



The Cyrus Cylinder استوانه کوروش or Cyrus Charter منشور کوروش was discovered under the foundation of a Babylonian palace in 1879, making it perhaps the oldest time capsule on record. It commemorates Cyrus' victory over Babylonia in 539 BC and sets out the rights of subjects in his expanding empire. It is often commemorated as the oldest charter of human rights in the world.

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Forever Unfinished

By Paul Barker, Advocacy Bulletin Editor

یلدا مبارک May you have a blessed [Yalda](#) (winter solstice). Let us join Persians in their annual celebration of the victory of light over darkness as the calendar turns a page and moves to ever brighter days.

Over the past nine years, the PCIA Advocacy Bulletin has endeavored to provide its readers with interesting information to motivate and support advocacy action. The hope has been that our letters to editors, members of congress and policy makers would promote PCIA's vision of using diplomacy rather than military threats and bombast to resolve tensions between our countries. While we represent a unique constituency of Americans who have lived and worked in Iran and built enduring personal bonds with its people, culture and history, we are not a huge group and our influence limited. When possible we have worked with other pro-peace organizations on sign-on letters and campaigns to achieve a better future for relations between the Iranian and American people.

This, the December 2025 edition of the Advocacy Bulletin, is intended to be the last. It provides a list of organizations and news sites that regularly provide useful insights on issues facing Iran. Hopefully readers will be able to quench their thirst for reliable Iran-

focused news by visiting their websites and by subscribing to their newsletters and publications.

As 2025 comes to an end, tensions fanned by the bombing of Iran's nuclear, military and political sites in June continue to simmer and threaten. Indeed, problems on the far side of the world, in Venezuela, also have relevance for Iran. The US administration's pursuit of aggressive military tactics without Congressional authorization is a warning to other governments which displease this White House, as well as to American taxpayers and voters.

Heavy rains have finally brought relief to the southern parts of Iran, but the legacy of Iran's years-long drought and decades-long water mismanagement remain. Iran's compounding environmental, political and security problems have left its President with a sense of powerlessness, which is compounded by the restraints placed on his authority by the governing structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Is it encouraging that the United States and Iran have recently been able to communicate directly? Or is it frightening that the reason for that dialogue is to arrange flights to deport Iranians back to Iran, including political dissidents and members of religious minorities who have reason to fear renewed persecution on their return?

The work of the PCIA Advocacy Bulletin will forever be incomplete. Should an urgent need arise in the coming few months, there may yet another as-yet-unscheduled edition before the final closure of PCIA on 30 June 2026. In any case, thank you for letting me fill your inboxes with my monthly musings and collections of Iran related reading materials. سخن کوتاه باید و سلام

Iran society has transformed but its system not at all

John Limbert interviewed by Negar Mojtahedi, Iran International, 2025/12/5.

Former US diplomat **John Limbert**, a hostage during the 1979 Tehran embassy takeover, told Eye for Iran that Iran's society has radically developed in recent decades even as its ruling system has barely changed.

"Society appears to me changed a lot. Very different," Limbert said. "If you look at the government, the ruling apparatus, it's been remarkable, it's basically stayed the same. The same little men's club, elite men's club has run the country."

"Look at the literacy rate. When we were there, it was about 50 percent. Now it's well over... ninety five, ninety six."

Literacy has been one of the biggest structural changes in Iranian life.

In 1976, 48.8 percent of people aged 10 to 49 were literate. By 2021, that figure had reached 97.1 percent. The literacy gap between men and women dropped from 23.4 percent to 6 percent.

Limbert served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iran and spent 14 months as a hostage after the US Embassy was seized in November 1979. Nine of those months were in solitary confinement.

"There's a narrative out there that we were treated well, but we were not. Fourteen months I was there; nine months I was in solitary."

Archival video online shows a striking exchange inside the embassy compound in 1979: Limbert speaking directly with Ali Khamenei who was a senior official in the new government and is now Iran's Supreme Leader.

Limbert greets Khamenei and makes a wry remark about Iranian hospitality, saying that in Iran "even when a guest insists, he must go, he is told 'no, no, you must stay.'" It was his polite way of saying he wanted to leave, delivered through the cultural language of taarof, the elaborate politeness that shapes everyday interactions.

'Back of beyond'

Limbert first traveled to Iran in 1962, later returned as a Peace Corps volunteer and as an instructor at Pahlavi University in Shiraz. He speaks Persian and earned all his degrees from Harvard University.

While the ruling structure of the Islamic Republic is still dominated by the same generation that took power in 1979, Iranian society itself, Limbert says, has changed in profound ways.

Limbert said the most dramatic change is visible far from Tehran, in places that once felt remote and forgotten.

"Yasuj was the back of beyond... now there's a university there. Darab in Fars... it was a dead town. There was nobody there. Now there's a university there."

He praised the creative boom that has emerged under pressure.

"Culture is amazing. Look at the films that are coming out of Iran... look at the creativity."

Recent scenes from inside Iran capture this contrast vividly. A marathon in the Persian Gulf island of Kish took place on Friday with more than 5,000 runners. Footage shows most female runners without hijab — a sight that would have been unthinkable decades ago.

Yet these images exist alongside something darker.

Authorities have executed over 1000 people thus far in 2025, the highest number of yearly executions in Iran according to Amnesty International. This includes political detainees, ethnic minorities and protesters. Human rights groups report intensified repression, mass arrests and new surveillance campaigns.

And while society has modernized, the ruling system has barely moved.

"They took power in '79, and they've held it ever since. They or their followers are still around," said Limbert.

For Limbert, Iran is moving in two directions at once. "It's going in both directions at the same time." He does not predict collapse, but he questions endurance.

"I don't think it can last forever. But I don't know how long."

Diplomacy Now or Later?

By Paul Barker, panel moderator

At the final PCIA conference held in Washington DC in October, the plenary session on **Finding a Way Forward for Diplomacy with Iran** featured a panel with four noted scholars/journalists/diplomats with extensive experience in Iranian-American relations over the decades: Trita Parsi, Barbara Slavin, John Limbert and Sina Toossi. While the

volatile international atmosphere surrounding American-Iranian politics evolved greatly over the two years when our conference was being planned, the relevance of the aspiration to find a peaceful, diplomatic path to negotiate our long entrenched hostilities only grew stronger. Our panelists shared wisdom garnered through their extensive experience with the bedeviling dynamics of US-Iran politics. As the ever-wise John Limbert observed, there are always two answers to these questions: 1) “I don’t know” and 2) “It’s complicated.”

Trita Parsi, who has authored three books on the promise and pitfalls of Iran-Israel-US relations opened the discussion with the provocative suggestion that due to the unhelpfully entrenched positions of the current regimes in both Washington and Tehran, this is not a good time for a strong push for new diplomacy. Despite earlier signaled flexibility, the Trump team now has now laid down unacceptable terms for a new deal, terms which would amount to Iranian capitulation to US demands. Iran predictably finds these more than unacceptable. Were the US to now press these terms and Iran resist them, Netanyahu’s Israel might seize the moment as an opportunity for militarily “mowing the grass” in Iran. When the current regimes in the US and Iran age out, new openings for diplomacy will hopefully arise.

Barbara Slavin reported on her recent talks with President Pezeshkian on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. She found him to be more seasoned and confident in his role than had been the case a year earlier. His government has been burned badly by Trump’s policies and actions, most recently joining Israel’s bombing campaign against Iranian nuclear assets and pushing of unrealistic diplomatic positions. The alternative Iranian path has been to nurture trade, diplomatic and security relations with China, Russia and Iran’s immediate neighbors. Hopefully Trump’s desire to bring peace somewhere will bear fruit, or at least constrain the most dangerous options; hopefully Netanyahu’s problematic attacks on targets in Qatar and elsewhere will hold back his country’s appetite for new attacks on Iran; and hopefully Tehran’s leaders will want to focus on dire domestic, economic and environmental problems.

John Limbert quoted the wisdom of Samuel Becket and Moulavi Rumi to call for patience and persistence in the face of inevitable setbacks. We need clear and realistic goals, and we need to recognize that foreigners have a terrible track record when it comes to sorting Iran’s very real problems. Our Iranian friends, and we, deserve better leaders than we have.

Sina Toossi noted that there did appear to be an opening for successful diplomacy early in this year when Steve Whitkoff showed a willingness to accept limited uranium enrichment and even as late as June when the US was engaged fairly directly with Iran in five rounds of negotiations. These opportunities were blown up by the 12-day June war. The prospects for diplomacy in the near term are not good.

The video of the full panel discussion can be found at: [Iran Today and Future Diplomacy](#)

Sources for Iran News and Advocacy

[NIAC Insights](#), NIAC

[Iran Unfiltered](#), NIAC

[Win Without War](#)

[FCNL](#), Friends Committee on National Legislation

[PAAIA](#), Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans

[Informed Comment](#) Newsletter, edited by Juan Cole

[Stimson Center](#)

[AMWAJ Media](#)

[European Leadership Network](#)

[BBC Persian](#)

[New York Times](#),

[The Guardian](#)

[Haaretz](#)

Iran Policy

[Who Can Solve Iran's Many Problems? Not I, Says the President.](#) Amid sky-high inflation, water and energy cuts and prospects for a deal with the U. S. dimming, President Masoud Pezeshkian has apparently thrown up his hands. Farnaz Fassihi and Leily Nikounazar, NYT, 2025/12/18

[Can Iran reinvent itself? A fragile charm offensive meets mounting internal strain.](#) In the wake of US strikes Tehran is exploring a softer diplomatic approach – even as its leaders fear further conflict and crackdowns intensify at home. Patrick Wintour, The Guardian, 2025/11/24

[Iran Has a New Moral Order.](#) The Islamic republic no longer controls the symbolic universe that once anchored its legitimacy. Menahem Merhavy, Foreign Policy, 2025/12/15

[From Prison, Mostafa Tajzadeh Rejects War and Sanctions, Calls for Peaceful Democratic Transition in Iran.](#) Iranian political prisoner and former deputy interior minister Mostafa Tajzadeh told the French weekly Le Point that neither war, sanctions, nor foreign intervention can bring democracy to Iran. NIAC Insights, 2025/12/17

[Iran's Grand Strategy.](#) Negar Mortazavi and Vali Nasr had a book talk at the Busboys and Poets bookstore in Washington, to discuss Nasr's latest book "Iran's Grand Strategy". Iran Podcast, 2025/12/12

[Outdoor Concerts? Uncovered Hair? Shimmying in Public? Is This Iran?](#) Young people across Iran have been leading a dramatic change in social mores in recent months. "We have a fearless young generation that is breaking taboos." Farnaz Fassihi and Sanam Mahoozi, NYT, 2025/12/1

[Will new Pakistani-Saudi pact unlock strategic opportunity for Iran?](#) Amwaj, 2025/11/27

[**The Mystery of Mohammad Tajik**](#), Sgabe Harris, The Atlantic, January 2026

[**Iran Enacts New Law Intended to Facilitate Travel and Return of Iranians Abroad.**](#) NIAC Insights, 22025/12/12

[**Deadly Terrorist Attack on Police Checkpoint in Kerman Leaves Four Dead.**](#) At least three Iranian police officers and one civilian were killed in terrorist attacks carried out by armed assailants late on Monday night, December 15, at a police checkpoint. NIAC Insights 2025/12/17

US Policy

[**U.S. Boarded Ship and Seized Cargo Heading to Iran From China.**](#) The seizure last month came amid fears of a renewed conflict between Iran and Israel. Chris Cameron and Eric Schmitt, NYT, 2025/12/12

[**Trump Admin Frames Iran As Continuing Threat in Deprioritized Middle East.**](#) The past week has illustrated how deeply the Middle East's geopolitical turbulence remains intertwined with Iran's regional posture, diplomatic maneuvering, and strategic competition with the U.S. NIAC Insights, 2025/12/12

[**Enduring Hostility: A Book Talk on Why the U.S. and Iran Remain Adversaries.**](#) Dalia Dassa Kaye and Ryan Crocker interviewed by Barbara Slavin, 2025/12/4

[**There Is No 'Axis of Authoritarianism'.**](#) The "allies" are on the sidelines because they were never allies. Daniel Larison, 2025/12/5

[**Western policy must include Iran's neglected peripheries.**](#) Rob Macaire, MENA, 2025/12/9

[**Are We Still Fighting Iran?**](#) American experts think the regime in Tehran is teetering while Israelis believe it's rebuilding its defenses—another confrontation is looming. Seymour Hersh, Substack, 2025/12/10

[**What Does the Trump National Security Strategy Mean for Iran?**](#) Larry Johnson, Sonar21, 2025/12/9

[**After years living quietly in Florida, Shah of Iran's alleged 'chief torturer' must face accusations in court.**](#) Parviz Sabeti crafted a low-profile life for his family – but now he faces a \$225m lawsuit over atrocities committed in prisons in Tehran and elsewhere. Richard Luscombe, The Guardian, 2025/9/12

[**The Challenges of Providing Humanitarian Aid.**](#) Organizations working in Gaza and Sudan say their jobs have become harder than ever. John Halitwagner and Rishi Iyengar, Foreign Policy, 2025/12/11

[**New threats to Iranian green card and visa holders.**](#) Jamal Abdi, NIAC, 2025/12/3

On 2 December 2025 the Trump administration announced a series of actions targeting immigrants of Iranian heritage:

- Pausing all green card and citizenship processing for individuals from the 19 countries, including Iran.
- Conducting a "full scale, rigorous re-examination" of green cards issued to any Iranian who entered the U.S. on or after January 20, 2021.
- Pausing all asylum applications for people facing persecution.

NIAC is exploring litigation to challenge and halt these sweeping and discriminatory actions. If you or someone you know has been impacted -- or could be impacted as a visa or green card holder -- [please share or complete this intake form for potential legal action](#).

To learn more about these new policies, please see our [comprehensive FAQ](#). Additional resources at our Travel Ban and Immigrant Justice Center [here](#).

Region

[Will Russia mediate between Iran and the IAEA?](#) Oliver Meier, ELN, 2025/12/19

[Can Saudi Arabia serve as a mediator between Iran and the United States?](#) Mohammad Sadegh Javadi Hessar, European Leadership Network, 2025/12/2

[Gulf Arab mediation in spotlight as Iran ponders talks with Trump](#), Amwaj, 2025/11/25

[Iran sounds 'red line' on Gulf islands amid GCC condemnation](#), Amwaj, 2025/12/8

[One Year After Assad's Fall: Iran's Strategic Collapse In Syria](#). Iliya Jazaeri and Kian Sharifi, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 2025/12/13. One year after Assad's fall, Iran grapples with the collapse of its key regional ally. Tehran lost up to 50 billion dollars invested over a decade, its Mediterranean access, and supply routes to Hezbollah.

Israel, Iran, USA

[Israel now realizes damage it inflicted to Iran's ballistic missile program 'less severe' than initially thought](#). Times of Israel, 2025/12/11

[US briefly withheld some intelligence from Israel during Biden era](#). By Erin Banco and Jonathan Landay, Reuters, 2025/12/12

Environment

[Iran Launches Major Oman Sea-to-Central Plateau Water Transfer Project](#). Iran has inaugurated a large-scale water transfer project that carries desalinated water from the Sea of Oman to the country's central plateau. NIAC Insights, 2025/12/12

[Iran's Desalination Pipeline Is More Stopgap Than Solution](#). The project fits a long-standing pattern in Iran of improvisation rather than reform. Umud Shokri, The Stimson Institute, 2025/12/11

[Iran Can't Run Away From Tehran's Disasters](#). Moving the capital is an old idea and a perennial nonstarter. Nik Kowsar and Alireza Nader, Foreign Policy, 2025/11/27

[Iran's Capital, Tehran, Faces Zero Day without Water: Climate Change and Bad Policy](#). Ali Mirchi, Amir Agha Kouchak, Kaveh Madani, and Mojtaba Sadegh, Informed Comment, 2025/12/2

[>Welcome Rains Bring Relief to Iran—While Exposing Deep Climate and Governance Vulnerabilities](#), NIAC 2025/12/19

[Iran’s Air Pollution Emergency: Toxic Winter Skies](#). Widespread Closures, and the Compounding Pressures of Drought and Water Crisis. Iran is facing one of its most dangerous air pollution episodes in recent years, as toxic smog spreads across major cities. NIAC Insights, 2025/11/16

[Why Tehran Is Running Out of Water](#). Because of shifting storms and sweltering summers, Iran’s capital faces a future “Day Zero” when the taps run dry. Wired, 2025/12/6

[Why Iran must dismantle its ‘water mafia’](#), Amwaj, 2025/12

[The 5,000-Kilometer Echo of Earth’s Worst Extinction](#). How matching chemical signals in two distant ancient oceans show the end-Permian crisis was a single, connected planetary event. Silvia Pineda-Munoz, Medium, 2025/12/6.

A team of scientists collects samples from a quiet roadcut in **northwest Iran**. The outcrop looks like any other layered cliff to most people. But inside those layers are molecules produced by ancient life. Chemical traces of algae, bacteria, soil, and wildfire smoke.

Another team is doing similar work in South China, nearly 5,000 kilometers away. Different rocks, different landscapes, different researchers. There’s no reason to expect these two places to share a story. Yet that is exactly what happened.

Economy

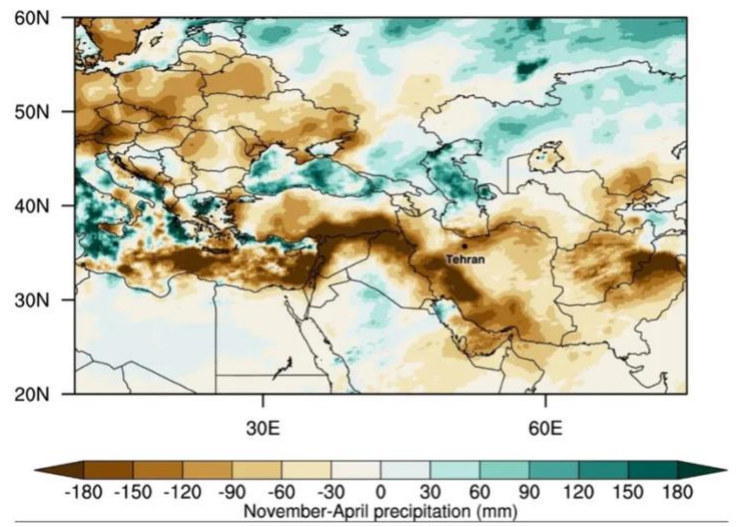
[Sanctions, Eastern Diplomacy, and Rising Maritime Tensions](#), NIAC, 2025/12/19

[Historic Collapse of the Rial Signals Deepening Economic Crisis](#), Iran Unfiltered, NIAC, 2025/12/5

[Iran’s currency falls to a new low as nuclear sanctions squeeze its ailing economy](#), Amir Vahdat, AP, 2025/22/3

[Iran Launches Three-Tier Gasoline Pricing as Economic Pressures and Energy Imbalances Mount](#). As of Saturday, December 13, 2025, Iran officially began implementing a three-tier gasoline pricing system, marking one of the most sensitive fuel policy changes since the nationwide protests in 2019. NIAC Insights, 2025/12/18

[Iran’s Economists Urge Pezeshkian to Pursue Transparent and Fair Economic Reforms](#). 180 of the country’s most prominent economists, academics, and social science researchers have issued an open letter to President Pezeshkian, urging the government to pursue deep economic reforms. NIAC Insights, 2025/12/12



November-April precipitation anomaly in 2024-25 relative to the 2000-01 to 2019-20 mean, from GPM IMERG Final Run (V07B) dataset. Tehran is indicated by a black dot. ILLUSTRATION: YEONWOO CHOI AND ELFATIH A.B. ELTAHIR/BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS

Media

[When Sanctions Silence Iranian Voices: How Digital Exclusion Is Hurting Ordinary Iranians](#). In recent weeks, many Iranian YouTubers have experienced a sudden and severe collapse in advertising revenue. NIAC Insights, 2025/12/18

[Iran's famed singer Gooqoosh recalls family, exile and life in the spotlight](#), Iran's most-famous singer has written an account of her life as she embarks on a farewell tour. Jon Gambrell, The Independent, 2025/12/5

[New location feature on X ignites firestorm in Iran over 'white SIM cards'](#), Amwaj, 2025/1/25

[Cutting Through Rocks](#) a movie about Azari rural life in Iran. The [trailer](#) is online. Brothers try to swindle sisters out of inheritance. The educated sister is able to prevent the swindle. It's called "Cutting through Rocks" اوزاق يولار

[Jafar Panahi, Who Filmed in Secret in Iran, Wins Big at the Gotham Awards](#). He won best director, original screenplay and international feature for "It Was Just an Accident." Kyle Buchanan, NYT, 2025/12/2

[12 days that shook Iran | Fault Lines Documentary](#), Al-Jazira,

Nuclear, Missiles

[IAEA Passes Resolution on Iran](#), Kelsey Davenport, Arms Control Association, 2025/12

[Why Iran is building arms factories abroad](#), Paul Iddon, Amwaj, 2025/12/19

[When Iran Looks to Space, It Sees an Industry](#). Sina Toossi, ISNI, 2025/12/18

[Debate: Is Saudi Arabia under a Pakistani nuclear umbrella?](#) Amwaj, 2025/11/25

[Pakistan's 27th Amendment Upends Its Nuclear Command](#), Haleema Saadia and Ali Mustafa, Foreign Policy, 2025/12/12

[A constitutional reform throws restraint, deterrence, and regional stability into question](#). Haleema Saadia, Foreign Policy, 2025/12/12

Advocacy

[ICE is targeting us – here's how we fight back](#). NIAC, 2025/11/25

Human Rights

[Invisible Repression in Iran: How Unwritten Punishments and Digital Control Sustain a Hidden System of Human Rights Violations](#), Human Rights Tracker, NIAC, 2025/12/3

[Iranian Security Forces Disrupt Memorial in Mashhad, Detain Narges Mohammadi and Dozens](#), Human Rights Tracker, NIAC, 2025/12/15

[Kish Marathon Exposes Growing Rift Over Hijab Enforcement in Iran](#). The Kish Marathon, one of Iran's largest public sporting events, has become the center of a national controversy after authorities announced a judicial case against its organizers. NIAC Insights, 2025/12/12

[A second flight of Iranian deportees, carrying 55, has left the US](#). Nasser Karimi and Jon Gambrell, AP, 2025/12/8

History

[Molding the Language of Nationalism in Three Recent Periods in Iran](#), Sydney Martin, Iran 1400 Project, 2021/12/10

[Mission Impossible: The CIA and the Cult of Covert Action in the Middle East.](#) Douglas Little, Academia.edu, 2004

[Norman Schwartzkopf Sr. and Iran](#)

[Alexander's War](#) – Alexander's campaign across Iran and Afghanistan. Iran was easy, but Afghanistan, not so much.

ADVOCACY COMMITTEE PURPOSE STATEMENT

Peace Corps Iran Association advocates for peace and understanding through education, outreach, and cultural diplomacy.

PRINCIPLES: The Board of Peace Corps Iran Association has adopted the following Guiding Principles for our advocacy efforts toward improving relationships between Iran and the United States, and their peoples.

1. Understanding and acceptance of other people and cultures are the building blocks of friendship, inclusiveness and world peace. As citizens of a world power, Americans bear a special responsibility.
2. Tolerance and mutual respect form the foundation for peaceful interactions between countries and their citizens.
3. Bringing countries and their citizens into the global community through cultural and economic ties reinforces international cooperation and reduces the likelihood of armed conflict.
4. Negotiation and diplomacy are essential to resolving international issues.
5. Force is rarely justified in dealing with conflicts. Peace is built and sustained through voluntary agreement and consent.

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1. The Advocacy Bulletin is an opt-out email publication for PCIA members interested in this subject. It is a way to share ideas, information, and opportunities for action. The Bulletin is archived on the website.
2. PCIA members are invited to share articles for publication. The editor decides which articles are selected for publication. Some pieces, particularly when not aligned with PCIA's Mission, Values, and Guiding Principles, or which do not relate to the current state of Iran advocacy issues, may be posted in PCIA's Facebook group.
3. Articles should be addressed to AdvocacyBulletin@peacecorpsiran.org and the release question answered, "I consent/do not consent to the release of my writing beyond the Advocacy Bulletin distribution and PCIA archives." If consent is given, statements issued to the public will be identified as coming from the author, and not PCIA, the Advocacy Committee, or Board.
4. Writers are encouraged to include action recommendations and reference information to help readers understand issues.
5. The Advocacy Bulletin is not an academic journal, but it does aspire to be fact-based. Whenever possible citations and links to web-based articles should be included in the articles.
6. Opinions and ideas from members expressed in the Bulletin do not represent Board positions. However, members of the Advocacy Committee may present a position to the Board and request endorsement. Positions adopted by the Board to be posted in the Advocacy Bulletin will be identified as such.

The opinions in this issue are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the Board of PCIA. Letters and contributions to the Advocacy Bulletin are most welcome and may be submitted to the editor at Paul@peacecorpsiran.org.

Donations to PCIA Welcome: In order to support the advocacy and other work of the Peace Corps Iran Association, please consider [making a donation](#).