

# ParsBrief

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### Jalal Talibani: Committee formed to shut MKO Ashraf camp

Press TV, Tehran, June 25, 2011

Iraq's President Jalal Talabani says a committee has been formed to shut down a camp belonging to the anti-Iran terrorist Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO).

"The government of Iraq will do all it can to prevent terrorism. We should attempt to close down MKO terrorists' Ashraf Camp and we shall remove all those people. Those who are willing will go back to Iran. Others will go wherever they want to," Talabani said in a speech during an anti-terrorism conference in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on Saturday.

"A committee has been formed to shut down Camp Ashraf in order to help establish security for our neighbors," he went on to say.

Talabani pointed out that the committee was formed by Iran, Iraq and the International Red Cross, reiterating that the camp would be closed by the end of 2011.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari also said during a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Salehi earlier that the camp would be shut down and its members would leave Iraq by the end of 2011.

The MKO is listed as a terrorist organization by much of the international community and is responsible for numerous acts of terror and violence against Iranian civilians and government officials.

The group fled to Iraq in 1986, where it enjoyed the support of Iraq's executed dictator Saddam Hussein and set up Camp Ashraf near the Iranian border.

The organization is also known to have cooperated with Saddam in suppressing the 1991 uprisings in southern Iraq and the massacre of Iraqi Kurds.

Iran has repeatedly called on the Iraqi government to expel the group, but the US has been blocking the expulsion by pressuring the Iraqi government.

Iran is among the victims of terrorism as more than 17,000 Iranians, including senior officials, have lost their lives in various terror attacks since the victory of the Islamic Revolution some thirty years ago.

Out of the 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist attack, 12,000 of them have fallen victim to acts of terror carried out by the MKO.

Iran Snapshot: Are US Politicians Giving Support to "Terrorist" Mujahedin-e-Khalq? (Duss)

Scott Lucas, enduringamerica.com, May 14, 2011

*There is an ongoing, heated dispute over the status of the Iranian exile group Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MeK or MKO), linked to the political movement People's Mojahedin of Iran. Critics condemn the group, which has pursued the overthrow of the Islamic Republic for more than 30 years, for "terrorist" acts such as bombings and assassinations. Supporters say MeK is a legitimate resistance organisation and should be taken off official lists of terrorists groups in Europe and the US.*

Matt Duss enters the discussion:

Giuliani, Dean Paid To Advocate For Terrorist Group

An article in today's Wall Street Journal looks at the considerable support that the exiled Iranian Islamist-Marxist cult Mujahideen-e Khalq — which is designated by the U.S. State Department as a foreign terrorist organization — has been able to cultivate, both in European capitals and in DC, getting people like Rudy Giuliani and Howard Dean to speak at their events.

The article notes that these speakers "wouldn't disclose their speaking fees, but many of them charge between \$25,000 and \$40,000 per appearance." Dean also said that "he has made both paid and unpaid speeches for MeK."

As I noted back in December, such activities skirt very close to violating U.S. law in regard to "material support" for terrorism. Responding to this charge when it was raised by attorney David Cole, Giuliani and his colleagues quoted the relevant law: "Individuals who act entirely independently of the [FTO] to advance its goals or objectives shall not be considered to be working under the [FTO]'s direction and control."

"As a result," Giuliani et al concluded, "we felt quite secure, thank you, in relying on the protection Congress placed in the statute, backed up by the First Amendment."

But can Giuliani and others really be said to be "acting entirely independently" of the MEK if they're getting paid explicitly to advocate on their behalf?

That question aside, the MEK is clearly ramping up its lobbying effort here in DC. Yesterday, the Washington Post ran a full page ad calling on State Department ed-list the MEK. The ad claims that the MEK is “Iran’s principal opposition movement,” which would surely come as a surprise to Iran’s actual opposition movement.[..]

The Washington Post ad was paid for by the National Association of Iranian Scholars in Britain, which is listed as one of a number of MEK aliases by the Iran Interlink website, run by former MEK members.

Also yesterday, the Washington Times ran a pro-MEK ad of a different sort, in the form of a ridiculously misleading op-ed by Daniel Pipes. “The MeK issue reveals Iraqi subservience to Iran with special clarity,” wrote Pipes, suggesting that that the Iraqi army’s recent violent entry into Camp Ashraf north of Baghdad — where MEK members have lived since 1986, protected first by Saddam, then by the U.S. — was done on Iran’s orders.

While I appreciate the fact that neocons like Pipes have awakened to the fact of Iranian influence in Iraq (enabled, of course, by the U.S. intervention), the idea that Iraqis should need special Iranian encouragement against the MEK is amusing. The MEK fought alongside Hussein’s forces after the 1991 Gulf War to put down the Shia uprising in Iraq’s south and the Kurdish uprising in the north, driven by MEK leader Maryam Rajavi’s infamous command to “Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.” Given the significant Shia and Kurdish presence in the new Iraqi government, it should come as no surprise that that government is not positively disposed toward the MEK.

The question of what to do with the residents of Camp Ashraf — which includes a number of children — is a tough one, but it should be separated out from whether they should be taken off the terrorism list. Barbara Slavin had a very good piece in March, looking at the delusion of some high-profile MEK supporters that the U.S. could support them as a credible Iranian political opposition force. It’s clear that some would like to treat the MEK as an Iranian version of Ahmad Chalabi’s Iraqi National Congress. Responding to that comparison yesterday, Kombiz Lavasany wrote via Twitter, “In Chalabi’s defense, not sure Iraqis knew or cared about him. Everyone in Iran just hates the MEK.”

## Cables: U.S. saw leftist Iran opposition group Mujahadeen Khalq as a 'cult'

World Tribune, May02, 2011

WASHINGTON — The United States has assessed that a leading Iranian opposition organization that in the 1970s was aligned with leftist and Marxist causes was a cult that deals brutally with members who want to leave.

The State Department has concluded that the Mujahadeen Khalq, or MEK, was holding Iranian exiles against their will in Iraq's Camp Ashraf. The department, in cables sent to Washington over the last 20 years, asserted that Mujahadeen set a policy of killing suspected defectors from the movement supported by the former Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq.

Wikipedia said the group which played a major role with the leftist Tudeh Party in the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, was more "religious, radical, anti-American" than the earlier generation of Iranian leftists.

"Many of the defectors alleged psychological and psychical harm at the hands of the MEK, including solitary confinement in MEK jails in Ashraf," a State Department cable read.

The cables were released by the U.S. government under the Freedom of Information Act in May. U.S. lobbyists for Mujahadeen dismissed the cables as inaccurate and biased to fit the State Department's conception that MEK was a terrorist group.

"The question is why, when every single Camp Ashraf resident was taken outside, and interviewed by the U.S. military in American-controlled facilities in 2003 and 2004, and each were given the choice to leave, none of those individuals had done so?" Allan Gerson, an attorney for MEK in Washington, asked.

Over the last two years, MEK has been recruiting former senior U.S. officials to remove the group from the State Department's terror list. Many former officials, including those from the State Department, assert that Mujahadeen was deemed a terrorist group in 1994 as part of a U.S. reconciliation effort with Iran.

The State Department cables quoted defectors as describing MEK as a cult that punishes former members. The cables said the MEK leadership ordered the execution of all attempted defectors.

"They reaffirmed existing perceptions of the MEK as a cult-like organization that thrives on maintaining control of its members and those lured to Ashraf under false pretenses," one cable read.

The State Department traced MEK from the Iranian revolution in 1979. The cables said MEK supported the Islamic takeover of the U.S. embassy in Teheran in which diplomats were held hostage for more than a year.

Several years after the revolution, MEK was outlawed by the regime in Iran. The group fled to neighboring Iraq and was supported by the Saddam regime, which used MEK to attack civilian targets in Iran.

"They are hated among Iranians, since their hands are stained with the blood of their fellow countrymen," the State Department, quoting an exiled Iranian, said.

Lobbyists said the State Department cables would have little affect on the effort to legalize MEK in the United States. Members of Congress as well as potential presidential candidates, arguing that MEK has eschewed violence, have called for the removal of the group from the State Department terror list.

#### US State Department claims no popular support for MKO among Iranians

A U.S. State Department document released in May 2011 under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act says the MEK has no popular support inside Iran and "to the extent Iranians know about this group they are far more likely to oppose it than support it." It added, "Any U.S. support for MEK would extremely damage its reputation amongst Iranians and would increase anti-American sentiments in Iran." The State Department cables quoted defectors as describing MEK as a cult that punishes former members. The cables said the MEK leadership ordered the execution of all attempted defectors.

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IRANIAN POPULAR ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE MEK

Summary

Showing a unanimity rare among Iranians, anecdotal information gleaned from both ordinary Iranians living inside Iran and abroad and from Iran analysts strongly indicates that the 'Mujahedin-e Khalq' (MEK) opposition group has not significant popular support inside Iran. To the extent that Iranian respondents are familiar with the MEK they express severe dislike for this group, primarily due to its alliance with Saddam Hussein during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. All Iranians queried tended to disbelieve the MEK's expressed allegiance to the ideals of human rights and democracy, with even hardened Iranian oppositionists and persecuted religious minorities such as the Iranian Baha'i saying they would prefer the current Iranian government to an MEK-affiliated one. Many Iranian

respondents believe that any indication of USG support for the MEK would seriously harm USG popularity among ordinary Iranians, even among those Iranians who oppose the current Iranian government, would fuel anti-American sentiment, and would likely empower Iranian hardliners. END

### Banned Terror Group Seeks U.S. Rebirth

American Backers of Mojahedin Khalq (MKO, MEK, Rajavi cult) terror group : For as little as 25k we will take them off the list

Wall Street Journal, May 13, 2011

WASHINGTON—An Iranian exile group once allied with Saddam Hussein has enlisted former top U.S. officials—including heads of the CIA, FBI, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and politicians from both parties—to try to get it removed from the State Department's terrorist list.

The Mujahedin e-Khalq, or People's Holy Warriors, has deployed the heavyweights on speaking tours in Washington and European capitals, hoping to convey the image of a popular, democratic alternative to Tehran's ruling clerics.

Obama administration and European officials, however, fear the campaign could undermine Washington's policy of reaching out to opposition forces in Iran. They say that's because the U.S. would appear to be aligned with a group that is widely unpopular due to its military alliance with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein during the 1980s and '90s and a string of terrorist attacks the U.S. says it launched inside Iran.

Among the group's newfound cheerleaders are recently departed members of President Barack Obama's national security team, including Jim Jones, the former national-security advisor, Dennis Blair, the former director of national intelligence and James Woolsey, who headed the Central Intelligence Agency.

These officials, and others including former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and former heads of the military Joint Chiefs of Staff, have taken the podium to praise the group. The speakers wouldn't disclose their speaking fees, but many of them charge between \$25,000 and \$40,000 per appearance.

"We should take the MeK off the [terror] list and recognize them for what they are, which is the legitimate government of the Republic of Iran," former Democratic National Committee

Chairman Howard Dean said at a recent event in London. Mr. Dean said he has made both paid and unpaid speeches for MeK.

MeK's backers cite intelligence it has provided the West on Iran's nuclear program and aid to U.S. troops in Iraq as reasons to remove the listing. They also cite MeK's democratic platform.

Mohammed Mohaddessin, a senior member of MeK's political arm in Paris, said Iranian communities in the U.S. and Europe organized and funded the lobbying effort. He said that in 2001, "the MeK rejected all kinds of violence, so there is no excuse for keeping them on the list."

The MeK, led by Maryam Rajavi, was founded in 1965 to fight the Shah of Iran, and the U.S. says it killed several Americans in Tehran in the 1970s. The group briefly allied with, then turned violently against, the clerical regime that came to power in 1979. In the early 1980s, the MeK retreated to Paris. By 1986, it relocated to Iraq and fought alongside Saddam's forces in the eight-year war against Iran.

The State Department first listed MeK as a terrorist group in 1997. In its latest terror report, in 2009, it blames MeK for many attacks on Iranian embassies, military officers and politicians, though not since 2001 until 2001, when it was based in Iraq. The report says the MeK took part in the deadly suppression of Kurdish and Shiite revolts inside Iraq. Mr. Mohaddessin denies allegations that MeK was involved in internal Iraqi security operations. "Those are rumors spread by the Iranian regime," Mr. Mohaddessin said.

The group says its main motivation for the campaign is to help protect its ranks in Camp Ashraf, north of Bagdad, whose residents suffered a deadly Iraqi army crackdown last month. About 3,400 MeK members have lived there since allied forces disarmed them after invading Iraq in 2003. MeK officials say its designation lets Iraq treat it as terrorists.

Two senior State Department officials dismissed that argument, saying a delisting wouldn't help Ashraf's residents and that the U.S. hoped to move them to another Iraqi location as a prelude to relocating them to third countries.

Getting off the list, which can keep members from entering the U.S., would also allow MeK to raise funds from unaffiliated Iranian-Americans and better organize towards its goal of overthrowing Iran's government.[..]

Mr. Mohaddessin blames MeK's unpopularity on misinformation spread by the government. The last time the State Department had to consider MeK's status was during the waning days of the George W. Bush administration. In upholding the terrorist designation, then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice wrote in a 2009 internal cable released by anti-secrecy group Wikileaks: "The most powerful myth the MeK has been able to lodge in the



minds of most supporters is that they are the democratic alternative to the current regime in Tehran." She also referred to the MeK's "terrorism and cult-like repression of its members."

In response to an MeK lawsuit, a federal court ordered the State Department last year to review the listing again. U.S. officials say that should be done by mid-summer. A State Department spokeswoman said the federal-court ruling acknowledged that classified information provided "substantial support" for keeping the MeK on the terror list. Both the U.K. and the European Union have taken the MeK off their terror lists in recent years under court orders after legal action by the group.

The U.K. court found that since 2001 it was no longer "concerned in terrorism" and thus must be de-listed. The EU court ruled that the European Commission's 2008 decision to keep the terror listing violated the MeK's due process rights and failed to demonstrate why they should stay on the list. On Thursday, French investigators dropped an eight-year terrorism probe of 24 MeK members, including Mrs. Rajavi.

Since December, the MeK has hosted about a dozen events in Washington, London, Paris, Berlin and Brussels.

"We shouldn't just de-list the MeK; we should applaud them," Mr. Giuliani, the ex-mayor, said at a Washington event last month. "We should join with them, we're on the same side," he said to rousing applause from a few hundred MeK supporters from across the U.S. He declined to comment.

Other speakers at recent events include Hugh Shelton, Richard Myers, and Peter Pace, all former chairmen of the Joint Chiefs; Tom Ridge, the first head of Homeland Security; and Louis Freeh, former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In an interview, Mr. Woolsey, who said he waived his usual speaker's fee at a recent MeK event, said Tehran's condemnation of MeK was "like a backwards weathervane—wherever they're pointing, we should do the opposite"

Ex-CIA chief Mr. Jones, who said he received his standard speaking fee, said, "I'm not saying I'm convinced this is the future government of Iran, because that's for the people to decide, but our policy is at odds with reality."

KEITH JOHNSON, JAY SOLOMON and SCOTT GREENBERG

## Iranian Exile Group Poses Vexing Issue for U.S. in Iraq

New York Times - By TIM ARANGO

CAMP ASHRAF, Iraq — The more than 3,000 people living here once represented a powerful paramilitary organization bent on overthrowing the government in Iran. In the 1970s, the group killed Americans in Tehran, and after being given refuge by Saddam Hussein its members were suspected of serving as a mercenary unit that took part in his violent suppression of the Kurds in the north of Iraq and the Shiites in the south.

Now they are unwelcome in Iraq but believe they should be given protection in the United States — even though their group, known as the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, remains on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations.

"You probably have in mind Hawaii," said Ambassador Lawrence E. Butler, the American diplomat who has been negotiating with the group in recent sessions here.

"I suspect you don't want to go to Guantánamo," he added.

For the last three months, Mr. Butler, who is the foreign policy adviser to Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III, the top American military commander in Iraq, has been shuttling back and forth almost every week on the American embassy's behalf between Baghdad and Camp Ashraf, an outpost in Diyala Province near the Iranian border. Offering humor and bluntness, he has sought to cajole the exiles to leave their camp and avert what will almost certainly be another violent confrontation with the Iraqi security forces if they stay.

As the American military begins its final withdrawal from Iraq, the situation at Camp Ashraf is among the most vexing of the unfinished chapters of the American war here.

The group adheres to an ideology that is a mix of devout Shiism and Marxism, and in the initial phase of the war the Americans bombed the camp and killed several of its members before disarming the group, which had more than 2,000 tanks and armored personnel carriers. But the Americans later provided security for the camp as the Iraqi government, which is friendly with Iran, turned hostile to the group. A raid on the camp in April by the Iraqi Army left dozens dead and hundreds wounded.

Mr. Butler's mission has been to seek a solution that will save residents' lives by first moving them to another camp away from the Iranian border, and then to other countries for resettlement. His goal is humanitarian, he said. He betrayed no sympathies for the group's politics or forgiveness for its misdeeds. He wants them to move, he said, because he fears a slaughter at the hands of the Iraqi Army if they stay.

That solution has proved tricky, however, because the residents are refusing to leave, and no countries have come forward to welcome them. But the clock is ticking, and several times Mr. Butler has reminded members of the group that American forces will be leaving. For Mr. Butler, the former ambassador to Macedonia whose diplomatic career has placed him across the negotiating table from members of the Irish Republican Army and war criminals in the Balkans, the current dealings have proved just as tough.

“If I don’t get assurances that you will move to a new location in Iraq, the next round of negotiations could be very short,” he admonished the group near the end of the recent session.

After a half-dozen such sessions, he has made little progress in getting the group to agree to leave the camp before Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki’s government follows through on its promise to shut it down by the end of the year.

Adding to his difficulties, the group has a formidable and well-financed communications machine. It has attracted political figures like Howard Dean and Wesley K. Clark, the retired Army general, by paying them to make speeches in support of the group, fueling its resistance to a move and angering officials trying to bargain with it, like Mr. Butler.

Referring to General Clark, Mr. Butler asked the group, “How much was he paid?” He added, “He doesn’t get out of bed for less than \$25,000.”

To this, one member replied that none of the group’s famous advocates were “doing it for the money.”

“I’m guessing about a million dollars was spent on this over the last six months,” Mr. Butler said, referring to the overall advocacy campaign. “If I was on your board of directors, I wouldn’t be pleased with the results.”

In an interview, General Clark acknowledged having been paid by the group, but he said he gives speeches around the world and always offers his “own personal opinion” based on his many years of government service. (Mr. Dean has previously said publicly that he took speaking fees from the group.)

In a written statement, a representative for the group said it had not paid anyone for speeches.

That the group has access to money from the Iranian dissident diaspora is evident in the modern, well-appointed conference room full of flat-screen monitors. Men in suits served beverages and snacks on silver platters during the recent talks.

Mr. Butler is keen to puncture what he believes is the false narrative that has sprouted around the group since the American invasion, which has helped it secure such prominent support. Contrary to widespread belief, he says, the group never provided any valuable

intelligence to the Americans about Mr. Hussein's government. Nor, he says, has it provided any useful information about the Iranian government or its nuclear program.

He said that for six years the group provided unreliable information about Iran to the Defense Intelligence Agency, which he criticized as having taken years to discern that it was being fed what amounted to a slew of lies.

"They are very good at telling stories," he said of the group.

Through legal actions, the group has managed to get its name removed from terrorist watch lists in Britain and the European Union; a federal lawsuit in the United States resulted in a judge ordering the State Department to review its classification of the group.

The group has not carried out an attack in years, and says it renounced violence in 2001.

The State Department's public documents show a litany of violent crimes against Americans in the 1970s, including the assassination of military officers and executives in Tehran.

"These people slaughtered Americans," Mr. Butler said out of earshot of the group's representatives during the recent negotiating session. "They have blood on their hands."

The Americans have offered a plan in which the group's members would vacate this camp, which during Mr. Hussein's tenure served as a military base, and relocate to another site in Iraq, where they would disband, an essential step before the United Nations would recognize the members as refugees.

"To the outside world, you look like a paramilitary organization," he told them, before adding, "As a group you are dangerous."

For now, Mr. Butler is not optimistic about the prospects of getting the group to move, or disband. After a helicopter flight back to the American Embassy in Baghdad after the session, he shared his worry of a lack of political will back home.

"My prediction is Washington is not going to give me any backup," he said. "It's just poison. It's terrorism. It's Iran. It's Iraq."