

ParsBrief

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Britain says MKO in Camp Ashraf subject to Iraqi law - protected persons status not applicable

House of Lords, London, November 23, 2009

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Written answers and statements, 25 November 2009

Andrew Dismore (Hendon, Labour)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's assessment is of the status in international law of the residents of Camp Ashraf, Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

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

Camp Ashraf is in a sovereign and democratic Iraq and the camp residents subject to its laws. The UK is of the view that the residents of Camp Ashraf, as with all people in Iraq, enjoy rights and protections under the Iraqi constitution and applicable international obligations to which Iraq is a signatory. We do not consider that they have 'protected persons' status.

We do not feel a ministerial statement is necessary at this time.

Nuri al-Maliki: Iraq to move Mojahedin Khalq to remote south

Reuters - December 09, 2009

Iraq plans to uproot an Iranian exile group that has become a headache for the Baghdad government and move the activists to a remote southern area until it can expel them, the prime minister said this week.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki vowed to oust members of the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI), an Iranian opposition movement that the United States considers a terrorist organisation, from a camp northeast of Baghdad where they have been living for two decades.

Their clamor for greater rights within Iraq and aggressive international outreach has been an irritant for a government seeking to nurture its fragile relationship with Tehran.

Maliki did not say when officials would try to move the exiles from Camp Ashraf to the southern province of Muthanna.

"Moving them to Nuqrat al-Salman is a step towards expelling them (from Iraq)," Maliki wrote in a question-and-answer session posted on a state website. He was referring to a remote area that is home to a well-known prison. The entry was dated Dec. 7.

Iraqi forces clashed with residents in late July when they forcibly took control of the camp, which had been protected by U.S. troops since Saddam Hussein's ouster in 2003.

The Iraqi government, which sees the camp's 3,500 residents as enemies who enjoyed Saddam's protection for years, is keen to force the PMOI out of Iraq but wants to avoid being seen as trampling the exiles' rights or endangering their lives.

The PMOI began as an Islamist leftist group opposed to Iran's late Shah, but fell out with Shi'ite clerics who took power after the 1979 revolution and was crushed.

Mujahideen guerrillas carried out attacks against Iranian targets and collaborated with Baghdad in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Iran executed a large number of PMOI prisoners at the end of the war.

Maliki suggested the exiles would be less troublesome in largely Shi'ite Muthanna than they were in Diyala, an ethnically and religiously mixed province that remains volatile.

"Their presence at Ashraf is a major risk because of the historical ties with some groups and political powers in that area, especially the remains of the former regime and al-Qaeda," the prime minister said.

He dismissed objections to the move from local officials in Muthanna. "The province is a part of Iraq and it must assume its responsibility," Maliki said. (Reporting by Waleed Ibrahim and Missy Ryan, editing by Paul Taylor)

France respects Iraqi sovereignty, supports dismantlement of Camp Ashraf

Senate, France, December 2009

Written Question No. 10,055 of Mr. Jean-Pierre Chevènement (Territoire de Belfort - RDSE)

published in the OJ Senate 10/09/2009 - page 2110

Mr. Jean-Pierre Chevènement brings to the attention of the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs the very serious situation for Iranian refugees in Camp Ashraf in Iraq.

This camp was created in 1986 in Diyala province, north of Baghdad, to house thousands of members of the People's Mojahedin of Iran, an opposition group to the Iranian regime.

After the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein, who protected them and used them as his instruments, they were disarmed by U.S. forces and received the status of "protected persons" under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

On June 17, 2008, the Iraqi Council of Ministers adopted a directive stipulating that members of this organization would be expelled from Iraq. On 1 January 2009, the United States has ceded control of the camp to Iraqi authorities. Last July, the Iraqi army entered the camp by force causing many casualties (11 dead and 450 injured according to some NGOs).

He asked what action the French Government intends to take with the Iraqi Government that shed will light on these events and that steps be taken so that the Fourth Geneva Convention is respected and what steps he has taken, including the United Nations (UN) so that these refugees are not deported to the Islamic Republic of Iran given the power relationship that exists between this country and Iraq.

Response from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

published in the OJ Senate 12/11/2009 - page 2632

As you know, France has consistently expressed its support for the recovery by the Iraqi authorities of their full sovereignty as soon as possible. One of the milestones of this process, we have welcomed, was the agreement to withdraw American forces, adopted by the Iraqi parliament in November 2008, which stipulates that Iraqi forces gradually take

over from U.S. forces and Iraqi authorities will be able to extend their authority throughout their territory. The restoration of the sovereignty of Iraq of course includes Camp Ashraf, the vast area located 80 km from Baghdad and occupied by the People's Mojahedin Organisation (PMOI), with special status. It had been granted to them by Saddam Hussein in 1986. The Iraqi authorities did not wish indeed to continue sheltering on its territory and close to Iran, a base belonging to an organization that has participated in military action against Iraq and the crimes committed by the former regime Saddam Hussein against his people. It is in this context that in January 2009, the Iraqi authorities informed the heads of diplomatic missions in Baghdad and Camp Ashraf that it could not benefit from any privilege of extraterritoriality and that it was intended to be closed through a process overseen by international law. In this context also, and as a result of failed negotiations with the camp residents, the Iraqi authorities intervened in July 2009 within the enclave to establish a police station. This unfortunately took a violent turn: eleven victims and many wounded on both sides are to be deplored. France is naturally agreed that the implementation of the closure of Camp Ashraf is done with full respect for principles of international law. This is the message that we passed several times in the national and European framework to the Iraqi authorities, including the Iraqi Minister of Human Rights who is responsible for this issue. This requirement of respect for human rights must also apply to officers of the PMOI which, by all accounts, continues to use practices to intimidate the camp residents. Thus, they would not be free to decide their fate. As you know, France had objected that the PMOI, on the list of European terrorist organizations since 2002, was withdrawn in 2008. The PMOI is still considered a terrorist organization in several countries, including Canada, the United States and Iraq. France welcomes the efforts of the mission of United Nations Assistance in Iraq (UNAMI) through its Office of Human Rights, the High Commission of United Nations Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross so that a solution can be found on this difficult issue, which is respectful of Iraqi sovereignty and law.

U.S. recognizes Iraq sovereignty over entire territory including Camp Ashraf

<http://www.state.gov/>

"QUESTION: On Iraq, Camp Ashraf, the Iranian opposition, says that the Iraqis are going to move them next Tuesday, I think. Are you going to try and use your influence with the

Iraqis not to move them? The opposition says there'll be bloodshed if they do attempt to do that.

MR. KELLY: Well, I think what we would do, first and foremost, is to urge the Iraqi authorities to conduct any such relocation with the residents of Camp Ashraf, that it be done in a lawful and humane way. They've made clear to us, to the Government of the U.S., that they do plan to do this. And this is entirely an Iraqi planned initiative. And as I said before, we'd expect this be carried out in a humane way.

We have, all along, recognized Iraqi sovereignty over the entire territory of Iraq, including the area where Camp Ashraf is located. And as I think we've said before, the Government of Iraq has assured us that they would not deport any of these citizens to any country where they would -- if you have a well-rounded fear of being treated inhumanely.

So we -- I mean, we're engaging the Government of Iraq. Diplomatically, we respect Iraqi sovereignty. But of course, we're making it clear that we would expect these - the residents of Camp Ashraf to be treated well and with respect. " (Source; December 11, 2009.)

Iraq orders Iranian exiles to vacate camp

Washington Post Foreign Service - December 16, 2009

STANDOFF MAY END IN VIOLENCE Group's presence is sore point in ties with Tehran Iraqi policemen stood ready at Camp Ashraf in case violence erupted. The government says it intends to take the exiles, members of the Mujaheddin-e Khalq, to camps in the south. (Hadi Mizban/associated Press)

Iranian dissidents protest the Iraqi government's orders that they vacate Camp Ashraf, even as Iraqi policemen, at right, stood ready in case violence erupted. The government says it intends to take the exiles, members of the Mujaheddin-e Khalq, to camps in the south. (Ernesto Londoño/the Washington Post)

CAMP ASHRAF, IRAQ -- With loudspeakers mounted on pickup trucks and riot police offering backup, Iraqi troops on Tuesday ordered a group of Iranian dissidents here to vacate their sanctuary, which has become an irritant in Iraq's relationship with Iran.

"Today is the day we start moving things out," Brig. Gen. Basel Hamad told reporters during a rare trip to the camp, 40 miles north of Baghdad. "We will not allow any foreigners to establish their own laws on Iraqi soil."

Members of the Mujaheddin-e Khalq, or MEK, who reside in the 10-square-mile compound, have warned that they will not be taken out alive. Residents and Western officials fear the increasingly tense stalemate at Camp Ashraf could end in bloodshed.

The standoff has raised questions about the extent to which the United States, which once protected the MEK, is indebted to armed groups with which it brokered deals during the course of the war. The deadlock also has shed light on the degree to which an increasingly sovereign Iraq is haunted by its past, swayed by erstwhile nemesis Iran and willing to use force.

The Iraqi government invited reporters to the camp Tuesday. The day began ominously, with three car bombs detonating at the site where the journalists later gathered. At least four people were killed in the blasts, which occurred near the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad.

At midday, Iraqi policemen donned riot gear at a staging area and spoke about what might happen at Camp Ashraf in the days ahead.

"Our instructions are that we are not to beat anyone," said Aquil Ahmed, the police commissioner, adding that troops were armed only with rubber batons and electric shock wands. "If the demonstrations reach another stage, we will need to use weapons."

Packing dozens of Iraqi and Western journalists into the backs of pickup trucks, Iraqi troops drove down the tree-lined streets of the camp dropping leaflets and blaring messages in Farsi on loudspeakers. They asked MEK members to defect and invited them to hop into four small white-and-blue buses. None obliged.

A point of contention

The MEK camp includes dozens of people with dual nationalities or with residency permits for the United States, Canada and European countries.

Their continued presence in Iraq has been a sore spot in Baghdad's relations with Tehran, which became close after the March 2003 U.S. invasion. The Shiite-led government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki says the group must be disbanded and expelled, but no country seems willing to give the MEK sanctuary.

The group began as a student opposition movement in Tehran in the 1960s that sought to overthrow Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the shah. It resorted to violence during the 1970s, with members accused of bombing government facilities and killing U.S. citizens in Iran.

The MEK moved its headquarters to Iraq in the mid-1980s and fought alongside Saddam Hussein's forces during the second half of the war between the neighboring countries. U.S. and European officials say the group helped the Iraqi government crush uprisings by Shiites and Kurds.

Shortly after the U.S.-led invasion, the American military brokered the group's disarmament and offered it protection. The MEK says it gave U.S. officials valuable information about Iran's nuclear program.

The roughly 3,200 residents of the camp have since lived in a Marxist-like commune, and they say they aspire to overthrow the Iranian regime.

A group with few friends

In recent months, as the Iraqi government has become increasingly assertive, the residents' fate has become precarious. In July, Iraqi troops barged into the camp to set up a police station. Group members resisted, and Iraqi officers opened fire and ran over residents with American-donated armored Humvees, killing 11 people and wounding scores.

While it seeks a permanent home for the Iranians, the Iraqi government says it intends to take them to other camps in southern Iraq. But officials have not disclosed details.

As others debate the MEK's fate, the group appears more isolated than ever. It recently broke off communications with the International Committee of the Red Cross. The European Commission has begun distributing a white paper to lawmakers, many of whom support the MEK, in an effort to taper their support for the group.

"We're trying to educate them," said a senior Western diplomat involved in the efforts, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of diplomatic rules. "We collectively tend to forget what bad guys the MEK are."

American officials say they can do little under the terms of a bilateral agreement other than urge the Iraqis to act humanely.

"We not only have no obligation to protect them, we cannot intervene," said Philip Frayne, a spokesman for the U.S. Embassy.

MEK members say the United States owes them more.

"I am afraid of these soldiers," said Maryam Zoljalali, 28, who moved to the camp eight years ago from Sweden. "I don't know what they will do in the future."

After standing by uncomfortably for a few minutes as camp residents waved placards and photos around journalists, Iraqi troops ordered the reporters back to their vehicles.

Inside one bus, an Iraqi soldier scoffed as he looked out the window.

"They had satellite dishes before anyone in Iraq," he said, a reference to the preferential treatment accorded to the MEK under Hussein. "We used to come here as laborers when they were the commanders."

Special correspondent Aziz Alwan contributed to this report.

By Ernesto Londoño

**Iranian opposition leader in Parliament
But her organization is on the U.S. terrorist list.**

TV2 Nyhetene - December 07,2009

In front of a small fan was the Iranian opposition leader Maryam Rajavi welcomed when she arrived in Parliament on Thursday. Rajavi is in Oslo for talks on the situation in Iran - both on the human rights front, and when it comes to the country's nuclear program. She would particularly ask for Norwegian support to a camp for exile iranians in Iraq.

"I came here to ask the Norwegian government for help prevent a humanitarian catastrophe of historical dimensions in the Camp Ashraf, Iraq, "said Rajavi.

Bipartisan support

Rajavi was very well received in the Parliament. A smiling Marit Nybakk (Labor) gave the Iranian exile leader a hug, and in foreign and defense committee, she met representatives from the Labor Party, Progress Party and the Christian Democrats.

Morten Høglund of Progress Party believed there had been a good and constructive meeting.

"We talked about the situation in Ashraf, but also about the situation in Iran in general. I think everyone who works with foreign affairs are concerned about the situation in Iran," said Høglund after the meeting.

In the U.S. terror list

But Rajavi is a controversial figure: The group she leads, the People's Mujahedin, should have been behind a series of terrorist acts against the Iranian and Western targets over the years. According to the United States, she leads a terrorist organization.

- What thoughts do you think is behind the designation of this organization as terrorist by the US?

- I have discussed with the Americans many times, and I think they are absolutely wrong. I am very pleased that the EU no longer has this attitude. I see this organization as an ally in the fight for a free and democratic Iran, "said Morten Høglund.

Terror

But religion researcher at the University of Oslo, Kari Vogt, looks completely different on the group leader Rajavi.

Religious Researcher Kari Vogt says there is no doubt that the People's Mujahedin has conducted terrorist acts.

- Have they been behind the terrorist acts?

- Of course, they have,. They are a military movement based in Iraq and who collaborated with Saddam Hussein. For this reason they are seen as traitors in Iran, "said Vogt.

Limited support

The organization was formed in the 1960s, and helped to overthrow the Shah-board during the revolution in 1979. But soon they also ended up in conflict with Ayatollah Khomeini and his regime.

In the 80s, they fought on Saddam's side in the war between Iran and Iraq. Today, the People's Mujahedin is the largest group in the Iranian opposition umbrella organization National Council of Resistance of Iran of which Rajavi is also the leader.

Although Rajavi said that she leads a credible alternative to the regime in Tehran, and that the Islamic Republic have forced the U.S. to lead the People's Mujahedin to the terrorist list.

"We were labeled as terrorists by Mullah's office. This is a benefit Europe and the United States have given to mullahs. This party means the end of Khamenei and Ahmadinejads regime ..."said Rajavi.

Authoritarianism motion

When the U.S. is trying to appease the Iranian regime, Vogt was asked, who believes that the statement falls on its own absurdity.

" This is definitely not a democratic alternative to the present regime. On the contrary, they are known for great an authoritarian movement with an emphasis placed on personality cult, "says Vogt.

Removed from EU terror list

People's Mujahedin was earlier this year removed from EU terror list after a long struggle in the legal system. In 2008, it provoked strong reactions among British politicians, including Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, then a judicial chair ordered the United Kingdom to remove the organization from its terrorist list.

Religious historian Kari Vogt believes nevertheless Norwegian politicians are betting on the wrong horse when they meet Rajavi.

"They have very limited support inside Iran. They have indeed supported in part by the exile community in Europe and the United States, but not inside the country. They do not represent the real opposition now. I think it is problematic, and in my opinion, politically compromised to meet this movement," says Vogt.