

ParsBrief

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Dissident Iranians Live In Limbo In Iraq

Quil Lawrence, National Public Radio, November 02, 2009

An old Middle East aphorism says "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." With the United States and Iran at odds, it should mean warm relations between the United States and the opponents of Tehran.

But a group of 3,400 Iranian dissidents, currently living north of Baghdad, has posed a dilemma for the U.S. government.

They were given U.S. military protection in 2003 after the American-led invasion of Iraq, but now the Iraqi government wants them out. The trouble is that they don't want to leave.

The Mujahedeen-e Khalq organization, known as MEK, was part of the alliance that overthrew the Shah of Iran in 1979. But it quickly ran afoul of the Islamic revolution. The organization moved to Iraq in the 1980s. Since then, the dissidents have lived as refugees at Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad.

Refuge in Iraq came at a price, though. Saddam Hussein put them to work against their own country during the Iran-Iraq war. And he had other jobs for them, as well.

Ali al-Zuhairi, an Iraqi tribal sheik in the town of Khalis, near Camp Ashraf, recalls bitterly how the MEK helped Saddam put down the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings in 1991. Zuhairi claims the MEK killed rebel Iraqis and left their bodies in the street. He calls them "terrorists."

Officially, the U.S. government agrees, and designates the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization. But on the ground in Iraq, the U.S. treats the group differently, says Mohammad al-Shemari, another resident of Khalis.

Dr. Paul Sheldon Foote on the Mujahedin-e-Khalq: Mark Dankof's America on RBN Radio

Republican Broadcasting Network, October 18, 2009

... Much has been said about MKO/MEK/PMOI as a terrorist organization that once conducted attacks against American citizens and is suspected of collaborating with pentagon and the Israeli intelligence in espionage activities against Iran. In a two hour radio program, Dr. Paul Sheldon Foote, covers the history and ideology of the organization on Mark Dankof's America on the Republic Broadcasting Network. The interview is accessible at: <http://www.nejatngo.org/en/postu.aspx?id=2783>

Mark Dankof's own article on the MeK may be accessed at <http://mark1marti2.wordpress.com/2009/07/31/the-mujahedin-e-khalq-the-peril-of-paradox-in-american-middle-east-policy>. It is entitled, "The Mujahedin-e-Khalq: The Peril of Paradox in American Middle East Policy."

European countries urged to host PMOI

Aswat al-Iraq - November 4, 2009

BAGHDAD- The Iraqi cabinet's secretary general on Wednesday revealed attempts by the Iraqi government to convince European countries to host the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), which is currently based in Iraq.

"Iran has called on Iraq to hand over the PMOI's members, but the (Iraqi) government does not want to force them to go to a country against their wishes, just as it does not want them to stay in Iraq," Ali al-Allaq said in an exclusive statement to Aswat al-Iraq news agency.

"There is no justification for the organization's members to remain in Iraq," Allaq added.

The official explained that it is not possible for the Iraqi government to look after the PMOI's members, who are taking refuge in the country, at a time it declares security and reconstruction as its top priorities.

The PMOI, also known by the abbreviations MKO and MEK, is a militant socialist organization that advocates the overthrow of Iran's current government. Founded in 1965, the PMOI was originally devoted to armed struggle against the Shah of Iran, capitalism and Western imperialism.

The group officially renounced violence in 2001 and today it is the main organization in the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an “umbrella coalition” parliament-in-exile that claims to be dedicated to a democratic, secular and coalition government in Iran.

MKO leaders prevent the repatriation of MKO members

Fars News Agency – October 17, 2009

Senior deputy of Iraqi Interior Ministry: Many individuals imprisoned at Camp Ashraf are willing to return to Iran including 70 of them who have announced their willingness to return but the leaders of this group prevent them.

Hadi Adnan Alasadi in an interview with governmental newspaper Al-Sabah expressed that: MEK’s presence in Iraq is illegal because of its terrorist nature organization and its violent history.

Declaring that the nature of groups such as MEK and the Kurdistan Workers Party in Turkey is the same, he added: “According to security Convention between Iraq and Washington the responsibility of Camp ashraf is under Iraqi government’s authority and the Camp’s name has been changed to “New Iraq”.

"As long as the organization maintains its terrorist nature in Iraq it has no right to claim asylum” he said,

“The presence of this organization in Iraq is illegal and violates international law.”

Mojahedin Khalq contact arrested in Kualalampur for bombing Iraqi parliament

New Straits times, Kualalampur, October 16, 2009

Mohammed al-Daini has been an outspoken advocate for the use of Mojahedin Khalq terrorists in Iraq (Iran-Interlink)

KUALA LUMPUR: The Immigration Department has confirmed that a wanted Iraqi former MP was detained at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) here last Saturday October 10th, evening.

(Mohammed al-Daini)

Director-general Datuk Abdul Rahman Othman said Mohammed al-Daini was arrested for using a fake passport.

“The immigration officer at the departure checkpoint stopped him after checks revealed that the passport he had belonged to someone else,” Abdul Rahman said when contacted yesterday.

However, it is learnt he entered Malaysia on Oct 8 with a British passport.

Mohammed is now under detention at the Immigration depot in Subang, awaiting deportation.

AN AFP report said Mohammed had gone into hiding for eight months after being accused of ordering a 2007 bomb attack in the Iraqi parliament’s canteen.

Mohammed had fled to Syria, before he left for Egypt and then Malaysia, according to Modhi Awad, brother of Mohammed Awad, an MP killed in the April 2007 bombing.

The bomb attack killed eight people, including Awad.

On February 25, Iraqi authorities prevented Mohammed from flying to Jordan but he was not arrested as he still had parliamentary immunity. Later that same day, parliament voted to lift his immunity, by which time the MP had fled.

Just days earlier, reporters were shown confessions, which was aired on television, by a nephew and a security guard of the accused MP who said they had carried out several attacks for Mohammed including the parliament bombing.

By Alang Bendahara

MKO members to be relocated from Iraq

Rajavi lobby silenced in UK Parliament yet again

House of Parliament, London, October 13, 2009

David Drew (Stroud, Labour)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the detention of 36 Camp Ashraf residents without charge or trial by Iraqi forces; and if he will make a statement.

Ivan Lewis (Minister of State (Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), Foreign & Commonwealth Office; Bury South, Labour)

The Iraqi Government have given assurances that no Camp Ashraf residents would be forcibly transferred to a country where they have reason to fear persecution, or where substantial grounds exist to believe they would be tortured.

All 36 arrested on 28 July 2009 were released on 7 October 2009 and have returned to Camp Ashraf. The Iraqi authorities have said they intend to resettle all 36 to other countries once suitable arrangements are in place. They had been detained under a combination of charges related to the violence at the camp on 28 July 2009 and immigration violations.

Our ambassador in Baghdad met the Iraqi Human Rights Minister on 6 October 2009 to discuss the detention of the 36. He was briefed on the efforts underway to make arrangements for their release.

During their detention our embassy in Baghdad was in regular contact with the Iraqi authorities, the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The UN confirmed that they have been held in acceptable local conditions. Food and water was available throughout, but the 36 men chose to follow a hunger strike in protest at their detention. Medical care was provided during their detention. The 36 had regular access to the ICRC.

Study faults US handling of MKO terrorists in Iraq

PressTV- October 14, 2009

A recent report by the RAND Corporation, a prominent think tank that does research for the US Government, illustrate that Washington committed a judgmental error when dealing with the terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) in Iraq.

During the 2003 Operation Iraqi freedom, an ongoing military campaign that resulted in the invasion of Iraq by the coalition forces, the MKO was designated as an enemy force.

The "Rajavi cult", as the MKO became to be known, had provided security services to Saddam Hussein from its camps in Iraq and had been listed as a foreign terrorist organization by the US Secretary of State.

It had also targeted Americans in Iran throughout the 1970s. They assassinated a number of American citizens, namely William C. Cottrell, Colonel Lewis L. Hawkins, Donald G. Smith, and Colonel Jack Turner inside Iran.

After a cease-fire was signed, the then US Secretary of Defense designated this group's members as civilian "protected persons" rather than combatant prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions

A RAND study, which examined the evolution of this controversial decision, says the designation has left the United States open to charges of hypocrisy in the war on terrorism.

The MKO was founded in Iran in the 1960s, but its top leadership and members fled the country some twenty years later, after carrying out numerous acts of terror inside the country.

The group masterminded a series of assassinations and bombings inside Iran, including the 1981 bombing of the offices of the Islamic Republic Party, in which more than 72 senior Iranian officials were killed, including the Judiciary Chief, Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti.

The Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had invited the MKO into Iraq to fight on his behalf during the eight-year Iraq-Iran War. Once it settled in Iraq and fought against Iranian forces in alliance with Saddam, the group, already hated within Iran for its indiscriminate terror campaign, incurred further ire of the Iranian people.

MKO members were housed in 'Camp Ashraf,' in a city approximately 40 miles north of Baghdad, thereby establishing a base for planning operations against the Tehran government during the eight-year war as well as conducting operations against Iraqi Kurds and Shias during the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein.

From the early weeks of Iraq's invasion in 2003 until January 2009, the coalition forces detained and provided security for members of the group, described in the RAND report as "an exiled Iranian dissident cult group living in Iraq".

"Despite their belief that the MKO did not pose a security threat, coalition forces detained the group and provided protection to prevent the Iraqi government from expelling MKO members to Iran, even though Iran had granted the MKO rank and file amnesty from prosecution," RAND says.

"The coalition's decision to provide security for an FTO (Foreign Terrorist Organization) was very controversial because it placed the United States in the position of protecting a group that it had labeled a terrorist organization," it adds.

In April 2003, US forces in Iraq negotiated a ceasefire between its troops and the MKO, based on claims that later turned out to be false.

"Because they had no information about the characteristics of the group, the Special Forces officers who received the request were persuaded by MKO leaders (who spoke fluent English) that, prior to the invasion, the group had offered to fight on the coalition's behalf and that many of its members had been educated in the United States."

In May 2003, the Washington establishment agreed to direct coalition forces to secure MKO's surrender and to disarm the group.

The coalition officers who negotiated with the MKO leadership were dissuaded from carrying out this instruction. Rather than insisting upon the MKO's surrender, they

accepted a cease-fire agreement under which the MKO would be disarmed and its 3,800 members (at the time) would be consolidated and detained through assigned residence (rather than internment) at Camp Ashraf.

Coalition forces, however, took no action to determine the legal status of the MKO for more than a year. The report says this was due to the fact that the US Department of Defense (DoD) was not sure 'what law should be enforced for the MKO.'

"The United States had adopted the contentious policy of not applying the Geneva Conventions to foreign terrorists fighting in Iraq, though it did apply them to enemy forces while invading Iraq, and war planners had named the MKO an enemy force."

To make matters worse, the group, who had a long history of trickery, had asserted that it had not engaged coalition forces in combat. Officers responsible for detaining the MKO accepted this claim, even though at least one special-forces-casualty had resulted from combat with the group.

"If coalition forces, and particularly those involved in any type of negotiations with the MKO, had been appraised of the group's long history of deception, they would have been far less likely to have made the kinds of concessions that proved so troublesome later on."

In June 2004, the US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld tried to determine the legal status of the MKO, by designating its members as civilian "protected persons" under the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The designation, which presumes that the 'Rajavi cult' had not engaged coalition forces in battle, went against recommendations by the Department of State, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"It has proven to be extremely controversial because it appeared that the United States selectively chose to apply the Geneva Conventions to a designated terrorist organization and, further, to grant it a special status," RAND reported.

When, in late 2003, the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Governing Council passed a resolution calling for the expulsion of the group from Iraq, the United States refused to return MKO members to Iran.

The White House, labeling their return as "a 'gift' to the Islamic Republic of Iran," announced its intention to seek the MKO's relocation elsewhere.

According to the Geneva Convention, when detainees are released from assigned residence or internment, they may either be reestablished in their country of residence prior to detention, resettled, or "accommodated" in third or neutral countries or repatriated to the country of their nationality.

Iraq had made it clear that the terrorists had no place within its boundaries. Iran was not an option either. Though Tehran had offered amnesty to the MKO's rank and file, Washington bluntly refused to send them back.

"Despite the broad-based expectation that the IRI would persecute all former MKO members who returned to the country, that has not proven to be the case for the approximately 250 individuals who have already been repatriated through a process managed by the ICRC," RAND adds.

The only solution was to send them to any country that would accept them. No western country is willing to offer asylum to the individuals -- even though 1015 MKO members have a passport or residence permit of a third country.

"The MKO was a minor issue in the overall conflict in Iraq, but it was an important one because the issues that emerged in the course of detaining the MKO were, in many ways, a microcosm of the larger challenges posed by detainee operations in general."

"To date, there is no evidence that any MKO members who were repatriated to Iran through the ICRC have been persecuted or tortured," The report says.

"JIATF (Joint Interagency Task Force) personnel and former MKO members believe that many members of the MKO rank and file would volunteer for repatriation if they were freed of the MKO leadership's authoritarian, cultic practices,"

The group practices public self-deprecation sessions, mandatory divorce, celibacy, enforced separation from family and friends, and gender segregation.

One of the MKO's cultic characteristics is a focus on suicide.

"Although it had not used suicide as a tactical weapon in terrorist attacks since 1981, the MKO has frequently used the threat of suicide as a negotiating tactic or to frustrate investigations."

"This proved particularly effective after 10 members immolated themselves in Paris as a protest action following the arrest of Maryam Rajavi, the MKO's co-leader, in 2003."

Although MKO leaders and supporters vigorously deny that the group is a cult, the report's findings suggest that these denials are not credible.

As part of the "ideological revolution," the Rajavis mandated divorce and celibacy.

Compulsory divorce required couples to place their wedding rings in a bowl and renounce their affections for one another.

Masoud Rajavi would separate couples claiming that "such practices would liberate the members" from competing loyalties. Their children were also sent to European countries, former MKO member, Mohammad-Hossein Sobhani, said in August.

Because "the organization forbids matrimony, for the past 25 years no child has been born to a man and a woman inside the organization," he adds.

Families on hunger strike to protest American support for terrorist group which holds their loved ones hostage

American Army established a check point to prevent families release their loved ones from a terrorist cult

Iran Interlink, Al Khalis, Iraq, November 04, 2009

Eight families (named below) travelled to Iraq from Iran this week to find and meet with their relatives who are trapped in a terrorist cult. Once again American soldiers, apparently acting as lackeys for the MKO leaders in Camp Ashraf, have blocked all attempts of these families to meet their loved ones.

Efforts by the Iraqi authorities, U.N. representatives, the ICRC and others to facilitate the humanitarian move have been blocked by the Americans.

Although Iraqi police have established a base inside Camp Ashraf in an effort to enforce Iraqi law among the residents there, the American soldiers have established a further buffer checkpoint which effectively prevents them from carrying out this duty.

Families who arrived at the camp on Saturday 31 October were able to pass through the Iraqi checkpoints to the camp, but were blocked at the final checkpoint which is manned by U.S. military personnel.

The families are now staying at the first check point and an Iraqi officer is acting as liaison between them and the camp. The US army is apparently resisting the requests of the families and insists that the Iraqis should ask permission from the MKO leaders to let families see their loved ones. The MKO is not only an illegal foreign terrorist group in Iraq but has since 1997 been on the U.S. terrorism list.

The families are living in temporary container units. They say they are grateful to the Iraqi military for accommodating them at the first check point and providing security as well as attempting to organise meetings between the families and their loved ones. It is now four days that the families are living in the military check point with the obvious lack of facilities. From November 2 the families began a hunger strike. They demand that the Iraqi government as the only responsible body in Iraq must take charge and allow the freedom of their children.

The Iraqi government's attempts to dismantle the terrorist camp and release the victims has been facing strong resistance from the Israeli lobby and neocons who support the return of Saddamists to Iraq. The Mojahedin Khalq Organisation has acted as their proxy in Iraq with Camp Ashraf being used as the base for gathering and coordinating the Saddamists after the American Invasion of Iraq in 2003. By order of the Pentagon, the camp was protected and held together by the U.S. until their retreat in 2008. Americans left a unit at the camp to make sure the terrorist HQ is not dismantled by the new Iraqi government.

The MKO leaders, with the backing of the U.S. army, refuse to accept families meeting their children. They say the families are "agents of the Iranian secret services" and have refused even to hand over the letters the families have written to their children.

Names of the families currently visiting Camp Ashraf:

1- Mr. Jahanshir Sassani - looking for his son Mohammad Ali Sassani . Mohammad Ali was a P.O.W. during the time of Saddam's war with Iran. He was handed over to the MKO during the war in defiance of international law. He has been in Iraq for 21 years. This is Mr. Sassani's fourth visit to Iraq to try to meet with his son.

2- Mr. Reza Noroozi - looking for his son Abdolmajid Nooozi. Abdolmajid was a P.O.W. during the time of Saddam's war with Iran. He was handed over to the MKO during the war in defiance of international law. He has been in Iraq for 22 years.

3- Mr. Akbar Moradi Rizi - looking for his brother Hossein Moradi Rizi. Hossien has been in cult isolation for the past 30 years.

4- Mrs. Nasreen Lotfizadeh - looking for her daughter Soosan Banihashemi. Soosan has been in cult isolation for the past 21 years.

5- Mrs. Parvin Saberi - looking for her brother Aghil Saberi. Aghil has been in cult isolation for the past 16 years.

6- Mrs. Giti Zartoshtnia - looking for her son Roozbeh Attaee (aka: Ali Mahdavi). Roozbeh has been in cult isolation for the past 10 years.

7- Mrs. Masoumeh Mahboob - looking for her husband Arzil Dialeh and sons Mohsen and Peyman Dialeh. They have been in cult isolation for the past 7 years.

8- (...)