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IRAN: DEMOCRACY SMALL GRANTS PROPOSALS RECOMMENDED FOR FUNDING

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B. B) EMB LONDON (GAYLE)-NEA/IR(COBERLY) EMAILS AND TELCONS APRIL 9 C. C) EMB LONDON (GAYLE)-NEA/IR(COBERLY) EMAIL APRIL 24 Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d) 1. (C/NF) Summary: Per Department guidance for the Iran Democracy Small Grants program (refs a and b), Embassy London supports and forwards for Department review, and approval and funding, six project proposals submitted to Iran Watcher (Poloff) by Iranian contacts in the UK. Per Department guidance in refs a and b on post vetting process, Embassy Public Affairs section has cleared this cable. All project applications use the Department-generated application form for the Small Grants program, and all are bundled (ref c) for Department's formal review. 2. (C/NF) Summary con't: Proposals from Durham University and the UK-based media NGO, The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), (both outlined at paras. 4-9 below) include extensive exchanges with Iranian media, academic, civil society and clerical sectors. These proposals are likely to attract broad participation from individuals and NGOs in Iran, in some part due to the political cover among contacts within Iran which Durham has apparently been able to generate. USG approval and support, rapidly provided, even if at funding levels somewhat below those requested, is likely to encourage Durham to make further innovative proposals of possible interest to USG. Some Durham proposals exceed normal caps for one program, but lend themselves, if Department agrees they should be supported, to treatment as multiple proposals which individually would fit within single project spending limits, as Department authorities have indicated may be feasible in appropriate cases under the Democracy Small Grants Program. 3. (C/NF) Summary con't: Embassy also recommends a proposal by the Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS) (paras. 13-14), which appears, despite the controversial profile among some Iran expatriates of one CIS leader, Amir Fakravahr, to have generated at grassroots level a small but authentic network of Iranian and Iranian expatriate students, connected to students in Iran and genuinely interested in civil society engagement and non-violent reform. Again, even partial funding is likely to encourage further work and proposals consistent with Department goals. End summary. Durham University and IWPR ----- 4. (C/NF) The most promising and detailed applications are from Durham University's Dr. Mohammad Ali Pedram, a former participant in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) and a key Embassy London contact. Pedram is also known to Department, having arranged multiple outreach activities both at the UK's Durham University and at IWPR (ref b), a UK-based NGO which had not previously

done Iran-related work and which has already been receiving unrelated funding from Department's Democracy and Human Rights Bureau. Pedram is active at both IWPR and at Durham University, and has submitted five separate proposals, discussed below, on behalf of both IWPR and Durham University. The proposals on behalf of the two different institutions are in principle unconnected, with Pedram's role being the only link between them. As a practical matter, there will be significant cooperation and coordination between IWPR and the university, much of it apparent in the details below. (Embassy comment: As Pedram tends to compartmentalize his work, it is possible portions of his proposals on behalf of IWPR may have been separately submitted to Department. End comment.)

Durham Workshops: Women's NGOs ----- LONDON 00001163 002 OF 004 5. (C/NF) One very strong Pedram/Durham University proposal (requesting \$75,000 funding; six months in duration), under the auspices of Durham University's School of Governmental Affairs, headed by Poloff contact Dr. Anoush Ehteshami, is for a workshop, entitled "Forum to Discuss Iranian NGOs Concerning Women Advocacy." The workshop's purpose would be to build links between NGOs inside Iran and their UK-U.S. counterparts for training, networking, knowledge-sharing and increased public awareness, with a goal of joint cooperation between Iran and U.S. universities and NGOs working to empower women. This project focused on womens' NGOs, in addition to being under the auspices of Durham's School of Governmental Affairs, would also be overseen by Professor Emma Murphy, a Durham University political economist who specializes in "Feminism and Development." "Project milestones" would include strengthening links between Iranian and Western women's NGOs and "production of a conclusive text agreed by Iranian participants" to promote mutual awareness, cooperation, and coordinated effort among NGOs in Iran.

Durham Workshops: Civil Society ----- 6. (C/NF) An ambitious project at Durham University, entitled "Iran-U.S. Civil Society Engagement" (lasting 12 months, asking \$123,050 in funding) aims at bridging "the communicative gap between influential Iranian individuals affiliated with strategic research centers" and their U.S. counterparts, and would convene additional and expanded symposia along the lines of recent (2007) Durham events held with USG assistance and described in paras. 10-12 below. The workshops and symposia would provide the opportunity and space for engagement and exchanges among individuals and institutions in Iran and the U.S. who, though private academics and entrepreneurs themselves, bring significant degrees of informed perspective and critical ability to bear on strategic and regional questions of interest to both countries. Individual sessions within this proposed program include topics such as "Iran's Ethnic Diversity and Its Role In Promoting Democracy," "Iran's Economic Policies After the Islamic Revolution," "U.S. Versus Iranian Media," and U.S. and Iranian Cultural and Academic Relationships." Persian transcripts of proceedings would be disseminated within Iran, audio recordings broadcast on-line as podcasts or via Radio Fardo, and video clips disseminated via "You-Tube" or VOA Persian TV broadcasts.

Workshops: Iranian seminarians ----- 7. (C/NF) The single most innovative and arguably, groundbreaking, proposal from Durham (seven months duration, asking \$91,700 in funding) is for a first-of-a-series-of workshops, with follow-on translation and dissemination in Iran of the proceedings, to introduce (in a series of workshops) ten students from some of Iran's leading (and, by definition, socially and politically conservative) seminaries, in the theological centers of Qom and Mashhad, to Western academic views and methods with invited U.S., UK, and other western academics and seminarians. The project proposal is entitled "Forum To Discuss Iranian Seminary Students and Their Impact on Reform In Iran," and would emphasize themes of human rights, democracy, accountability and rule of law. There has been only limited western interaction with the clerical sector, portions of which have in recent decades provided intellectual and political resistance both to the former Pahlavi regime as well as to the current regime's

ideology of "Velayet e Faqih" (rule of Islamic jurists), which, though based on the writings of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, is nevertheless theologically repugnant to many Shiite thinkers and believers; such ferment is centered in Iran's seminaries. Outreach to Iranian Shiite seminarians could complement USG and Western interaction with the more secular, Western-oriented elements of Iran's political class. IWPR: Media Training, NGO Data Base LONDON 00001163 003 OF 004 ----- 8. (C/NF) Pedram, along with IWPR's Executive Director Tony Borden (known to Department - DRL), proposes a \$75,000, six-month program which would run a training workshop to build sustainable capacity for a free and fair socio-political journalism in Iran, by targeting promising young Iranian journalists, using IWPR's existing networks in Iran. The proposal describes the five-day workshop, to be held at Durham University for ten Iranian journalists; it includes direct training, simultaneous translation into Persian by U.S. and UK media institutions, formal statements of expectations beforehand by Iranian trainees, and independent evaluations of program outcomes. 9. (C/NF) Pedram and Borden also propose a \$75,000 "Iranian NGO and Media Data Base Pilot" project, lasting six months, to collect and build up-to-date open access and on-line data on active Iranian NGOs and media outlets, in both English and Farsi, to enable these groups to build links with each other and share skills and know-how on operations, advocacy, outreach, and sustainability, and provide information to outside groups seeking to link with NGOs in Iran. The personnel retained in Iran would include IT specialists and NGO surveyors. In response to a concern that data collection on Iranian NGOs could render NGOs cooperating with the survey vulnerable to identification by IRI authorities, Pedram argues his project design contemplates two categories of databases: an open-source one with identifiers only for those NGOs which have consented, and a private, grantee-controlled database, containing identifiers for all NGOs surveyed, not accessible on-line. Comment: Political Cover for Participants -----
----- 10. (C/NF) Comment: Durham University's demonstrated access to academic and civil institutions, reinforced by Dr. Pedram's apparently successful creation of political cover with IRI authorities for Iranian participants (see ref a), gives this proposal the strongest prospects of broad, meaningful Iranian participation given the restrictive current political conditions in Iran. The apparent strength of Pedram's political cover was also apparent in his recruitment to participate, in the April 2007 Durham University Workshop on Public Diplomacy, the IRGC-linked academic and cleric Hesamuddin Ashena (ref a). Pedram's success in establishing political cover, was further indicated by Ashena's appointment in November 2007 as spokesman for the Iran National Security Council. End comment. Future Pedram Proposals: Local Governance et al -----
----- -- 11. (C/NF) Poloff has encouraged further Pedram/Durham University proposals for academic symposia or workshops drawing on Pedram and Ehtashami's networks within Iranian academia and unofficial policy circles, to bring together innovative and challenging groups of U.S. academics and specialists and well-placed Iranian interlocutors. One especially notable Ehteshami proposal, not yet past the verbal stage, is for the convening in Durham of a number of Iranian local officials, from municipal councils and other locally-elected (vice centrally-appointed), subnational bodies in Iran, to discuss comparative government and to engage in dialogue with U.S. counterparts and U.S. and UK experts. (Embassy comment: Such an event, if Department supports further exploration, might offer U.S. and USG observers a useful look inside Iranian politics at a grassroots level. End comment.) 12. (C/NF) Other groups and sectors for which Durham has discussed forming groups for workshops/symposia include: risk and disaster management, young lawyers, and culture and media experts. (Embassy comment: Rapid support at some level of proposals already submitted may improve Durham's ability to LONDON 00001163 004 OF 004 pull together groups in these and other sectors of possible interest to USG. Poloff judges

the speed of decision and approval, rather than amount of financial support, to be the key factors in encouraging further proposals of possible interest to USG. End comment). Grant Proposals from Other Sources: ----- Confederation of Iranian Students ----- 13. (C/NF) The Confederation of Iranian Students (CIS) (website www.neo-cis.org) has submitted a request for funding of a conference "for the promotion of democracy in Iran." CIS is an Iranian student group, heavily though not predominately expatriate, formed in the Fall of 2007 at the initiative of several UK-based former International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) participants and journalists. It is linked to the Iranian Enterprise Institute, a 2007-founded "think-tank" based principally in Washington, D.C., with some activities in London, and reportedly supported by expatriate Iranians' contributions. The CIS gives a prominent leadership role to the outspoken, Washington-based former dissident and regime prisoner, Amir Fakravahr, now well known to Voice of America Persian Service and in some Capitol Hill circles. The CIS claims membership of some 4,000 students, 65% of whom CIS claims are inside Iran, and states as its central purpose the creation of "an umbrella organization" for the multiplicity of existing Iranian student organizations, especially those inside Iran. 14. (C/NF) CIS has requested \$48,400 in small grants funds for a one-day conference to be held in London or elsewhere in Western Europe, tentatively in Fall 2008. The purpose of a conference would be to gather input from various student movement leaders, "international thinkers and secular democrats" in order to form a "united front for promotion of democracy which places cultural and educational exchanges" at the center of its program, to achieve consensus on "most effective practices and ideas ... to promote democracy inside Iran." The CIS proposal, which Poloff discussed with Fakravahr and others before its submission, emphasizes non-violence and respects the formal parameters of the USG's policy to avoid the promotion of regime change in Iran. (Embassy comment: Although Fakravahr and others professing membership in or sympathy for CIS personally believe international economic pressure on Tehran would, if successful, contribute to civic unrest in Iran, they appear to have accepted the practical necessity of working within USG-determined policy constraints, including strictures on advocating violence or traumatic regime change, if they are to enjoy USG support. End comment.) 15. (C/NF) Several proposals received but not recommended by Embassy for funding under the Democracy Small Grants Program will be e-mailed separately to Department for information. Visit London's Classified Website: http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:United_Kingdom TUTTLE

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