

ParsBrief

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HR Minister confirms the removal of 100 MEK from Iraq

Wafaa Amer, Al Sabah Newspaper - April 26, 2012

Iraq's Human Rights Minister, Mohamed Shaya Sudani, said on Wednesday that one hundred members of the Mojahedin-e Khalq had been removed from Iraq at their own request.

On the sidelines of a joint press conference with Martin Kobler, Sudani told Al Sabah, "The winding up of the agreement between the ministry and the United Nations includes the removal of members of the MEK from the country. They are being moved gradually from Diyala to Baghdad, in order to keep this agreement on track..."

Sudani pointed out that "the transfer process was being interspersed with interviews of individual members by the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in order to ascertain their choice to voluntary return to their country of origin or to apply for asylum for any country in the world; this resulted in the transfer of some 100 of them to other countries". Sudani warned that "the transfer of MEK members from one place to another part of the country is not a final solution to the problem and is not compatible with human rights standards. Because they are not accepted by the international community their stay in Iraq is being prolonged, which is incompatible with the laws in force and the new policy in the country and the government's decision to expel them from Iraq."

He explained that "no organization or party has accurate statistics on the number present in the camp, either before the transfer or now. This is the responsibility of the international community, as members of the organization prevented entry of any party, whether government or non-governmental, to the camp to undertake an accurate count of the numbers either when they were under the American administration or the government of Iraq..."

Clinton urges MKO to complete move

By Scott Shane, NY Times, March 01, 2012

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said on Wednesday that a decision on whether to remove an Iranian opposition group from the list of terrorist organizations would depend in part on whether more than 3,000 of its members cooperate in moving to a new location inside Iraq.

The group, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or People's Mujahedin, is under pressure from the Iraqi government to move from Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad, where it was given territory by Saddam Hussein, the executed Iraqi dictator. Under an agreement negotiated by the United Nations, it has begun a move to a former American base near the Baghdad airport.

United Nations officials have said they hope to find permanent homes for the exiles outside Iraq, where government forces have had several bloody clashes with the group, also known as the M.E.K.

In mid-February about 397 members of the group made the move. "There were complications, but it was peaceful," Mrs. Clinton told the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday.

But about 2,800 people remain at Camp Ashraf, and the group's leaders have complained about conditions in the new location. American officials, who say the group has refused to occupy one building, blocked water trucks and resisted the opening of a clinic, are concerned that the group may balk at completing the move.

Mrs. Clinton told the committee that "M.E.K. cooperation in the successful and peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf" will be "a key factor in any decision" on its longstanding request that the State Department lift its terrorist designation. She did not elaborate, but an administration official said her remarks were meant to be a strong signal to the group that it must improve cooperation.

Lawyers for the organization went to court this week seeking to speed a State Department decision on the terrorist label for the group, which has a history of terrorism but says it long ago renounced violence. It has recruited a long list of prominent former American officials to endorse the cause, many of whom have been paid generous speaking fees by the group's supporters.

U.S. urges court to stay out of decision on Iranian group

Jeremy Pelofsky , Reuters , March 26, 2012

The Obama administration on Monday urged a U.S. appeals court not to interfere with its review and decision-making process over whether to remove the Iranian dissident group Mujahadin-e Khalq from a U.S. terrorism blacklist.

The group asked the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to order the State Department to either remove it from the list or require action within a specified period on its request to delist the group.

The State Department urged the court to stay out of the matter, saying it was continuing to evaluate the matter, consulting with the intelligence community and other government agencies and that it had met with representatives of the Mujahadin-e Khalq.

Further, in its reply to the appeals court, the department repeated what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said last month to U.S. lawmakers: that they were closely watching the group's cooperation in closing its Camp Ashraf base in Iraq.

The group, which calls for the overthrow of Iran's Islamist government, has been based in Iraq. It was supported by former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, but is no longer welcome in Iraq under the Shi'ite-led government that came to power following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and Saddam's downfall.

The Iraqi government plans to expel the residents of Camp Ashraf and is in the process of moving them to a processing center at a former U.S. military base in Baghdad.

Camp residents, who numbered about 3,000 and had been under the protection of the U.S. forces since 2003, agreed to be moved last month. U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq in December.

Also known as the People's Mujahideen Organization of Iran, the group led a guerilla campaign against the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran during the 1970s that included attacks on U.S. targets.

As a result, the United States placed it on its list of foreign terrorist organizations. The group has said that it has renounced violence.

BAN ON FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Americans are banned from providing financial and other support to any group included on the so-called "Foreign Terrorist Organization" list, and its members or representatives are banned from entering the United States.

Representatives for the group, which has also received support from several former senior U.S. government officials, had urged the court to intervene and force the administration to act or take the step itself of removing the group from the list.

"Such relief would - despite the PMOI's long history of terrorism - remove an important barrier to the PMOI's ability to operate freely in the United States, and is clearly unwarranted here," the State Department told the court.

"Moreover, an order directing the Secretary to act by a particular date is also inappropriate given the highly complex and delicate overall nature of the matter pending before her," it said.

The State Department also warned that court action "would seriously interfere" with its efforts to resolve the Camp Ashraf situation.

A lawyer for Iranian opposition group, Viet Dinh, said that they would respond by the April 2 deadline set by the court.

"The important thing to recognize from the brief is that the Secretary recognizes her responsibility to delist the PMOI if it does not meet the statutory criteria, and she does not have any discretion to keep the group on the list simply out of national security concerns," he told Reuters.

The appeals court has deferred a decision on whether it will hear oral arguments in the matter.

The case is In re: People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, No. 12-1118.

(Editing by Mohammad Zargham)

Ex-US officials investigated over speeches to Iranian dissident group on terror list

By Michael Isikoff, National investigative correspondent, AFP, March 17, 2012

Speaking firms representing ex-FBI Director Louis Freeh and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Hugh Shelton have received federal subpoenas as part of an expanding investigation into the source of payments to former top government officials who have publicly advocated removing an Iranian dissident group from the State Department list of terrorist groups, three sources familiar with the investigation told NBC News.

The investigation, being conducted by the Treasury Department, is focused on whether the former officials may have received funding, directly or indirectly, from the People's Mujahedin of Iran, or MEK, thereby violating longstanding federal law barring financial dealings with terrorist groups. The sources, all of whom spoke on condition of anonymity, said that speaking fees given to the former officials total hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"This is about finding out where the money is coming from," an Obama administration official familiar with the probe said. "This has been a source of enormous concern for a long time now. You have to ask the question, whether this is a prima facie case of material support for terrorism."

Freeh and Shelton are among 40 former senior U.S. government officials who have participated in a public lobbying campaign – including appearing at overseas conferences and speaking at public rallies – aimed at persuading the U.S. government to remove the MEK from the terror list.

First-class flights

Many of the speakers have received fees of about \$30,000 or more per talk and first-class flights to European capitals, according to two sources familiar with the arrangements.

Edward Rendell, a former Pennsylvania governor and ex-Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, whose speaking firm also received a subpoena, has received \$160,000 over the past year for appearing at about seven conferences and rallies, including some in Paris, Brussels and Geneva, according to his office. (Rendell is a contributor to MSNBC TV.)

The former officials have said they were told the fees came from wealthy American and foreign supporters of the MEK, not the group itself — and they resent any suggestion they are abetting a terrorist group.

"We're all pretty miffed," Shelton told NBC News. "None of us involved in this would say a good word about anyone suspected of being a terrorist." But Shelton said that he's "pretty passionate" that the MEK represents a legitimate resistance group fighting to overthrow "America's number one enemy" — the Iranian government.

In a statement Friday, Hossein Abedini, a spokesman for the MEK, also denied the group has ever "paid senior former U.S. officials or any other dignitary in the U.S."

“This is an utter lie and there is not even a scintilla of truth to it,” Abedini said. “The MEK, as the legitimate opposition to the clerical regime, enjoys international recognition in Europe and the U.S. The objective of this failed propaganda is to weaken the widespread public support of the members of Congress, officials and scores of U.S. generals for ... revoking of the illegitimate and unjust terror listing of the MEK.”

Shelton said that he was informed by Keppler Speakers, the agency that handles his speaking engagements, that it had been subpoenaed for records of talks he has given over the past year at conferences and rallies sponsored by the MEK. He said Freeh told him that Greater Talent Network, the firm that handles the former FBI director's speaking engagements, also received a subpoena.

Freeh did not respond to requests for comment. (A Keppler executive also did not respond. Reached by phone, Tom Marcossan, an executive vice president of Greater Talent, declined to comment.)

But Rendell told NBC News that he received an email this week from Freeh's office alerting him and more than three dozen other former senior officials that subpoenas were being issued by the Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control. The email asked that the former senior officials contact Freeh and former Attorney General Michael Mukasey. Freeh and Mukasey, who have been among the leaders in the campaign to "delist" the MEK, are hiring a lawyer to represent all former senior officials caught up in the investigation, the email from Freeh's office said, according to Rendell.

John Sullivan, a spokesman for the Treasury Department, said the department does not comment on "potential" investigations. But he added in an email: "The MEK is a designated terrorist group, therefore U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with or providing services to this group. The Treasury Department takes sanctions enforcement seriously and routinely investigates potential violations of sanctions law."

It is unclear how far Treasury Department officials intend to push the probe — or why they chose to launch it now, more than a year after the lobbying campaign began. But NBC News has obtained one possible clue: A small Pennsylvania-based speakers firm called Speakers Access wrote an email in September inviting a Washington based national security expert to speak at a conference in Geneva, Switzerland "on behalf of our client, National Council of Resistance of Iran, Foreign Affairs Committee." The National Council of Resistance is considered by the Treasury Department to be one of the "aliases" of the MEK and is itself designated as a terror group.

'Mistake'

The email was later turned over to the FBI and other U.S. officials. The Speakers Access executive who wrote the email, who asked not to be identified, said the email was a "mistake" and that the client was actually another organization — "the Committee for Human Rights in Iran," which is not on the terror list but which has the same contact in Paris as the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

The executive said Speakers Access has since ceased any dealings with either group and turned over all its records on the matter after receiving a Treasury Department subpoena months ago.

The investigation comes at a time of intense internal debate about the MEK, in part spurred by assertions it could prove a useful ally in pressuring the Iranian government to

suspend its nuclear program. NBC News reported recently that MEK operatives, trained by the Israeli Mossad, are believed by some U.S. intelligence officials to have been involved in the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists — a report that the group has denied as "absolutely false."

Israel teams with terror group to kill Iran's nuclear scientists, U.S. officials say

U.S. officials say that the MEK has a long history of terrorist acts, including bombings and assassinations, against Iranian leaders during the 1980s and that at least six Americans died in such attacks. The group — which was once allied with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein — is also viewed warily because of the slavish devotion of its followers to its Paris based leader, Maryan Rajavi.

"The MEK has a crazy edge to it," said Michael Leiter, former director of the National Counter-Terrorism Center and an NBC News consultant. "It always struck me as a cult as much as a terrorist group."

But the group's supporters say it has long since publicly renounced violence and that Rajavi has proclaimed the group's adherence to democratic principles. "They want the mullahs out of Iran and they want to replace them with a constitution based on the Declaration of Independence," said Shelton.

The group has also generated sympathy over the plight of its followers at Camp Ashraf, a paramilitary camp on the Iran-Iraq border, where they have been detained — and until recently protected — by the U.S. military since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. U.S. officials have been seeking the group's cooperation to resettle the estimated 2,500 remaining MEK members at Camp Ashraf to a new facility near the Baghdad airport, where they can be processed by the United Nations as refugees and resettled elsewhere.

But the process has stalled — in part over disputes about the conditions of transfer — and MEK advocates say they fear the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, at Iran's urging, may move in to slaughter the group's members. "This could be a humanitarian disaster," said Rendell.

Rendell said that there have been weekly conference calls among a "core group" of former U.S. senior officials participating in the lobbying campaign, organized by Freeh, to talk about ways to prod the State Department to remove the MEK from the terror list and protect its followers at Camp Ashraf. He identified this group as including former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former Democratic National Committee Chair Howard Dean and Mukasey — all of whom have publicly spoken out on behalf of the MEK and spoken at its rallies.

Officials act as middle men

These weekly conference calls have also turned into back channel negotiations over the Camp Ashraf issue. In recent weeks, Rendell said, State Department Ambassador Daniel Fried, the special envoy for detainee issues, has joined the phone calls, urging the pro-MEK "core" members to pass along messages to MEK leaders in Paris, Rendell said.

"The core group talks to Freeh every week," he said. "It's Ridge, myself, Dean, Freeh, Mukasey. Shelton has joined us on occasion. ... We were the ones that Fried asked to communicate with the MEK, telling them, 'This is the best deal you're going to get.' He will say, 'Listen, you guys have to persuade the MEK to do this. Tell them, OK, tell Paris, they

have to persuade the people to get on the buses (at Camp Ashraf.) We then communicate [with the MEK]."

Fried declined comment. But a senior State Department official confirmed his participation in the calls as a means of communicating with MEK leaders in Paris — something U.S. officials are barred from doing — in order to work out a "peaceful" resolution over the conflict over Camp Ashraf.

Rendell said that he and other members of the core group have met with Rajavi in Paris and sent emails to her chief deputy, Farzin Hashemi, passing along Fried's messages. "The bottom line is, we all believe we are protecting people," he said.

But the bottom line for some U.S. officials is that the former government officials participating in the pro-MEK campaign are being paid handsomely for promoting a dubious cause sponsored by an officially designated terrorist group. Despite the public lobbying campaign, there is still deep suspicion about the MEK and its motives — and concerns that once its members leave Camp Ashraf, many of its followers will return to terrorism, said one senior official speaking on condition of anonymity.

"It's extraordinary that so many distinguished public servants would shill for a group that has American blood on its hands," the official said.

Our Men in Iran?

Seymour M. Hersh, *The New Yorker*, April 6, 2012

From the air, the terrain of the Department of Energy's Nevada National Security Site, with its arid high plains and remote mountain peaks, has the look of northwest Iran. The site, some sixty-five miles northwest of Las Vegas, was once used for nuclear testing, and now includes a counterintelligence training facility and a private airport capable of handling Boeing 737 aircraft. It's a restricted area, and inhospitable—in certain sections, the curious are warned that the site's security personnel are authorized to use deadly force, if necessary, against intruders.

It was here that the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) conducted training, beginning in 2005, for members of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, a dissident Iranian opposition group known in the West as the M.E.K. The M.E.K. had its beginnings as a Marxist-Islamist student-led group and, in the nineteen-seventies, it was linked to the assassination of six American citizens. It was initially part of the broad-based revolution that led to the 1979 overthrow of the Shah of Iran. But, within a few years, the group was waging a bloody internal war with the ruling clerics, and, in 1997, it was listed as a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department. In 2002, the M.E.K. earned some international credibility by publicly revealing—accurately—that Iran had begun enriching uranium at a secret underground location. Mohamed ElBaradei, who at the time was the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear monitoring agency, told me later that he had been informed that the information was supplied by the Mossad. The M.E.K.'s ties with Western intelligence deepened after the fall of the Iraqi regime in 2003, and JSOC began operating inside Iran in an effort to substantiate the Bush Administration's fears that Iran was building the bomb at one or more secret underground locations. Funds were covertly passed to a number of dissident organizations, for intelligence collection and, ultimately, for anti-regime terrorist activities.

Directly, or indirectly, the M.E.K. ended up with resources like arms and intelligence. Some American-supported covert operations continue in Iran today, according to past and present intelligence officials and military consultants.

Despite the growing ties, and a much-intensified lobbying effort organized by its advocates, M.E.K. has remained on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations—which meant that secrecy was essential in the Nevada training. “We did train them here, and washed them through the Energy Department because the D.O.E. owns all this land in southern Nevada,” a former senior American intelligence official told me. “We were deploying them over long distances in the desert and mountains, and building their capacity in communications—coordinating comms is a big deal.” (A spokesman for J.S.O.C. said that “U.S. Special Operations Forces were neither aware of nor involved in the training of M.E.K. members.”)

The training ended sometime before President Obama took office, the former official said. In a separate interview, a retired four-star general, who has advised the Bush and Obama Administrations on national-security issues, said that he had been privately briefed in 2005 about the training of Iranians associated with the M.E.K. in Nevada by an American involved in the program. They got “the standard training,” he said, “in comms, crypto [cryptography], small-unit tactics, and weaponry—that went on for six months,” the retired general said. “They were kept in little pods.” He also was told, he said, that the men doing the training were from JSOC, which, by 2005, had become a major instrument in the Bush Administration's global war on terror. “The JSOC trainers were not front-line guys who had been in the field, but second- and third-tier guys—trainers and the like—and they started going off the reservation. ‘If we're going to teach you tactics, let me show you some really sexy stuff...’ ”

It was the ad-hoc training that provoked the worried telephone calls to him, the former general said. “I told one of the guys who called me that they were all in over their heads, and all of them could end up in trouble unless they got something in writing. The Iranians are very, very good at counterintelligence, and stuff like this is just too hard to contain.” The site in Nevada was being utilized at the same time, he said, for advanced training of elite Iraqi combat units. (The retired general said he only knew of the one M.E.K.-affiliated group that went through the training course; the former senior intelligence official said that he was aware of training that went on through 2007.)

Allan Gerson, a Washington attorney for the M.E.K., notes that the M.E.K. has publicly and repeatedly renounced terror. Gerson said he would not comment on the alleged training in Nevada. But such training, if true, he said, would be “especially incongruent with the State Department's decision to continue to maintain the M.E.K. on the terrorist list. How can the U.S. train those on State's foreign terrorist list, when others face criminal penalties for providing a nickel to the same organization?”

Robert Baer, a retired C.I.A. agent who is fluent in Arabic and had worked under cover in Kurdistan and throughout the Middle East in his career, initially had told me in early 2004 of being recruited by a private American company—working, so he believed, on behalf of the Bush Administration—to return to Iraq. “They wanted me to help the M.E.K. collect intelligence on Iran's nuclear program,” Baer recalled. “They thought I knew Farsi, which I did not. I said I'd get back to them, but never did.” Baer, now living in California, recalled that it was made clear to him at the time that the operation was “a long-term thing—not just a one-shot deal.”

Massoud Khodabandeh, an I.T. expert now living in England who consults for the Iraqi government, was an official with the M.E.K. before defecting in 1996. In a telephone interview, he acknowledged that he is an avowed enemy of the M.E.K., and has advocated against the group. Khodabandeh said that he had been with the group since before the fall of the Shah and, as a computer expert, was deeply involved in intelligence activities as well as providing security for the M.E.K. leadership. For the past decade, he and his English wife have run a support program for other defectors. Khodabandeh told me that he had heard from more recent defectors about the training in Nevada. He was told that the communications training in Nevada involved more than teaching how to keep in contact during attacks—it also involved communication intercepts. The United States, he said, at one point found a way to penetrate some major Iranian communications systems. At the time, he said, the U.S. provided M.E.K. operatives with the ability to intercept telephone calls and text messages inside Iran—which M.E.K. operatives translated and shared with American signals intelligence experts. He does not know whether this activity is ongoing.

Five Iranian nuclear scientists have been assassinated since 2007. M.E.K. spokesmen have denied any involvement in the killings, but early last month NBC News quoted two senior Obama Administration officials as confirming that the attacks were carried out by M.E.K. units that were financed and trained by Mossad, the Israeli secret service. NBC further quoted the Administration officials as denying any American involvement in the M.E.K. activities. The former senior intelligence official I spoke with seconded the NBC report that the Israelis were working with the M.E.K., adding that the operations benefitted from American intelligence. He said that the targets were not “Einsteins”; “The goal is to affect Iranian psychology and morale,” he said, and to “demoralize the whole system—nuclear delivery vehicles, nuclear enrichment facilities, power plants.” Attacks have also been carried out on pipelines. He added that the operations are “primarily being done by M.E.K. through liaison with the Israelis, but the United States is now providing the intelligence.” An adviser to the special-operations community told me that the links between the United States and M.E.K. activities inside Iran had been long-standing. “Everything being done inside Iran now is being done with surrogates,” he said.

The sources I spoke to were unable to say whether the people trained in Nevada were now involved in operations in Iran or elsewhere. But they pointed to the general benefit of American support. “The M.E.K. was a total joke,” the senior Pentagon consultant said, “and now it’s a real network inside Iran. How did the M.E.K. get so much more efficient?” he asked rhetorically. “Part of it is the training in Nevada. Part of it is logistical support in Kurdistan, and part of it is inside Iran. M.E.K. now has a capacity for efficient operations than it never had before.”

In mid-January, a few days after an assassination by car bomb of an Iranian nuclear scientist in Tehran, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, at a town-hall meeting of soldiers at Fort Bliss, Texas, acknowledged that the U.S. government has “some ideas as to who might be involved, but we don’t know exactly who was involved.” He added, “But I can tell you one thing: the United States was not involved in that kind of effort. That’s not what the United States does.”

Guest Op-Ed: MEK and its material supporters in Washington

Glenn Greenwald, Salon, March 28, 2012

Jeremiah Goukla worked as a lawyer in the Bush Justice Department, and then went to work as an analyst with the RAND Corporation, where he was sent to Iraq to analyze, among other things, the Iranian dissident group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), publishing an oft-cited study on the group. MEK has been in the news of late because a high-powered bipartisan cast of former Washington officials have established close ties with the group and have been vocally advocating on its behalf, often in exchange for large payments, despite MEK's having been formally designated by the U.S. Government as a Terrorist organization. That close association on the part of numerous Washington officials with a Terrorist organization has led to a formal federal investigation of those officials. Goukla has written and supplied to me two superb Op-Eds on the MEK controversy — one about the group itself and the other explaining why so many prominent Washington officials are openly providing material support to this designated Terror group — and I'm publishing the two Op-Eds below with his consent (as you read them, remember that paid MEK shill Howard Dean actually called on its leader to be recognized as President of Iran while paid MEK shill Rudy Giuliani has continuously hailed the group's benevolence).

Before posting those Op-Eds, I want to note one update on this matter: supporters of MEK have filed a lawsuit asking a federal court to force the State Department to decide within 30 days whether to remove MEK from the list of designated Terrorist organizations (State Department officials have previously indicated they are considering doing so). In response, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has told the court that (1) it has no role to play in directing the timing of this decision ("Any interference by a court with the Secretary's ability to carry out these absolutely critical duties would set a seriously troubling precedent"); and (2) the U.S. Government is currently attempting to force MEK to move from its current base in Camp Ashraf to another location in Iraq (something MEK does not want to do), and whether MEK cooperates with the U.S. Government's directives will play a large role in determining whether the group is removed from the Terrorist list.

With regard to that second argument: in determining whether MEK belongs on the Terrorist list, what conceivable difference should it make whether MEK is cooperative in moving from Camp Ashraf as the U.S. Government wants? What does their cooperation or lack thereof have to do with whether they are a Terrorist organization? The answer, of course, is that the U.S. list of Terrorist organizations (like its list of state sponsors of Terrorism) has little or nothing to do with who are and are not actually Terrorists; it is, instead, simply an instrument used to reward those who comply with U.S. dictates (you're no longer a Terrorist) and to punish those who refuse (you are hereby deemed Terrorists). The scholarship of Remi Brulin documents how Terrorism, from its prominent introduction into world affairs, has been manipulated that way. Andrew Exum of the Center for a New American Security yesterday objected to my argument that the field of "Terrorism expertise" is basically fraudulent because the concept of "Terrorism" itself is largely propagandistic and ideological, rather than being some meaningful term with a fixed, coherent definition. His commenters have very effectively addressed his claims, but this game-playing with MEK is yet another example underscoring what I mean.

By Jeremiah Goukla

THE IRAN WAR HAWKS' FAVORITE CULT GROUP

Despite the flurry of support by some prominent politicians as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton scrutinizes its case, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a dissident Iranian group based in Iraq with a propaganda arm in Paris, is no enigma.

The U.S. declared the MEK a terrorist organization 13 years ago partly because the group is thought to have assassinated three U.S. Army officers and three U.S. civilian contractors in Tehran in the 1970s. The group's pep rallies feature U.S. politicians lured with high fees to come speak on its behalf. The MEK wants the U.S. government to take the group off its terrorist list – as the E.U. and U.K. have already done. But before that happens the group requires close scrutiny.

I studied the MEK for the U.S. military and visited Camp Ashraf, the MEK facility 40 miles north of Baghdad. I also interviewed former MEK members. As Human Rights Watch also concluded, I saw that the MEK is a cult. It uses brainwashing, sleep deprivation, and forced labor to indoctrinate members. It segregates men from women, mandates celibacy, forces married members to divorce (except for its leaders), and separates families and friends who must seek permission just to converse.

MEK members must report their private sexual thoughts at group meetings and endure public shaming. In a Catch-22, those who deny having sexual thoughts are accused of hiding them and shamed, too. The cult has but one purpose: to put itself in charge in Iran.

A brief history lesson illuminates how the MEK transformed from a radical student group in 1965 to what it is today. When the MEK was founded it embraced both Marxism and Islam and dedicated itself to the violent overthrow of the Shah of Iran. All this is reflected in its name, the "People's Holy Warriors." By 1979 the MEK evolved into a major movement that threatened Ayatollah Khomeini's dominance after the Iranian Revolution. He suppressed the group, executing some leaders and imprisoning others. In 1981 some MEK leaders escaped in a stolen plane. Among these was Masoud Rajavi. Exiled to Paris, he established the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella organization of Iranian dissident groups opposed to Khomeini. The NCRI soon became the propaganda arm of the MEK. Rajavi's wife, Maryam, runs the NCRI, which is also on the U.S. terror list. She calls herself "president-elect" of the NCRI's "parliament-in-exile."

When Saddam Hussein waged war against Iran, Rajavi moved the MEK from Paris to Iraq. His alliance with Saddam in a brutally violent war cost the MEK credibility and its font of recruits. Isolated in Iraq's desert, Rajavi instituted authoritarian control over his decimated army and confiscated his troops' assets. He encouraged Saddam to send Iranian POWs to MEK's Camp Ashraf rather than repatriate them. With promises of asylum for POWs and family reunions with the new MEK members, Rajavi duped Iranian visitors to come to the camp and stole their passports so they couldn't leave.

Human Rights Watch reports that those who tried to escape endured confinement or torture. After the U.S. invaded Iraq, the MEK ejected its most "difficult" members and used guards and concertina wire to entrap the rest. Members must swear allegiance to Masoud and Maryam, whose pictures are in every building at Camp Ashraf. But these days Maryam's is the public face of the NCRI. Masoud Rajavi mysteriously disappeared in 2003.

Maryam trumpets the dangers of Iran's nuclear program and gives the NCRI credit for discovering Iran's Natanz nuclear facility. That self-serving claim is doubtful, as is the

NCRI's posture as a democratic government-in-waiting. While its propaganda arm espouses Western values to Western audiences, the MEK continues to force-feed its doctrine to members who may not criticize the Rajavis and are not free to leave the Ashraf compound.

While many people would like to see a change of regime in Tehran, no one should believe that the MEK would provide Iran with a government based on liberty and justice for all. Indeed, based upon its treatment of its own adherents in Iraq, a MEK regime might not be much improvement over the current one.

By Jeremiah Goukla

INVESTIGATIONS BEGIN INTO MEK SUPPORTERS

The U.S. Treasury Department has begun an investigation into nearly two dozen prominent former government officials who have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to promote the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian dissident cult group that has been designated by the State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) since 1997.

These officials include several prominent George W. Bush Administration anti-terror officials like Homeland Security secretary Tom Ridge, Homeland Security advisor Frances Fragos Townsend, Attorney General Michael Mukasey, UN ambassador John Bolton; as well as former Republican Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani; former Democratic governors Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania and Howard Dean of Vermont; ex-FBI Director Louis Freeh; and retired chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Hugh Shelton. These former officials have given speeches at home and abroad urging the State Department to remove the MEK from the FTO list.

Given the cacophony of saber-rattling over Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program – which the U.S. intelligence community generally believes was shut down in 2003 – and the risk, however low, of actually getting prosecuted for “material support of terrorism,” it is important to examine why anyone would promote a designated terrorist organization.

What is the MEK?

The MEK – which is also known as the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI) and often operates through its Paris-based propaganda arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) – is an Iranian dissident group that once-upon-a-time was a significant force in Iranian politics. Created to oppose the Shah in 1965, the MEK lost out to Ayatollah Khomeini after the Iranian Revolution, and the mullahs have been the MEK's target ever since. Most MEK members are now based in Iraq, where they have lived since joining forces with Saddam Hussein in 1986 during the Iran-Iraq War. (For more history of the MEK, see the appendices here.)

Collaborating with Saddam was the MEK's greatest mistake. Saddam started that war, which was a catastrophe for Iran, but he didn't win and didn't install the MEK as the new government. In the process, the MEK killed Iranian soldiers and thereby killed off whatever credibility it once had.

The MEK claims to be the best organized and the most prominent opposition group in Iran. No credible sources that I have seen suggest that it has any relevance in Iran at all, other than to get the mullahs riled up. It is, however, very well organized, because, cut off from new volunteers, the MEK's co-leaders Masoud Rajavi (whereabouts unknown) and his wife Maryam Rajavi turned the MEK into a cult of personality.

The MEK vigorously denies that it is a cult, accusing critics of working for the Iranian regime or performing inadequate research (using the tactics of climate change, evolution, and tobacco denialists). However, I studied the MEK in depth and over a period of many months for the U.S. military. I visited Camp Ashraf, the MEK facility 40 miles north of Baghdad, and interviewed MEK members, former MEK members, and dozens of military and civilian officials. Along with almost all of my interviewees and Human Rights Watch, I concluded that the MEK is a cult. It employs many common cult practices: mandated celibacy and divorce, thought control, sleep deprivation, and forced labor. It segregates men from women, separates families and friends – who must seek permission just to converse – and even tells family members back home that the members are dead.

Why Would Any American Politicians Support the MEK?

Getting off the FTO list is a stepping-stone to the MEK's main goal: getting America to install it as the new government of Iran. Why would American politicians want that? There are two main reasons, neither of them good.

The first is ignorance. The MEK presents itself well and is good at running "Astroturf" campaigns. Its NCRI is a self-proclaimed "parliament in exile," dedicated to the principles of western liberal democracy. Over the years, lots of American civilian and military officials have failed to do their homework and fallen for the MEK's sales spiel, excited as they were to hear what they wanted to hear. (If something sounds too good to be true...)

Does this remind you of Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress? It should. As Ali Gharib has shown, the same people who helped Chalabi push us into Iraq are now orchestrating public events where former officials promote the MEK.

The second reason is money. The officials were paid to speak on the MEK's behalf, up to \$30,000 per speech. Not bad for a few minutes work.

But this is just the beginning. What the media has generally failed to mention is that these former officials are now in the national/homeland security business. Just take a quick look around Wikipedia, Forbes, and OpenSecrets.org, and here is what you will find:

Tom Ridge has his own security consultancy (Ridge Global, LLC) and lobbying firm (Ridge Policy Group). He chairs the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's national security task force and sits on the boards of at least one military contractor (TechRadium, Inc.) and one company (Geospatial Corporation) that serves the oil and gas industry.

Francis Fragos Townsend chairs an industry association for intelligence contractors (the Intelligence and National Security Alliance) and is the head of lobbying for a holding company (MacAndrews & Forbes Holdings Inc.) that owns the military contractor AM General.

Rudolph Giuliani has a security consulting firm (Giuliani Partners) and is a partner in a law firm with prominent oil and gas and lobbying practices (Bracewell & Giuliani). He used to own a private equity fund that teamed up with Bear Stearns to invest in security companies.

Louis Freeh has a security and investigations consulting firm (Freeh Group International Solutions, LLC) and a law firm (Freeh Sporkin & Sullivan, LLP), where he represents, among other clients, a Saudi prince in a bribery investigation involving an arms deal.

Hugh Shelton has served on the boards of directors of several military contractors, such as L-3 Communications, CACI International, Inc., and Protective Products of America, Inc.

Bolton, Mukasey, Rendell, and Dean are affiliated with major law firms whose clients include not just standard military contractors but many other more mundane corporations, as expert Nick Turse has shown, also benefit from military largesse. (Bolton is also affiliated with several pro-war think tanks.)

For people in the national/homeland security business, war with Iran would be a cash cow. They and their clients stand to benefit handsomely. Just stoking fears of war can get money flowing, from studies to retrofitting naval vessels. Bombing would be better, as even something as small as the Libyan war involved spending more than a billion dollars. But full-on war, that's the mother lode. An invasion followed by an Iraq-style lingering occupation and reconstruction would open up hundreds of billions and possibly even trillions of taxpayer dollars for the grabbing.

Hopefully these Treasury Department investigations are a sign that the Obama Administration has finally decided to rein in the warmongers. Ignorance, profit, and the dreams of a terrorist-cult group are lousy reasons to start a war.

"CYBER TERRORISM": US-supported Terrorist Group MEK Plants Stuxnet Virus Malware to Disable Iran's Nuclear Facilities

by Nile Bowie , Global Research, April 16, 2012

The international community has eased its condemnation of Iran following recent negotiations between Tehran and six other nations in Istanbul, Turkey. While the participating parties agreed to further discussions on May 23, 2012 in Baghdad, both Israel and the West have given no indication of easing the strict regime of sanctions imposed on Tehran. Following claims of the Iranian leadership that it pursues civil nuclear capabilities to generate electricity and fuel for medical reactors (allowing Tehran to divert its primary oil reserves to export markets) [1], Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has issued a religious prohibition on nuclear weapons in Iran [2]. During recent discussions, Iranian negotiator Saeed Jalili emphasized Iran's right to a civil nuclear program, as guaranteed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [3]. Although Tel Aviv possess between 75 to 400 nuclear warheads, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak insists that all of Iran's uranium enriched to 20% be moved to a "trusted" neighboring country [4].

While both CIA chief David H. Petraeus and US National Intelligence Director James R. Clapper Jr. concede that no credible evidence exists to accuse Iran of constructing a nuclear weapon [5], the brazen criminality of intelligence operations against Iran's civil nuclear program remain deeply troubling. ISSSource has recently confirmed that the individuals responsible for planting the Stuxnet computer worm used to sabotage Iran's nuclear facilities in Natanz were members of Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) [6], a US State Department-listed terrorist organization (#29) [7]. MEK was founded in 1965 as a Marxist Islamic mass political movement aimed at agitating the monarchy of the US-backed Iranian Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The group initially sided with revolutionary clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but eventually turned

away from the regime during a power struggle that resulted in the group waging urban guerilla warfare against Iran's Revolutionary Guards in 1981.

The organization was later given refuge by Saddam Hussein and mounted attacks on Iran from within Iraqi territory, killing an estimated 17,000 Iranian nationals in the process [8]. MEK exists as the main component of the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a "coalition of democratic Iranian organizations, groups and personalities," calling itself a "parliament-in-exile" seeking to "establish a democratic, secular and coalition government" in Iran [9]. Although the group has been credited with the assassination of high profile US military personnel [10] following the Islamic Revolution on multiple occasions [11], The New Yorker reports that members of Mujahideen-e-Khalq were trained in communications, cryptography, small-unit tactics and weaponry by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at a base in Nevada starting in 2005 [12]. JSOC instructed MEK operatives on how to penetrate major Iranian communications systems, allowing the group to intercept telephone calls and text messages inside Iran for the purpose of sharing them with American intelligence.

Following the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi Army has twice attempted to enter Camp Ashraf, a "refugee camp" where the militant wing of MEK (consisting of approximately 3,200 personnel) resided under external security protection of the US military up until 2009 [13]. With the full support of the US Embassy in Iraq and the State Department, UN special representative in Iraq Martin Kobler has organized efforts to relocate MEK insurgents to a former US military base near the Baghdad airport, amusingly titled, "Camp Liberty" – to avoid violent clashes between the MEK and the Shiite-led Iraqi government [14]. The group has long received material assistance from Israel, who assisted the organization with broadcasting into Iran from their political base in Paris, while the MEK and NCRI have reportedly provided the United States with intelligence on Iran's nuclear program, which publicly revealed the existence of the Natanz uranium-enrichment facility in 2002 [15].

While senior figures in the Council on Foreign Relations describe MEK as a "cult-like organization" with "totalitarian tendencies," [16] a cabal of elder statesmen such as former NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley K. Clark, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former 9/11 Commission Chairman Lee Hamilton were paid \$20,000 to \$30,000 per engagement to endorse the removal of the Mujahideen-e Khalq from the US State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations [17]. NCRI head Maryam Rajavi, now based in Paris and endorsed by statesmen from the United States and European Union, is famously quoted saying, "Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards," during Saddam Hussein's massacre of Iraqi Kurds in 1991 [18]. Despite the documented cases of atrocities committed by MEK forces, the Council of the European Union removed the group from the EU list of terrorist organizations in 2009; NCRI spokesperson Shahin Gobadi offered, "All we want is democratic elections in Iran," in a press statement to mark the event [19].

Although current and former US officials agree Iran is years away from having a deliverable nuclear warhead and has no secret uranium-enrichment site outside the purview of UN nuclear inspections [20], recent revelations connecting MEK with the Stuxnet computer virus that destroyed several hundred centrifuges in Iran's Natanz nuclear facility constitutes an act of deliberate and unparalleled sabotage. Stuxnet remains the most sophisticated malware discovered thus far, the virus targets Siemens' Simatic WinCC Step7 software, which controls industrial systems such as nuclear power plants and electrical grids from a Microsoft Windows-based PC. The virus exploits security gaps

referred to as zero-day vulnerabilities, to attack specific targets. Prior to its discovery, Stuxnet was previously undetected and remained unidentified by anti-virus software, as the malware was designed to appear as legitimate software to Microsoft Windows. Upon delivery of the Stuxnet payload, the malware manipulated the operating speed of centrifuges spinning nuclear fuel to create distortions that deliberately damaged the machines, while giving the impression of normal activities to the monitoring operator and disabling their emergency controls.

ISSSource has cited current and former US intelligence officials, who confirm the Stuxnet virus was planted at Natanz nuclear facility by a saboteur believed to be a member of Mujahedeen-e-Khalq [21]. By delivering the malicious payload via USB memory stick, the group was able to damage at least 1,000 centrifuges in the Natanz nuclear facility [22]. MEK has also been accused of assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists [23] and triggering an explosion that destroyed an underground site near the town of Khorramabad in western Iran that housed most of Tehran's Shehab-3 medium-range missiles [24]. NBC News reports that Israel provided financing, training and arms to members of Mujahideen-e-Khalq, who are responsible for killing five Iranian nuclear scientists since 2007 using motorcycle-borne assailants often attaching small magnetic bombs to the exterior of the victims' cars [25]. The New York Times reports that former US President George W. Bush authorized covert action intended to sabotage Iran's Natanz facility, after deflecting an Israeli request to shower specialized bunker-busting bombs on the facility in 2009 [26].

Due to the intricate nature of Stuxnet coding, security experts confirm its creation must be the "work of a national government agency" [27]. Ralph Langner, an independent computer security expert who dismantled Stuxnet credited Israel and the United States with writing the malicious software designed to sabotage the Iranian nuclear program [28]. Considering that Stuxnet targeted Programmable Logic Controllers (PLC) used in industrial plants to automate industrial operations, the malware designers required detailed knowledge of the programming language written for PLC components to successively subvert them [29]. It remains significant that the German electrical engineering company Siemens cooperated with one of the United States in 2008 to identify vulnerabilities in the computer controllers identified as key equipment in Iran's enrichment facilities [30]. Intelligence experts concede that testing of the Stuxnet virus was conducted in the Dimona complex located in Israel's Negev desert, the site of Israel's rarely acknowledged nuclear arms program [31].

When asked about the Stuxnet worm in a press conference, current White House WMD Coordinator Gary Samore boasted, "I'm glad to hear they are having troubles with their centrifuge machines, and the U.S. and its allies are doing everything we can to make it more complicated" [32]. While former chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Hans Blix challenges the IAEA's own reports on Iran's nuclear activities (accusing the agency of relying on unverified intelligence from the US and Israel) [33], former director of US nuclear weapons production programs, Clinton Bastin, has sent an open letter to President Obama regarding the status of Iran's capacity to produce nuclear weapons [34]. Bastin reiterates in his letter to the President, "The ultimate product of Iran's gas centrifuge facilities would be highly enriched uranium hexafluoride, a gas that cannot be used to make a weapon. Converting the gas to metal, fabricating components and assembling them with high explosives using dangerous and difficult technology that has never been used in Iran would take many years after a diversion of three tons of low enriched uranium gas from fully safeguarded inventories. The resulting weapon, if intended for delivery by missile, would have a yield equivalent to that of a kiloton of conventional high explosives" [35].

The theatrics of the US and Israel in their condemnation of Iran's nuclear power program have come at a heavy price for the Iranian people, who have been subjected to sanctions, assassinations, condemnation and sabotage. The United States has produced more than 70,000 nuclear weapons between 1951 and 1998 [36], while Israel possess a nuclear weapons stockpile ranging from 75 to 400 warheads [37]. The current legal international framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty guarantees the right to conduct peaceful nuclear energy programs; the deliberate provocations of the United States and Israel acting through intelligence groups such as Mossad and the CIA constitute the most genuine contempt toward international law, security and the value of a single human life. The mainstream media have worked to indoctrinate the population of the English-speaking world with an exploited and romanticized version of the Iranian theocracy's ideological ambitions to wage "unprovoked terror," while figures such as Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi publically renounce nuclear weapons [38].

The Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or the People's Mujahedin of Iran is an organization responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians since its inception. If the US and Israel launched a war against Iran, aggressor nations would likely recognize the touted "parliament-in-exile", the National Council of Resistance of Iran, as the nation's legitimate government. The US State Department's own website (which features Mujahedeen-e-Khalq as Foreign Terrorist Organization #29) indicates that "It is unlawful for a person in the United States or subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to knowingly provide 'material support or resources' to a designated FTO" [39]. As the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq continually seek removal from the US list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations [40], the group's unpardonable offenses must not be lost to the annals of history. While NCRI leader Maryam Rajavi would prefer to masquerade as a "pro-democracy" figure, the responsible parties of the international community must rightfully condemn the actions taken by her organization and its affiliates.

The Stuxnet virus was engineered with Iran's nuclear program in mind, as 60% of global Stuxnet cases appear within Iran [41]. US intelligence sources indicate that American and Israeli officials are working to finalize a new Stuxnet worm, referred to as 'Duqu' [42]; Alexander Gostev, chief security expert at Russia's Kaspersky Lab examined drivers used in Stuxnet and Duqu and concluded a single team most likely designed both worms, based on their interaction with the surrounding malware code [43]. Duqu malware similarly exploits Microsoft Windows systems using a zero-day vulnerability and is partially written in an advanced and previously unknown programming language, comprised of a variety of software components capable of executing information theft capabilities highly related to Iran's nuclear program. Duqu has the capacity to steal digital certificates to help future viruses appear as secure software [44]. Duqu's replication methods inside target networks remain unknown, however due to its modular structure, a special payload could theoretically be used in further cyber-physical attacks [45]. As the world begins to wage warfare in currency markets and programming code, the demand has never been greater for a new international legal framework to rightfully penalize covert provocateurs for manipulating economic structures and engaging in acts of sabotage.

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