than forthright. It stated that "funding does not influence the editorial content of their coverage in any way, nor would we want it to." The facts speak otherwise. NPR hosted supporters of the deal, including Rep. Adam Schiff of California and Joseph Cirincione, president of PF, who was invited at least twice, but it refused to invite Rep. Mike Pompeo of Kansas, a critic of Iran's nuclear program., who had several times requested an appearance on radio.

Some recipients of the grants seem understandable, other seem bizarre. Included among the recipients of funding are the Arms Control Association, which received 4 grants amounting to \$282,500, and the Atlantic Council that got \$182,000. The National Iranian American Council got 5 grants amounting to \$281,211, perhaps because one member of the PF board, the actor Farshad Farahat, is also a director of the NIAC. One of the more surprising and inexplicable was the National Committee on North Korea that got \$50,000.

Academic institutions and think tanks were helped. The Brookings Institution in D.C. got 3 grants amounting to 225,000, and Princeton University received \$70,000 to support Seyed Hossein Mousavian, former Iranian ambassador, for his books and activities involved with the negotiated settlement of Iran's nuclear program.

The single largest grant went to J Street, the leftist or liberal Jewish political action group, "pro Israel, pro-peace," which got 6 grants amounting to \$576,500. These were awarded to support J Street's media and education campaign to continue diplomatic engagement with Iran, to demonstrate the

benefits of the negotiated settlement with Iran, and to mobilize Jewish support for a final deal. J Street in effect accepted the spinning of the White House. Among J Street's activity was on July 23, 2015 a full page ad in the *New York Times* praising the diplomatic solution and calling on Congress not to sabotage the Iran nuclear agreement.

The Ploughshares Fund prides itself in general that its approach to reducing nuclear weapons and other global security threats is unique and effective. With this in mind, it is not clear why Valerie Plame , the central figure in the political storm in 2003 over the leaking of her alleged identity as a CIA covert officer, is on the Board.

In particular, PF claimed that the Iran coalition it created by was one of the most effective collaborative efforts in many decades.

The chair of the board Mary Lloyd Estrin, also a director of the General Service Foundation, enthused about the absolutely critical role that civil society and the PF played in tipping the scales in the promotion of a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear weapons threat. She also spoke of the "fearless leadership of Obama administration and supporters in Congress. Can one detect in her words a fundamental world wide conspiracy against the leadership that PF stopped?

The PF and its associates regard the Iran Agreement as a major victory for U.S. national security. To this end, the PF provided a network organizations and individuals in common effort. These included pooling ideas, sharing information, deciding strategies, and accepting the misleading statements of the Obama administration.

J Street, usually critical of Israeli policies, sought to disarm criticism of its acceptance of the White House spin by asserting that it worked to advance the deal out of the belief that the important agreement contributed greatly to Israeli

security, and that it blocked Iran's path to a nuclear weapon for some years.

But that is not necessarily true. It is possible that the path of Iran to nuclear weapons may be limited for a short time with closer international inspection. It is equally possible that the deal may lead to better relations between the US and Iran.

But already the US Government Accountability Office in a report in February 2016 suggests that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) may have problems in monitoring and verifying Iran's implementation of the nuclear deal, regarding nuclear materials and activities. Iran in the past has failed to notify the IAEA of some of its activity.

Observers may legitimately differ about Iran's adherence to the nuclear agreement, but there can be no disagreement about Iran's continuing provocative behavior. Iran's missile program is proceeding with full support from its leaders, and its ambition to become the hegemonic power in the Middle East is clear, especially to Saudi Arabia. The PF group in their obeisance to the White House spin, have neglected the reality that Iran is a dangerous power. This has shown by its missile launches and testing of ballistic missiles, its support for the Assad regime in Syria, its support of Hezbollah, its involvement in Yemen, and its detention of US sailors.

The bible, Isaiah 2:4, says "they shall beat their swords into ploughshares." Ploughshares Fund by its acceptance of misleading official propaganda and its funding of organizations not usually regarded as advocates of peace in the Middle East nor concerned with the security of Israel has not been helpful in turning Iranian "spears into pruning hooks."