

From:	(b)(6)
To:	
Subject:	FW: ECCE Meeting Readout
Date:	Thu, 13 Jun 2019 16:02:24 +0000

Do not forward. This is for the ECCE packet for the S/E.

(b)(6)

Official - SBU
UNCLASSIFIED

From: (b)(6)
Sent: Thursday, June 13, 2019 10:33 AM
To: (b)(6)
Subject: ECCE Meeting Readout

(b)(6)

We will put this in the notes for the S/E.

(b)(6)

Global Engagement Center
Department of State

(b)(6)

Official - SBU
UNCLASSIFIED

Sender:	(b)(6)
Recipient:	

ECCE- IranDisinfo Meeting Readout

06/12/2019

Participants:

(b)(6) GEC Iran Team Chief

(b)(6) GEC Senior Advisor

(b)(6) GEC Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist

Mariam Memarsadeghi – Tavaana Co-Founder and IranDisinfo Project Lead

(b)(6) I have been out so I am trying to get an understanding of what has been happening with this project while I've been gone. Can you please tell me about this project?

Mariam: There was a tweetstorm around the hashtag #naiclobbies4mullahs. Eventually the NIAC president came out saying that @IranDisinfo was behind the hashtag. Where @IranDisinfo may have gone too far was when "we countered.... Replied.... Retweeted 'No, it wasn't us.'" Following that there were strong criticisms made by individuals/groups that tend to work alongside the NIAC. "and then it, 'poof'" escalated. Rapidly the dialogue went from #naiclobbies4mullahs > IranDisinfo is criticizing US citizens > Slander/libel > IranDisinfo has no civic values

(b) Did you respond?

Mariam: No, at that point the award was suspended, so they shut down. I was attacked personally. Comment: As of 25 May, Mariam was promoting #NIAClobbiesForMullahs on her personal Twitter account. She has not promoted that hashtag since that date. The first use of the hashtag we can find was (date). She first used it 25MAY2019. ECCE appears to have deleted problematic tweets from @irandisinfo, so it's not possible for GEC to ascertain use of the hashtag there. End Comment.

(b)(6) How do you identify what content and narratives IranDisinfo shares?

Mariam: There is a team that monitors the media, including Twitter, and then when they see Iranian disinformation in the media, including Twitter, they respond through Twitter and Telegram. Options going forward are that IranDisinfo continues without Twitter, which would not be desirable, or with a Twitter feed dedicated to content only, or an active twitter using strict guidelines provided by the GEC.

(b)(6) What was the oversight for this activity?

Mariam: There were overarching guidelines and I and others were doing spot checks.

(b)(6) In doing spot checks, did you ever feel that any of these tweets walked a thin line?

Mariam: The last few days have been unwieldy, but before, no. At times the tone, but never substance.

(b) Within the teams, do you ever engage in brainstorming sessions? Talk about the projects across teams?

Mariam: We brainstorm in our own teams, but we keep it separate between Tavaana and IranDisinfo. All of Tavanna works on Tavanna. For Tavanna we have several grants. IranDisinfo, is it's our own grant and separate.

(b) Were there any safety checks?

Mariam: One option is to not have social media. TV Station Iran International wants to air the documentaries. We can switch to a broadcasting option and only and put out our own content, like the documentary series, PSA videos, etc. Going forward, there will be two-tiered safety checks where the writer writes, then submits for review, and then that goes for approval.

(b) Do any of your employees work for FDD. We have looked through their content and it looks to be pretty similar.

Mariam: ECCE contractor Saeed Ghasseminejad is an employee of FDD. FDD also posts the content that IranDisinfo provides them. This content is labelled and made clear that it is IranDisinfo. It should be verbatim the same content.

(b) Do any of your employees connect with any other government officials at all?

Mariam: The team is regularly in touch with Brian Hook and others in the current administration. The team pays attention to movement in the governments and tries to respond to those movements.

(b) Are they meeting with Brian Hook and other government officials?

Mariam: I have not myself, but others are on the team may be. People on like Saeed Ghasseminejad are pretty spectacular and there aren't a lot of people out there like them. We had to assemble our team from among them, and we have the best.

(b) the A&R team has done a full scrub of the twitter feed, and they have highlighted for us about 87 tweets that are targeting and messaging journalists and US persons.

(b)(The Department of State is bound by the Smith-Mundt Act. It was passed to prevent the U.S. government from propagandizing the American people. It was updated about five years ago to recognize that the pervasiveness of the Internet meant that it was no longer to stop communications from crossing borders. Still, we cannot directly target U.S. persons.

Mariam: I was not aware that we could not message U.S. persons. I think I had heard that at some point, maybe in high school, but it wasn't at the forefront of my mind. This was not specified in the scope of work. We can stop targeting this of course, but the GEC has to provide proper guidelines.

You have to understand how disinformation works. This is how disinformation works. Disinformation works by targeting journalists to get them to push the government line. Governments recruit credible voices at credible institutions. Even the most basic book on disinformation will tell you that.

(b) What was the audience that you were targeting?

Mariam: The international community. The voices outside of Iran. If we want to disinformation inside of Iran that is something else entirely. GEC has to provide guidelines.

(b) Does the international community include Americans?

Mariam: Yes, it does. But we can stop doing that if you tell us to stop.

(b) What are the languages that it was produced in?

Mariam: Arabic, Farsi, and English.

(b) Why those?

Mariam: It's in the scope of work.

(b) Who are your staff? Where do they come from?

Mariam: They are all activists that have left Iran after the Green Revolution. They are the best political analysts on Iran, and they come from all over. They watch what is happening with the regime and disinformation and then they shoot out responses to those things.

(b)(6) What does the process look like? The process of identifying a target audience, developing a message/ the content, and then deciding the intended impact – what does that look like for your team?

Mariam: There is not a process. We follow on twitter and we focus on what we think is the most important focus of the day: How the regime lied about managing the floods, how poverty is increasing and the purchasing power is decreasing. The things the people really care about.

(b)(6) Is there some sort of leadership team that gathers and develops a messaging plan, which directs the content?

Mariam: No. The team operates on their own.

(b)(6) You are ECCE's President and you are dual-hatted as the project director?

Mariam: That's right.

(b) There is no one between you and the team; you are functioning as the team leader?

Mariam: Yes.

(b)(6) That's all the questions we have today.

Mariam: I have one last question. How did the media get my name? I thought it would happen, and it is not really a problem, but (b) assured me that my name would be protected. I did not think my name could be protected, but I was told it would be.

(b)(6) We have not disclosed that information to the media.

Mariam: You did not disclose that information on the Hill?

(b)() We will not discuss what we have briefed on the hill. However, there it is possible that that is how that was leaked. It was not leaked by anyone in our office though.

(b)() (Meeting close out, thank you for coming)