

ParsBrief

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Guns and bombs are not speech

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - The United States can designate foreign organizations as terrorist groups and bar Americans from financially backing them, a federal appeals court ruled on Thursday .

"Leaving the determination of whether a group is a 'foreign terrorist organization' to the executive branch ... is both a reasonable and a constitutional way to make such determinations," Judge Andrew Kleinfeld wrote for a three-judge panel.

"The Constitution does not forbid Congress from requiring individuals, whether they agree with the executive branch determination or not, to refrain from furnishing material assistance to designated terrorist organizations".

The ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was made in a case involving people who raised money in California for Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, an Iranian opposition group designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government since 1997.

The defendants argued the MEK was not a terrorist group and they had First Amendment rights to contribute to the group.

The court disagreed, saying contributing money was not the same as exercising a right to free speech.

"Guns and bombs are not speech," Judge Kleinfeld wrote.

The 9th Circuit ruling was a rehearing of the same panel's decision in June. Both 9th Circuit decisions overturned a district court's dismissal of the indictment in the case.

The "Committee for Human Rights" had solicited contributions at the Los Angeles International Airport and sent them to the MEK in Turkey...

The decision read "The sometimes subtle analysis of a foreign organization's political program to determine whether it is indeed a terrorist threat to the United States is particularly within the expertise of the State Department and the executive branch ".

Straw rejects call to support Iranian opposition groups

London, Nov 1, IRNA

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw Tuesday rejected a call from a supporter of the MKO terrorist group to start talks with Iranian opposition groups to overthrow the country's government .

"Regime change in Iran is not part of the policy of Her Majesty's government, nor do I think it would be wise," Straw told MPs .

The foreign secretary was urged in parliament by Conservative MP Brian Binley, who was paid by the so-called National Council of Resistance to travel to the UN General Assembly in New York in September to rally support for the MKO's front group .

The rejection came after Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells dismissed a call from Binley to back his campaign to deproscribe the MKO as a terrorist group .

"The Mujahideen-e Khalq Organization (MKO) is proscribed in the UK under the Terrorism Act 2000. It has a long history of involvement in terrorism in Iran and elsewhere and is, by its own admission, responsible for violent attacks that have resulted in many deaths," Howells said

DUTCH AUTHOR CALLS IRANIAN OPPOSITION 'DANGEROUS'

November 8,2005

Radio free europe

Judit Neurink was interviewed about her book "Misleide Martelaren" (Misled Martyrs), which covers the 40-year history of the Iranian opposition group known as the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MEK), Radio Farda reported on 7 November. Neurink told Radio Farda she got interested in the subject about two years earlier, when MEK members immolated themselves after their leader, Maryam Rajavi, was arrested in France. Neurink asked herself why people would do such a thing, and said "My book tells a story that many don't know -- about brainwashing, about the imprisonment of friends and comrades, about torture, and about persuading people to go to Iran and kill civilians." Neurink said she interviewed MEK members, but experience showed her that this is like listening to a recorded message when the needle is stuck. Neurink described MEK as "dangerous." Radio Farda said Neurink's book will be translated into English and Persian. BS

Iraqi Kurds want Iranian opposition leader tried

Radio Free Europe

By Bill Samii

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Iraqi Kurds want Masud Rajavi, leader of an Iranian opposition organization based in Iraq, to be arrested and tried, Radio Farda reported on 20 October. Rajavi's group, the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MEK), settled in Iraq in the 1980s, where it received assistance from and cooperated with former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. The Kurds say they want Rajavi to be tried because of the role his organization played in their repression by the Hussein regime .

Mohammad Tofiq Rahim, an official with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, said in an interview with Radio Farda that his organization has documentary evidence of Rajavi's role. He said that when the Kurds seized control of northern parts of Iraq with U.S. assistance at the end of the Gulf War in 1991, the MEK cooperated with the Iraqi Army in retaking control of the city of Kirkuk. In the process, he charged, hundreds of the city's residents were killed by the MEK .

"Everyone in Iraqi Kurdistan knows that Masud Rajavi cooperated with the Mukhaberat [intelligence] and security forces of Saddam Hussein not only in the suppression of the Kurds, but all the opponents of the regime of Saddam," Rahim added .

Chalabi says Iraq must tackle foreign militants

Reuters, November 7, 2005

LONDON, Nov 7 (Reuters) - Iraq must do more to stop the country being used as a base for foreign militants seeking to destabilise its neighbours, Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Chalabi said in comments published on Monday.

In an interview with Britain's Financial Times, Chalabi acknowledged Iran's "legitimate concern" about Mujahedin-e Khalq, an Iranian opposition group operating in Iraq which the United States lists as a terrorist organisation.

He said there were also concerns in Turkey over bases in northern Iraq operated by the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK.)

"We should enforce the article in our constitution that Iraq should not be a transit point or base for destabilising neighbours," Chalabi told the newspaper. "We should deal with these issues humanely and fairly, but firmly".

Turkish leaders complain the PKK has a safe-haven in the mountains of northern Iraq from where rebel commanders direct operations into Turkey.

After more than 20 years of conflict, Turkish forces have failed to completely quell the PKK's armed campaign for home-rule in the mainly Kurdish southeast.

On Iran, Chalabi said Tehran had agreed to study his proposal for an inquiry by British, Iranian and Iraqi representatives into recent violence in the southern city of Basra.

Chalabi said Britain raised tension in the area by accusing Iran of helping Iraq militants to plant roadside bombs which killed British troops.

He added that Iran also inflamed the situation with allegations of British backing for militant Arab separatists in south-west Iran, according to the FT report .

This Is A Terrorist Organization: Hamilton

Stockholmian.com

November 7, 2005

A few hours after expressing support for the Mojahedin-e khalq organization, Elina Åberg, member of Sweden's Environmentalist Party, Green party (Miljöpartiet de Gröna), received severe criticisms from the political leaders in her party so that she was forced to turn 180 degrees and withdrew her comments. On Thursday morning, she said that the MKO was an active organization which "works for the freedom of people" but a few hours later she had to announce that expressing such words resulted from her being young and inexperienced. "After I talked to my colleagues in the party, I found that I had not enough knowledge on the MKO and the situation in Iran."

Ms. Lotta Hedstrom, member of parliament and Green Party leader, also denied Åberg's support for the MKO and said to the media that supporting the MKO is not the policy of the party. "The MKO is not suitable for overthrowing Iranian regime," she said .

Carl B. Hamilton, member of the Parliament for the Liberal Party, also criticized Åberg's comments and said that her comments proved her inexperience. "I was shocked. This is a terrorist organization."

Mojahedin-e Khalq has been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. and EU, mainly because of cooperation with the ousted regime of Saddam Hussein .

Elina Åberg expressed support for removing MKO from terror list but withdrew her comments very soon after receiving harsh criticism from inside and outside her party.

Geldof leaves Iran demo over terror list

The Irish Examiner, November 8, 2005

Ann Cahill, Europe Correspondent

BOB GELDOLF walked away from a demonstration on Iran after hearing that one of the groups involved was on the UN's terrorist list.

He was due to speak to a crowd gathered in Brussels where the EU's Foreign Ministers were meeting and discussing growing concerns about the regime

The Live Aid organiser was on his way to Africa and stopped off in Belgium to address the gathering of Iranians against the current government

But he left after hearing that one of the group's associated with the event, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI), was on the terror list

There were banners demanding the PMOI be taken off the terror list, calling the recently elected president an assassin and describing Iran regime as terrorist.

Geldof, billed to speak for 25 minutes, did not appear to know the PMOI was a proscribed organisation

"I would not have anything to do with it if they are on the terror-list. We checked it out before we came," he said

But after speaking to the organisers, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), he walked away

The former member of the Boomtown Rats told the media he believed the Iranian government should be referred to the Security Council of the United Nations

"I do not know enough about the Iranian situation and I am not trying to become an expert but it's a dangerous situation and we do not need more wars in that region", he said

Organisers of the rally were upset at his decision not to address the crowd of about 500 and said the PMOI should not be on the terror list

The organisation was condemned by a New York-based Human Rights Watch recently

Tension in Conference on MKO-Saddam Ties

BBC Persian Service

Mehrdad Farahmand ,

November 10, 2005

A number of former members of Mojahedin-e khalq organization, who've formed the "Iran-Interlink" group and act to save MKO remnants in Iraq and to reveal what they call inhumane activities of the MKO leaders, held a press conference on Wednesday (November 10) in London's Ambassador Hotel. They wanted to give information to journalists about the relations between the MKO and Saddam Hussein and the role of this organization in suppressing Shiites and Kurds in 1991 but the meeting was disrupted with the intervention of a number of people who seemed to be MKO supporters .

These people accused the organizers of the meeting of being the agents of the Iranian intelligence ministry. In addition to disrupting the process of the meeting, they threatened and even attacked reporters .

In Iran-Interlink's press conference, first a film was shown about the suppression of Kurds and Shiites in 1991 as well as interviews with survivors, victims and Kurd journalists. In addition, former MKO

members gave evidences and documents, proving that Saddam Hussein used MKO members to kill Iraqi Kurds.

Another film showed MKO members giving intelligence on Iran to Iraqi officers and receiving millions of dollars in return. The film was produced by former Iraqi secret services.

According to Massoud Khodabandeh, one of the organizers, they had received the films from Iraqi Kurds and experts had verified that authenticity of the films. In addition, the content of the tapes matched the confessions of former Iraqi intelligence agents.

Then, Alain Chevalerias, French researcher and journalist and the author of a book on the MKO spoke for the audience. Anne Singleton, former member of the MKO and author of a book on the MKO activities gave her speech. When these two authors said they were ready to answer the questions of reporters, some people among the audience started supporting the MKO and prevented journalist from questioning the former members.

These people even insulted the journalists and called them the agents of the Iranian regime. VOA correspondent was even beaten by MKO supporters when she was leaving the place and she was returned to the building under the protection of police.

These moves caused police to come to the scene and the invitees had to leave the place under police protection.

Security concerns (fear from MKO members' violence in the meeting) forced the organizers to change time and place of the meeting and Baroness Emma Nicholson, UK representative in European Parliament, who was supposed to take part in the meeting was absent.

Although the organizers had tried to limit the event to researchers and journalists (including the correspondent of MKO TV channel), some people joined the meeting with cover names and then disrupted the event.

For instance, a man said he was working for the Congress and US security service but he was supporting the MKO and even attacked reporter

Iran-Iraq Sign Security Agreement

BBC, 18 November 2005

Mowafaq Al-Rubai, Iraqi National Security Advisor, who's visiting Iran with his entourage, joined a press conference after meeting his Iranian counterpart Ali Larijani. He assured Iranian authorities that Iraqi government would not let its soil become a base for attacking Iraq neighboring countries, including Iran .

Iraq's National Security Advisor said that MKO remnants in Iraq are under supervision and that they would be repatriated to Iran according to international laws and two sides' agreements if courts in Iran prosecute and issue rules for them.

Mr. Rubai, a Shiite Iraqi politician, said that he has stressed during the meetings that Iraq would not allow any terrorist organization to attack Iran from its soil.

MEK Lobby in UK Fails Again

IRNA, 19 November 2005

Foreign Office Minister Lord Triesman has reiterated that British policy is to maintain diplomatic contacts with Iran to address "serious concerns" on a wide range of subjects .

"We do not underestimate the difficulty in making progress, but these issues are too important for us to ignore. Our policy is to bring our concerns to Iran's attention, engage Iran in discussion and look for solutions," he said .

The minister was replying to questions during a brief debate in the House of Lords Wednesday asking what representations the UK government plans to make in the immediate future to the government of Iran .

With regard to Iran's nuclear program, Triesman confirmed that Britain was still seeking support in the UN Security Council even though there had been only limited success .

"That is not an easy matter and not everybody cooperates with it, but that seems to us to be the right perspective, which we should pursue," he told his fellow peers .

The Foreign Office minister rejected a call by Liberal Democrat peer, Lord Alton, who is a leading supporter to the Muhajedin-e Khalq (MKO), to deproscribe the group from Britain's outlawed terrorist organizations .

Triesman said that the "evidence is compelling" about the sequence of events that led the UK to proscribe the MKO as a terrorist group under the country's Terrorism Act 2000 .

Let's talk about regime change

Massoud Khodabandeh/ Asia Times

As the standoff over Iran's nuclear program steadily deteriorates into a crisis, Washington's policy on the Islamic Republic is coming under sharp scrutiny. While a group of hardcore neo-conservatives want a decisive confrontation with the Iran, the broader US policy-making community is all too aware of the futility and dangers of this approach .

The case for regime change in Iran has been most enthusiastically taken up by the Iran Policy Committee (IPC) , which is largely composed of retired senior military officers and solely administered by a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations officer. Benefiting from close links to the Pentagon, the IPC has been tasked by the Iranian opposition group, Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), a proscribed terrorist organization, to provide professional lobbying and public relations services .

On the other side are those who seek engagement. They won something of a victory on Monday when the State Department announced that the US ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, had been given permission to meet with officials from Iran. "It's a very narrow mandate that he has," spokesman Sean McCormack said. "It deals specifically with issues related to Iraq".

The IPC is likely to be undaunted, though. Lobbying on behalf of a proscribed and notoriously anti-American organization like the MEK would be controversial enough, but the IPC gives the impression that it has gone beyond advocacy and is now, to all intents and purposes, representing the MEK in the US.

While such sensational gestures generate useful propaganda against Iran in the short term, the doomed fate of the MEK means that individual IPC members are at serious risk of destroying their reputations in the long term.

Regime change in Iran?

A proper understanding of the relationship between the MEK and the IPC requires an understanding of the broader regime-change debate now under way in Washington. While the US built a case against Iraq over its alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction, the neo-conservatives' case against Iran is more complex. In 2003, Senator Sam Brownback introduced the Iran Freedom and Democracy Support Act, which was backed by senators Rick Santorum and John Cornyn. After some changes to the bill, now sponsored by Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, it was finally passed on April 13 this year as the Iran Freedom Support Act (HR 282). The act allowed for "financial and political assistance ... to entities that support democracy and the promotion of democracy in Iran and that are opposed to the non-democratic government of Iran". While Brownback had envisaged the fund going to Reza Pahlavi and pro-monarchist groups and the media, Ros-Lehtinen promoted the MEK as the best recipients for millions of taxpayers' dollars.

The act was opposed by many Iranian groups, including the National Iranian American Council, which said that "while supporters argue that any step short of regime change is unlikely to bring about change in Iran, opponents argue that making regime change official policy eliminates the possibility of diplomacy and makes confrontation between the US and Iran inevitable". Among those groups which lobbied for the bill were the Institute for Public Affairs, the Iranian American Jewish Federation (IAJF) and the Washington-based IPC.

Iran Policy Committee

The IPC, a think tank established in February by Raymond Tanter, professor of political science at Georgetown University, is supported by several neo-conservative politicians and analysts, including

Douglas Feith, Frank Gaffney, Michael Ledeen, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Tom Tancredo and Bob Filner .

Ostensibly, the IPC's platform echoes the neo-conservative view that Iran poses a threat to US national security and that regime change is the preferred solution. Leaving nothing to doubt, the IPC's website banner reads "Empowering Iranians for Regime Change". A policy paper released on February 10 extends this view to state that "Iranian opposition groups ought to play a central role in US policymaking regarding Iran". It also perfunctorily adds that "diplomatic and military options" should be kept open. A review of the IPC's first white paper reveals language and propaganda that is eerily identical to that used by the MEK, thus leaving well-informed and experienced analysts in little doubt that the paper was in part, if not in whole, written by agents of the MEK in the US. This style is also evident in the IPC's two subsequent white papers released in June and September. The promotion of the so-called "third way", oddly implicating the Shi'ite Islamic Republic in the spread of al-Qaeda-style Salafi jihadism (which is anti-Shi'ite through and through), and falsely accusing Iran of being the central force behind the Iraqi insurgency, are pure MEK disinformation techniques .

Interestingly, the June white paper, entitled "Sham elections and regime change", was primarily a response to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report that accused the MEK of torturing its dissident members and engaging in other forms of human-rights abuses. Yet again, using language that is the exclusive trademark of the MEK, the IPC had this to say about the HRW report :

The IPC appointed a task force on human rights to investigate allegations about the MEK and its related groups and claims against that organization by the HRW. IPC research concludes that the "credible claims" of HRW are actually statements by agents of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security [MOIS], especially Mohammad-Hossein Sobhani and Farhad Javaheri-Yar. Tehran sent most of those interviewed by Human Rights Watch from Iran to Europe for the purpose of demonizing its main opposition, the MEK.

This reads like MEK propaganda. But leaving aside this important detail, what is striking about the IPC is that nobody on its board is in fact an Iran expert, let alone an expert on the bloody history and intricate cult-like ideology of the MEK. It is perhaps not surprising then that the IPC scrupulously avoids a debate with former members of the MEK .

Leaving aside the highly questionable relationship between the IPC and the MEK, the solution offered by the former to the policy differences on Iran is not altogether convincing. In the IPC's first white paper, the authors review the appeasement and military options before concluding that "Washington should consider a third alternative, one that provides a central role for the Iranian opposition to facilitate regime change". The problem for the IPC is that the US government instinctively distrusts the MEK, which has a history of anti-Western propaganda, is the only Iranian organization that has admitted to killing Americans, and was for nearly 20 years an unwavering ally of Saddam Hussein .

Moreover, the IPC's lukewarm enthusiasm for the use of military force against Iran is, at best, deceptive. Indeed, if the IPC is serious about promoting MEK interests, then it must realize (as the MEK readily does) that only massive US-led military force against Iran could make marginalized exiled groups like the MEK even remotely relevant .

Furthermore, a brief glance at the IPC co-chair biographies reveals why this MEK-connected think tank secretly lobbies for war against Iran. Composed of retired senior military officers, a former ambassador, and Claire M Lopez, former operations officer with the CIA (and the sole administrator of the IPC and its main point of contact with the MEK), these individuals' expertise and career paths are based on the promotion of military options rather than peaceful ones. Moreover, several of the principals are affiliated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and its related think tanks .

MEK: A bad investment

The IPC's emergence as the representative of the MEK in the US is directly tied to the proscription of the latter in 2003. Up to August 2003, the MEK was capable of running its own propaganda campaign through the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the personnel of both being almost identical . The NCRI was outlawed in the US in August 2003 when the State Department added the cover organization to the list of terrorist entities as a pseudonym for the MEK. Similarly, the MEK's small military wing in Iraq, the so-called "National Liberation Army of Iran" was bombed, disarmed and dismantled by US forces in April and May 2003. Having lost the patronage of Saddam, the MEK is now looking to the US government and Israel-linked lobby groups in Washington for support .

As part of this push to gain acceptance in the West, the MEK has presented itself as a pluralistic, secular and pro-democratic group which promotes the role of women and supports human rights. Its tools in this exercise have been the feminized image of its head, Maryam Rajavi, in civilian clothes, and the placing of the MEK's long-time US spokesman, Alireza Jafarzadeh, in the Fox News network as an independent analyst on Iran .

But even this was not enough to shift perceptions, and congressional support has been falling off as representatives are made aware of the manipulations which led them to sign up to documents purporting to condemn the Iranian regime, but having in their small print support for the MEK .

The creation of the IPC has arguably been the best publicity asset for the MEK in its efforts to reinvent itself. But no matter how the MEK markets itself, it cannot escape its past. The specter of young, brainwashed devotees burning themselves to protest the arrest of Maryam Rajavi in Paris in June 2003 continues to haunt Europe .

Moreover, there is now a determined and organized effort by former members to bring the organization's leaders to account. On November 24, a group of anti-war activists and former MEK members held a press conference in Washington DC, entitled "Saddam's links with international terrorism". The

conference showed videos secretly filmed by Saddam's own security services which evidenced the financial, logistical and intelligence relations between the former Iraqi regime and the MEK. Additionally, a documentary exposed the MEK's involvement in the suppression of the Kurdish uprising in 1991, immediately after the first Gulf War .

The day before this press conference, the MEK issued a statement alleging that former MEK members had been sent by Iran's Intelligence Ministry to prevent the organization being removed from the US terror list. The following day, the IPC issued a statement repeating these unsubstantiated accusations. Unfortunately for the IPC, United Press International picked up its statement and printed it. It was clear that the IPC had simply rehashed the MEK's statement and had not checked its information independently. Consequently, Tanter and other IPC members are now being sued by those they allegedly libeled .

IPC members might want to reconsider their position and decide whether supporting an organization that is nearly universally despised by Iranians of all political persuasions is worth the price of personal infamy .

Massoud Khodabandeh is a former member of the Mujahideen-e Khalq, and mainly served in the organization's intelligence/security department. Khodabandeh left the Mujahideen in 1996 and currently lives in the north of England, where he works as a security consultant. He has been active in Iranian opposition politics for over 25 years. He works closely with the Center de Recherche sur la Terrorisme in Paris as an expert on Iran.