

# Anti-Iran groups embroiled in scandal again

## ANALYSIS

The Iranian opposition has put all opposition groups to shame. Recently, US President Donald Trump announced his decision to cut off millions of dollars in funding to various countries, including some anti-Iranian institutions and figures. This news sent shockwaves through the ranks of mercenaries who, for years, have been carrying out anti-Iranian activities with money from the White House and the US Congress.

Trump stated that he would suspend this aid for 90 days. However, it did not end there. The US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also announced in a press conference that the main problem with these groups was their financial mismanagement. According to Rubio, for every \$1 that these groups take from taxpayers in "foreign aid," only "12 cents" of US aid ultimately went towards the actual goals of the White House, while the remaining 88 cents are pocketed.

Reports have been released showing which individuals have benefited from these funds. The website ProPublica has published detailed documents revealing the income and assets of these individuals and institutions. It appears that six of them alone have received around \$100 million in funding over the past 10 to 15 years. Of course, there are many other natural and legal persons whose receipt information is not available. What is clear is that Trump and Elon Musk are gearing up to get the most out of their resources.



Hamidreza Gholamzadeh

The photo includes the logos of some of the anti-Iran opposition groups whose funds were cut by the Trump administration.

## Be good, we'll fund you again

Trump had already announced that he would be stopping foreign aid to 200 countries for 90 days. This decision was part of Trump's efforts to reduce federal government spending, with Elon Musk at the helm of the operation. Immediately after the announcement, some people saw this as a positive signal from Trump to Iran. However, Marco Rubio put this notion to rest, stating that they had cut off funding because these groups were not doing their job properly. This move is not only not a positive signal but also an opportunity for these groups to reform and receive new funding. The US's primary goal is to review and streamline its spending, not to abandon its policies towards Iran.

## Slap in face to funding recipients

Since Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution,

various US administrations have spent hundreds of millions of dollars supporting opponents of the Islamic Republic. However, the fact that they have stopped funding these groups suggests that their efforts have not yielded the desired results. The failure of regime-change projects, infighting within the opposition, and the lack of success in the 2022 developments have led American decision-makers to conclude that their investments have been futile. Washington is now looking to allocate its budget to media outlets and groups that have a greater impact.

However, this story is far from over. The US secretary of state has recently announced that the main problem with these groups is their financial mismanagement, and reports have been released showing which individuals have benefited from these funds. It is not only the content of these reports that is worth

examining, but also the amount of money these individuals have received over the years.

## Who pocketed the money?

One activist has written on social media about how anti-Iran funding recipients have embezzled the funds. He claims that Ladan Boroumand, one of the founders of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center, has received around \$16 million in US government funding by the end of 2023. However, the story takes a more interesting turn when it is revealed that she registered a private company called SADA 1 LLC in Washington, D.C. in 2017. The company has been active for seven years, but there is no online presence, website, or information about its activities, and its address is the same as Boroumand's personal residence. While these vast sums of money are being spent in the name of human rights, no

one knows what this company actually does or whether it has any connection to these funds. The opposition, which has built its career on the suffering of the Iranian people, is now quietly managing a private company with no transparency whatsoever. Where do the US government's funds, allocated for human rights, ultimately end up, and in whose accounts do they land? Never mind the lack of transparency, these individuals do not even bother to explain themselves.

Similar claims have been made about the Tavaana project, which was set up by Mariam Memarsadeghi and Akbar Atri in 2009. They have picked up nearly \$14 million from the US government since 2011, but have failed to carry out their masters' orders. The Center for Human Rights in Iran has received over \$18 million in funding by the end of 2023. Its financial report outlines



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the income, expenses, and salaries paid to the organization's managers. IranWire, which is run by Maziar Bahari, has been funded with \$19 million, and the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center has received \$9 million from various sources.

## Regime change 'common goal of US left, right'

Hamidreza Gholamzadeh, an expert in international affairs, explains the difference in approach between Democratic and Republican administrations in dealing with foreign aid as such: "These expenditures have been largely within the framework of US soft power, and Democrats have used public diplomacy to advance their goals. In other words, Democrats have tried to promote their policies through soft power, regime change, and color revolutions. However, Republicans, especially under Trump, try to increase their hard power and pursue the same goals through intimidation, sanctions, economic pressure, and ultimately military action."

The shift in foreign policy under Trump, Gholamzadeh added, does not mean that the previous methods were bad, but rather that they were ineffective in Trump's view. "The goal that both parties share is regime change in countries like Iran, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Georgia. The difference lies in the method; Democrats believe that soft power works, while Republicans think that hard power yields results faster. That is the reason behind this recent cutoff of aid. The main goal remains unchanged, with an emphasis on achieving results."

## NED primary source of funding

Gholamzadeh stresses that a significant portion of these expenditures, especially in the non-governmental sector, has been carried out through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The story of NED's formation is that after the coup in Chile, the US Congress was upset that the government had spent money on the coup without permission. As a result, Congress banned any actions aimed at regime change or coups. After this incident, the Americans decided to establish NED.



Security personnel work as the USAID building sits closed to employees after a memo was issued advising agency personnel to work remotely, in Washington, D.C., US, on February 3, 2025.

● KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS



“The first president of NED explicitly stated in his inaugural speech that NED was established to do the same things that the CIA used to do but was no longer allowed to do, namely, coups and regime changes that Congress had banned,” Gholamzadeh said. The expert clarifies that such costs are covered and managed by USAID. “Some of these costs are borne by government resources, which is a different story. However, NED provides a significant portion of these types of funds that are received by anti-Iran activists and discussed in the media. In other words, USAID had the budget, and NED decided how much to allocate to whom. For instance, in Yemen, between 2007 and 2011, around \$4 million was paid to 40 organizations. In Tunisia, \$2.5 million, in Libya \$1.2 million, in Lebanon, which is currently experiencing significant developments, around \$4 million, and in Jordan, up to \$4 million has been spent.”

Role in overthrow of Hosni Mubarak

Gholamzadeh explains the role of US foreign investment in interfering with the affairs of countries, citing Egypt as an example: “One of the largest expenditures of these funds was in Egypt. To better understand how it works, it’s enough to know that during five fateful years, more than \$8.5 million was paid to over 50 organizations in Egypt. What were the

of Iran, significant expenditures have been made. For example, the Boroumand Center, which has received funding from NED since Iran’s Islamic Revolution, has been active in the field of human rights.” Another example, he says, is that between 2010 and 2015, one of NED’s expenditures in Iran was to promote the idea that the Iranian government was mismanaging natural resources, specifically water. The result of this effort was Netanyahu’s famous clip, where he held up a glass of water and told the Iranian people that they deserved clean drinking water. “Similar scenarios have been implemented in Georgia, Ukraine, and other countries, often under the name of George Soros, but a significant portion of the funding came from NED,” Gholamzadeh added.

NED’s activities in Iran

Gholamzadeh believes that the goals for which these funds are spent are diverse, but the focus is mainly on Latin America, West Asia, North Africa, and the Caucasus. In other words, NED’s activities in these regions are more extensive than in other parts of the world. “In Iran, in 2021, some of NED’s expenditures were allocated to its subsidiaries. For example, one of them was related to supporting marginalized minority rights. A legal magazine related to human rights also received funding from these sources. In addition, NED has spent mon-



Center for Human Rights in Iran were all funded by NED. However, I don’t recall IranWire receiving funding from NED; it probably received direct funding from the US Department of State. During his first term, Trump tried to change USAID, but he

this change as follows: “Between 2005 and 2010, NED tried to infiltrate Iraqi society and create a social base. A person who was 20 years old in 2005 would be 30 years old in 2015 and ready to enter the government. So, NED educated, networked, and injected these individuals into the Iraqi government. At this stage, they were taught a specific language and content under the name of ‘good governance’ to enable them to achieve US interests in Iraq. The same model can be seen in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and other countries.”

Footprint of US Department of State

Gholamzadeh concludes by attributing the root of the new Trump administration’s decisions, including the cutoff of foreign aid, to Trump’s strategy for a new leap forward: “The important point is that Trump is currently retreating to prepare for a leap forward. He is trying to internalize, strengthen his financial resources, and put the economy in a better shape — since the US has significant economic problems. However, this does not mean they are in a state of crisis, but rather that they need to manage and optimize their expenses to have a freer hand in pursuing their expansionist goals.” In the previous period, the Iranian expert contends, such problems did not exist to this extent, and Trump’s efforts were not very successful either. Now, he



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A woman holds a placard outside the USAID building, after billionaire Elon Musk, who is heading US President Donald Trump’s drive to shrink the federal government, said work is underway to shut down the US foreign aid agency USAID, in Washington, US, on February 3, 2025. ● KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS

is using coercive methods. He wanted to completely halt the working of this structure and reorganize it in a different way. However, he has exempted Israel and Egypt from this policy. Israel is a strategic ally of the US, and in the case of Egypt, its strategic importance, the US’s role in training the Egyptian army, and the fact that the US provides a significant portion of the Egyptian army’s budget are the reasons for this exemption. “The Suez Canal and Egypt’s strategic security are crucial for the US, both geographically and in terms of regional relations. Therefore, Washington does not want to put economic pressure on Egypt or lose the country under any circumstances.”

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Farhikhtegan.



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirms that he is now the acting director of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), during a visit to aircraft maintenance firm Aeroman in San Luis Talpa, El Salvador, on February 3, 2025. ● MARK SCHIEFELBEIN/AP



US President Donald Trump signs an executive order at the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C., US, on February 4, 2025. ● ERIC LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

results of these expenditures? The overthrow of Hosni Mubarak and the rise of Mohamed Morsi.” He notes that the same protests that took place in Tahrir Square during Morsi’s era in 2013 were also organized by three or four organizations that had received funding from NED. Apparently, even one or two of the men behind these groups were US residents. They played a key role in organizing the protests that led to Morsi’s overthrow. This, he maintains, is a clear example of how these funds work.

NED planned Netanyahu’s jibe at Iran

The expert continues to explain NED’s role in implementing anti-Iran propaganda campaigns based on finding flaws and injecting despair, saying, “In the case

ey under the pretext of ‘environmental accountability’ and ‘checking public information to promote accountability’. In the fields of freedom of information, journalism, and human rights, NED has been active in Iran over the years. Until around 2012, NED published its financial reports in full, detailing the amount of money paid to each organization in Iran.” However, he adds, during the same period, tensions arose in Egypt, particularly during the late Mubarak era and the early Obama administration, when one of the activists associated with NED, who was the son of the then-US secretary of transportation, was arrested. He was working with one of the organizations supported by NED in Egypt. This arrest and the resulting tensions, combined with the issues that arose between Iran and Egypt, led NED to stop publishing the names of many of these organizations in its reports and to limit the financial information it released. “Tavaana, Boroumand, and the

was unsuccessful in Congress. He attempted to bring USAID under the control of the Department of State and centralize its management, but he was not authorized to do so. Now, he is effectively doing the same thing. The current head of the organization is appointed by the Department of State and manages it.” Gholamzadeh expanded his analysis to include Iraq, saying: “For example, in Iraq, NED claims to be a non-governmental organization (NGO), and its tax documents are registered as such. However, 99.8% of its budget comes from the US government, and only 0.2% comes from the sale of products, books, and other resources. However, NED highlights this 0.2% as a sign of its independence and ignores the rest of its funding.” In Iraq, between 2005 and 2015, NED’s main activities focused on empowering women and young people, as well as civil and social issues. However, after 2015, there was a change in approach, and the main focus shifted to “good governance”. He analyzes the reason for

