

ParsBrief

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UN puts forward roadmap for relocation of Iranian exiles from camp in Iraq

Un News Centre - July 24, 2012

The United Nations mission in Iraq today presented a roadmap to the Government suggesting a series of steps to complete the peaceful relocation of Iranian exiles from Camp Ashraf to Camp Hurriya.

The roadmap has been designed to address the concerns of both the residents and the Government of Iraq, the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) said in a news release, adding that its roadmap outlines preparations to be made and a "step-by-step approach for the relocation," which addresses issues such as water and power supply and other humanitarian needs.

"Our commitment is strictly humanitarian: to facilitate a voluntary temporary relocation of residents to Camp Hurriya as a first step of resettlement to countries outside Iraq," said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Martin Kobler.

Camp Ashraf – made up of several thousand Iranian exiles, many of them members of a group known as the People's Mojahedeen of Iran – has been one of the main issues dealt with by UNAMI for more than 18 months.

In line with a memorandum of understanding signed in December by the UN and the Iraqi Government to resolve the situation, some two-thirds of the residents, or 2,000 people, were re-located to a temporary transit location near Baghdad known as Camp Hurriya – formerly known as Camp Liberty – where a process to determine refugee status is being carried out by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

To facilitate the remaining moves that will lead to the closure of Camp Ashraf, UNAMI called on the residents "to start the preparations for the next move without delay," and asked the Government of Iraq "to be generous when it comes to the humanitarian needs of the residents and to continue to seek a peaceful solution to this issue under any circumstances."

Lobbyists for listed Iranian terror group face new scrutiny

By Dan Murphy, Csmonitor, July 9, 2012

Some of the biggest names in American politics and foreign policy have been accepting money from a State Department designated terrorist organization in recent years and lobbying the US government to bring the group in from the cold.

A scandal? Hardly. That famous generals, politicians, and other retired officials have supported the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) has been public knowledge for some time. But their freedom to act on behalf of a group that has murdered Americans, and sought to create an amalgam of Islam and Marxism to take over Iran after the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, has nevertheless been striking. The internet is filled with their speeches, many of which were paid for with hefty fees, praising the group's Maryam Rajavi, the self-styled "president" of Iran.

A list of notables as long as your arm are on the MEK bandwagon: Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani; ex-Homeland Security boss Tom Ridge; Newt Gingrich; former Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean; former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell; former head of the 9/11 commission Lee Hamilton; former Obama National Security Adviser James Jones; ex-CIA Director James Woolsey; and retired generals Wesley Clark and Peter Pace.

That's just a brief sampling (the Monitor's Scott Peterson did an extensive investigation into the MEK's American supporters last year). US citizens aren't supposed to be helping out groups designated as terrorists by the government, but that's not how it works in this case.

Consider by contrast the Texas-based Holy Land Foundation. The group was prosecuted in 2007 for funneling money to Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group that is also on the State Department's terror list. The charity sought to defend itself by saying that it was only providing humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, which is governed by Hamas. The prosecution and the jury didn't see it that way, however, and five members of Holy Land were convicted, with two of the officials given 65-year jail terms.

While ex-US officials are receiving money from the MEK, rather than providing it, the tolerance of the close work with the group has been a Washington oddity for some time. There's some "enemy of my enemy is my friend" logic around this (the MEK hates the current Iranian regime), and some of its advocates view it as a government in waiting for Iran (much as they viewed Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress a decade ago). But the group has limited support inside Iran, and the Green Movement views the MEK with as much suspicion as the Iranian government does.

Now, a growing number of questions are being asked about the activism for the MEK.

A Washington Post article last week wonders if the officials could be prosecuted based on the Foreign Agent's Registration Act (FARA), which requires US citizens lobbying for foreign powers in the US to disclose their roles and officially register with the government. The article quotes David Cole, a scholar of constitutional law at Georgetown, as saying FARA should probably apply to the friends of the MEK. And continues:

Federal lobbying law defines a foreign "agent" as someone who acts "at the order, request, or under the direction or control, of a foreign principal, or of a person any of whose activities are directly or indirectly supervised, directed, controlled, financed, or subsidized in whole or in part by a foreign principal." It covers activities that include acting as a publicity agency or political consultant or representing the interests of the foreign group "before any agency or official of the government of the United States."

"The only defense would be if you can claim that you're doing it on your own, unpaid," said a retired senior U.S. official and expert on lobbying law, who spoke on the condition of

anonymity to discuss hypothetical cases covered by the statute. "But if you're getting money from the same group to make speeches, it's pretty hard to make the case."

There have been just the slightest stirrings of legal action recently. In June, NBC News cited unnamed sources alleging that "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" the MEK from the State terrorist list. "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 article cited an "Obama administration official" (unnamed, of course) as confirming the probe.

Will any of this lead anywhere? Probably not. It's hardly news that US law is applied unevenly when it comes to lobbying and connected retired officials. As for the MEK coming off the terrorist list? They remain there today as much as anything to avoid complicating negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, with many US officials concerned that a positive gesture to the group would do more harm than good to US interests. The status quo seems likely to prevail, at least under this administration.

Former presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich is one of the MEK and Ms. Rajavi's greatest admirers, and made the case for her group at its annual conference in France this June, which was attended by a passel of former US officials.

Mr. Gingrich referred to the MEK leader as "President" Rajavi, and told her enthusiastic supporters he was wowed by one of her recent speeches.

He said he hoped "that some people in the State Department might see the reality that this is a massive, worldwide movement for liberty in Iran and not anything like the State Department's descriptions and I think what you did yesterday was historic and extraordinary and needs to be driven home so that everybody that makes foreign policy decisions in the United States understands just how big this movement is getting ... and how bipartisan the American support for it is."

It's been a very long time since the MEK has carried out a terrorist attack, and it hasn't murdered a US citizen since the mid-1970s, when they killed two US officers attached to the US embassy in Tehran and four American contractors working in Iran. But the group worked closely with Saddam Hussein during his war with Iran in the 1980s, and was involved in the crackdown against his Kurdish and other domestic political opponents.

It retains an unsavory, cult-like reputation in many circles. Camp Ashraf in Iraq, its base of operations when the MEK was in business under Saddam Hussein, was for many years controlled entirely by the group. Former members have complained of being ordered to dissolve their marriages (because they distracted them from supporting Rajavi and her husband), to give up their personal property to the group, and of being physically prevented from leaving the organization by her loyalists.

Newt Gingrich's bow to Rajavi was more than a little ironic. While the gesture, as it generally is, was gracious, he hasn't been shy about making politics over other people's body posture in the pass. When he was still running for president in March, Gingrich released an ad attacking Obama for bowing to the king of Saudi Arabia.

Who's Hanging Out With The Iranian Terrorist Group Now?

by Jim Newell - The Atlantic, ProPublica, July2,2012

Every big- and middle-name Democrat and Republican loves raking in fees to speak to the exiled Iranian Marxist guerilla group MEK, an official member of the State Department's terrorist group list that also happens to hate the current Iranian regime. This seems pretty illegal, but hey, maybe we just love the Ayatollah and Ahmadinejad too much to see the legality of it all. Now let's meet an additional two faces who've been providing support to this official terrorist group recently: Newt Gingrich and columnist Clarence Page!

Fathead arrived in Paris last week to address the "principal leader" of MEK and greeted her with his finest curtsy:

When Newt Gingrich arrived in Paris last week to speak to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an Iranian exile umbrella group that's been based there since shortly after the 1979 revolution, he seemed to know exactly who Maryam Rajavi is. He praised Rajavi and her work several times in his speech, which he delivered as the prominent exile stood at his side. Before the speech, as he neared the end of a long line of attendees who stood in the rain to shake his hand, he turned to face Rajavi, smiled, and at approximately 1:02 minutes into the above video, folded at the waist and bowed solemnly. Rajavi, clothed head-to-toe in green, handed him a bouquet of flowers as the crowd cheered.

Of course Newt Gingrich did this. What's more fascinating is how working journalist Clarence Page of the Chicago Tribune found himself in such a position:

Late last month, syndicated columnist Clarence Page appeared at a rally in Paris in support of the Mujahadin-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian group that has been lobbying Washington to be removed from the U.S. government's list of designated foreign terrorist organizations.

Before a huge crowd waving portraits of MEK leaders Maryam and Massoud Rajavi as well as Iranian flags, Page called for the MEK to be removed from the official terrorist organization list.

Contacted about the appearance by ProPublica, Page said he has decided to give back his speaking fee for the event, as well as reimburse the cost of travel to and from France, which was paid for by a group called the Organizing Committee for Convention for Democracy in Iran.

"I thought they were simply a group of Iranian exiles who were opposed to the regime in Tehran," Page said. "I later found out they can be construed as a MEK front group, and I don't think it's worth it to my reputation to be perceived as a paid spokesman for any political cause.

The man who heard that a group called "the Organizing Committee for Convention for Democracy in Iran" would pay him and fly him to Paris to speak and didn't think anything was suspicious thinks he has a reputation to maintain? Dear God.

Iranian Terrorist Group M.E.K. Pays Big to Make History Go Away

By Elizabeth Flock, USNews.com, July 6, 2012

Come October 1, a federal appeals court decision will force the State Department to decide whether the exile-Iranian group Mujahadin-e Khalq, or M.E.K., belongs on the list of designated foreign terrorist organizations.

As recently as 2007, a State Department report warned that the M.E.K., retains "the capacity and will" to attack "Europe, the Middle East, the United States, Canada, and beyond".

The M.E.K., which calls for an overthrow of the Iranian government and is considered by many Iranians to be a cult, once fought for Saddam Hussein and in the 1970s was responsible for bombings, attempted plane hijackings, and political assassinations. It was listed as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997.

If the State Department does decide to delist M.E.K., whose name means "People's Holy Warriors of Iran," it will be with the blessing of dozens of congressmen.

A congressional resolution that urges Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to remove M.E.K. from the State Department list of foreign terrorist groups was signed by 99 politicians, including Rep. Darrell Issa, a California Republican, Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Democrat from Washington, D.C., and Alabama Republican Sen. Spencer Bachus.

Those signatures may have been obtained with real money to grease the wheels. A U.S. News investigation found that three major lobbying firms were together paid hundreds of thousands of dollars by U.S.-based Iranian-American community groups with ties to the M.E.K. to drum up support for the resolution.

Victoria Toensing of DiGenova & Toensing, a lobbying shop famous for its involvement in the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal, was paid \$110,000 in 2011 to lobby for the resolution. The firm Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld dedicated five lobbyists to getting signatures for the resolution, and was paid \$100,000 in 2012 and \$290,000 in 2011 to do so. Paul Marcone and Association similarly lobbied for the resolution, and received \$5,000 in 2010 and \$5,000 in 2011 for its efforts.

"It's a worthy cause," said Toensing, who believes the M.E.K. has reformed from its violent past. "Have you ever seen a more bipartisan disciplined group as the one that supported this issue"?

(Akin, Gump, et al. declined to comment to U.S. News. Paul Marcone said despite its history, the M.E.K. "has every right to petition the government on resolutions.")

While dozens of congressmen have signed on to the delist resolution, those no longer holding office appear to be even more supportive of the group.

Last week, at a Paris rally for the M.E.K., Newt Gingrich was captured on camera bowing to the Iranian exile-group's leader, Maryam Rajavi. (The M.E.K.'s political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, has its headquarters in Paris).

Also in attendance were former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley, and former Bush U.N. Ambassador John R. Bolton.

Video of the rally in Paris shows what appear to be tens of thousands of M.E.K. supporters waving flags and holding up pictures of Rajavi, who has called democracy "the spirit that guides our Resistance." Some assert the M.E.K. would prefer Iran to become a Marxist state, as it was founded by Marxist-Islamist Iranian students in the 1960s.

"The MEK are trying to portray themselves as a popular and democratic opposition to the current Iranian regime," said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The reality is that they're neither popular nor democratic".

A prominent Iranian journalist, who did not want to be named for fear of repercussions from the M.E.K., said that despite the group's attempts to present itself as the main Iranian dissident group, the majority of the Iranian diaspora "does not want to get close" to it. A 2011 New York Times story said most Iranians and Iraqis see the M.E.K. as a "repressive cult".

The "cult" descriptor isn't just popular opinion. A 2009 Rand study of the M.E.K. described the group as having "cultic practices" and "deceptive recruitment and public relations strategies".

Patrick Clawson, director of research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, which has been described as a pro-Israel group, describes the M.E.K. this way: "It's a cult. There's no other way to put it".

Clawson, who has spent time with M.E.K. members abroad and their supporters in the U.S., says politicians have been "misled" by "these charming individuals".

"They tell what seems at first glance to be a believable story," he said. "People in cults are charming sometimes. I mean, Scientologists convince movie stars".

There's no doubt the M.E.K. knows how to charm. When reached by U.S. News & World Report, the spokesman for the National Council of Iran (the M.E.K.'s Paris-based political arm), Shahin Gobadi, spent an extraordinary amount of time answering questions, both over the phone and by E-mail.

"I have sent you a lot," he said, after an E-mail arrived containing 17 attachments. "But I am happy to send much more".

Gobadi repeatedly said that the M.E.K. was working for a democratic future for Iran, emphasizing freedom of speech, abolition of the death penalty, equality for women, and peaceful coexistence with the rest of the world.

"The designation of the M.E.K. as a foreign terrorist organization was ... a goodwill gesture to the murderous regime in Iran as part of a policy of appeasing the mullahs," Gobadi said, skimming over the group's violent past. "Various senior U.S. officials have acknowledged this reality".

Among these officials is former Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean, who once called for Rajavi to be recognized as Iran's president.

As happened at the Paris rally last week, a number of politicians also deliver energetic speeches on behalf of the M.E.K.

Rendell, who has given at least eight supportive speeches, has made \$150,000 for his efforts.

The Treasury Department is currently investigating Rendell along with several former senior government officials for giving M.E.K. speeches for money, as transactions with a terrorist group are against the law. Treasury spokesman John Sullivan said that the

department "takes sanctions enforcements seriously," but would not give a timeline for when the investigation would be complete.

Rendell says his support for M.E.K. is humanitarian-based, as thousands of the group's members currently live in exile in a refugee camp in Iraq.

The humanitarian situation is undoubtedly real—Camp Ashraf has been attacked several times since the U.S. transferred control back to the Iraqi government in 2009. In April of last year, Iraqi security forces reportedly stormed the camp and killed 31, wounding 320 more, though news reports vary widely. The M.E.K.'s various websites are heavily Camp Ashraf-focused.

"I think our reneging on protecting Camp Ashraf is nothing short of disgraceful," Rendell said, calling it.

Ask any politician who has supported the M.E.K., though, and they are unlikely to be able to tell you very much about the group or its history.

Both Rendell and Giuliani, who has spoken at M.E.K. events in Paris, Geneva, and New York, and who was in Paris twice last week to advise the group, said they knew little about the group before their paid speaking gigs began.

Giuliani said he first learned about the group from former FBI head Louis Freeh, who told him the M.E.K. were a group of revolutionaries, not terrorists. Then, Giuliani said, he "did research." "And every time I go to one of these meetings, I am more convinced," he said.

Former State Department spokesman Crowley, who has been paid to speak at at least four M.E.K. events, acknowledged that the exile group has in the past "on more than occasion been on the wrong side of history." But Crowley said he became increasingly "intrigued" with the group during his time at the State Department, whose location on C Street the M.E.K. regularly visits. He said he believes "their pursuit now is peaceful".

Sadjadpour, the Carnegie analyst, finds it remarkable that so many politicians have supported a group with so much baggage. "In some cases it's greed, in some cases it's cluelessness, in some cases it's remarkably poor judgment, and often it's all of the above," he said of the political support.

While Gobadi repeatedly told U.S. News that the group is peaceful, a number of news reports allege that the M.E.K. may have been involved in a string of nuclear scientist assassinations over the last several years, with monetary and other aid from the U.S. and Israeli governments.

"On the premise that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, funding, arming or training M.E.K. is an important strategic tool for Israel and the U.S.," Dilshood Achilov, assistant professor of Middle East politics at East Tennessee State University, told the International Business Times of the nuclear scientist assassinations.

Gobadi called the allegations "absolutely absurd" and "directly from the textbook of the mullahs' Intelligence services".

But the New Yorker's Seymour Hersh this April gave credence to possible ties between the M.E.K. and the U.S. government, publishing a short piece that said the U.S.'s Joint Special Operations Command had trained members of the M.E.K starting in 2005. According to Hersh's sources, the training stopped sometime before President Obama took office. But "some American-supported covert operations continue in Iran," Hersh wrote, under the headline, the M.E.K. "Our men in Iran"?

Gobadi insists they aren't anyone's men. He says the M.E.K has "not received any funding or weapons from any foreign country and does not seek" it. "The Iranian crisis has an Iranian solution," he said.

Much of M.E.K.'s support, Gobadi says, comes from the Iranian diaspora. While he doesn't name the group's U.S. supporters, the Senate disclosure database reveals the Iranian American Community of North Texas and Iranian American Community of Northern California have been most active. Dozens of similar community groups came into existence after the U.S. government shut down a partner office of the M.E.K. in D.C. in 2003, but many have since disappeared. Requests for comments from both community groups were not returned, but it's clear that they have had enormous fundraising and sway.

IACNT and IANCC paid the lobbying firms in Washington thousands of dollars to get signatures for the congressional resolution. They paid the speakers lobby thousands of dollars to get Rendell, Giuliani and Crowley, participants said.

And they funded a series of sleek ads that have aired on channels like Fox calling for a delisting of the M.E.K.

While it initially looked as though the M.E.K. would be delisted in October, new comments from the White House suggest the group won't be.

In June, a senior administration official told reporters in a conference call that the M.E.K. may have "over-interpreted" recent events to its favor. "It appears that MEK leaders believe that the Secretary has no choice now but to delist them," the official said. "That is, quite plainly, wrong".

Gobadi said he can't predict the outcome, but can only be hopeful the "unlawful designation" can come to an end.

Despite hundreds of thousands of dollars in effort, that may be impossible while doubts over the group remain.

US News reporter Seth Cline contributed to this report.

U.S. steps up warnings on Camp Ashraf in Iraq

Reuters, Reporting By Andrew Quinn; Editing by Paul Simao , July 6, 2012

The United States warned an Iranian dissident group on Friday that time was running out for it to vacate its Iraqi base camp, and said its hope to be taken off the official U.S. blacklist of terrorist organizations could depend on its compliance.

Daniel Benjamin, the State Department's coordinator for counter-terrorism, said the Mujahadin-e Khalq (MEK) must complete its move from the Camp Ashraf facility, which the Iraqi government has vowed to close by July 20.

"It is past time for the MEK to recognize that Ashraf is not going to remain an MEK base in Iraq," Benjamin told reporters, saying Baghdad's patience was running out.

"The Iraqi government is committed to closing it, and any plan to wait out the government in the hope that something will change is irresponsible and dangerous."

The dissident group, which calls for the overthrow of Iran's clerical leaders, is no longer welcome in Iraq under the Shi'ite-led government that came to power after Saddam Hussein's downfall in 2003.

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

The United States added the MEK to its official list of foreign terrorist organizations in 1997, but the group has since said that it has renounced violence and has mounted a legal and public relations campaign to have its terrorist designation dropped.

COURT DEADLINE

Last month, a U.S. appeals court asked U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to make her determination on the MEK's status by October, a ruling hailed as a victory by MEK supporters.

But U.S. officials have stressed that Clinton - who has herself said that the disposition of Camp Ashraf will be key to her eventual decision - may still find against the group.

"MEK leaders appear to believe that the secretary has no choice now but to delist them. That conclusion is quite plainly wrong," Benjamin said.

"The MEK's relocation will assist the secretary in determining whether the organization remains invested in its violent past or is committed to leaving that past behind."

Despite repeated U.S. appeals to close the camp and the successful relocation of some 2,000 MEK members to a new holding facility near Baghdad, the group continues to have 1,200-1,300 members at Camp Ashraf and has taken no steps to relocate them since May 5.

The MEK has complained of mistreatment and poor conditions at the new facility, a large former U.S. military base, and U.S. officials say they have urged the Iraqi government to take steps to address some of the group's concerns.

Daniel Fried, Clinton's special advisor on Ashraf, said that while the Iraqi government had shown flexibility on earlier deadlines for Camp Ashraf, there was no indication it would do so again unless there were signs of significant movement from the camp by July 20.

"That date should put everyone on notice, and the MEK on notice, that it needs to proceed with the next convoy of people out of Camp Ashraf," Fried said.

America's own terror group Mojahedin Khalq

Glenn Greenwald, Salon , July12,2012

Huffington Post publishes, and then deletes, a post by a MeK spokesman. What does this tell us about Terrorism?

Yesterday morning, The Huffington Post published a post by Hossein Abedini, who was identified in the byline as a "Member of Parliament in exile of Iranian Resistance." His extended HuffPost bio says that he "belongs to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran" (NCRI). The NCRI is the political arm of the Mujahideen-e Khalq, (MeK), the Iranian dissident group (and longtime Saddam ally) that

has been formally designated by the U.S. State Department since 1997 as a Terrorist organization, yet has been paying large sums of money to a bipartisan cast of former U.S. officials to advocate on its behalf (the in-hiding President of the NCRI, Massoud Rajavi, is, along with his wife Maryam Rajavi, MeK's leader). Abedini, the HuffPost poster, has been identified as a MeK spokesman in news reports, and has identified himself the same way when, for instance, writing letters to NBC News objecting to negative reports about the group.

Yesterday's HuffPost piece by Abedini touted a recent rally, held on June 23 in Paris, which, he claimed, was attended by "over 100,000 Iranian exiles and supporters of the Iranian resistance from five continents." The news report cited by Abedini actually says that "tens of thousands" of Iranians participated, and — reflecting what seems to be MeK's bizarrely unlimited budget — they were transported by "more than a thousand buses . . . from all over Europe." Abedini boasted that the rally's keynote speaker was MeK leader Rajavi (whom he calls "the President-elect of the Iranian Resistance") — it was a MeK rally — and quotes her at length demanding the removal of MeK from the list of Terror organizations

As usual for a MeK event, Abedini was able to tout more than a dozen former high-level U.S. political officials from both parties who spoke to the rally, many of whom (if not all) have been repeatedly paid large sums of money for their MeK speeches. According to Abedini, this latest rally included many of the usual MeK shills: former GOP New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania Ed Rendell, former Democratic New Mexico Governor and U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson, former GOP U.N. Ambassador John Bolton, former GOP Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Democratic State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley, and several retired U.S. Generals. Shortly after the HuffPost piece appeared, several people on Twitter, the first of which (I believe) was the Iranian journalist Hooman Majd, noted that The Huffington Post had published a propaganda piece from a designated Terror group and wondered whether they would do so for all such Terror groups such as Al Qaeda. After several others, including The New York Times' Robert Mackey and myself, noted the oddity that HuffPost was publishing pieces from a designated Terrorist group, HuffPost deleted the piece. If one goes now to the URL where the post first appeared, one finds this: "Editor's Note: This post is no longer available on the Huffington Post" (the post can still be read in its cached version). No explanation is given for the deletion, but a HuffPost spokesperson, Rhoades Alderson, last night responded to my inquiry about it as follows:

It was published by mistake. By policy, we don't publish blog posts by people affiliated with designated terrorist organizations. The blog editor who published it was unaware that NCRI is MEK's political arm. When the mistake was discovered the post was removed.

Despite this "policy," the same post by Abedini remains on the HuffPost's UK site. Moreover, HuffPost has previously published numerous pieces from Abedini including one linking the Syrian and Iranian "resistance" and demanding Western support for both, another branding Iran the "epicenter of terrorism," and other posts spouting the MeK line. All of those posts by Abedini remain on the HuffPost site.

To be clear, I don't find HuffPost's conduct — either in publishing posts from MeK spokespeople or removing them — to be objectionable. That's not the point here. I personally believe it's better to hear from all groups and to have all viewpoints aired rather

than trying with inevitable futility to suppress them, but if HuffPost really does have a policy against publication of “people affiliated with designated terrorist organizations,” then — just like laws criminalizing the providing of “material support to Terrorist organizations” — it should apply equally to MeK and those who work with it (including MeK’s list of paid D.C. political celebrities).

[In the wake of 9/11, the U.S. Government instructed American media outlets not to broadcast any statements from Osama bin Laden on the ground that he might embed in his statements coded signals to his followers to activate sleeper cells on American soil -- perhaps he would use the nose wiggle employed by Bewitched's Samantha Stevens to unleash her magic powers -- and many American media outlets (needless to say) dutifully complied. It seems clear that the real reason for suppression of those Al Qaeda statements was to ensure that Americans, who were understandably asking "Why Do They Hate Us"? in the wake of 9/11, would be prevented from hearing Al Qaeda's actual grievances about U.S. aggression so that they could instead be told that They Hate Us for Our Freedom; George Bush on September 21, 2001: "Americans are asking 'Why do they hate us?' . . . They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other". It's far preferable, in my view, to allow all views to be aired, but a ban on Terror groups and their supporters should be equally applied.]

What makes this HuffPost event notable is that it is inconceivable that they would publish posts from spokespeople or paid advocates for other designated Terrorist groups which do not command widespread support among Washington’s elites — such as, say, Al Qaeda, or Hamas, or Hezbollah. MeK is treated differently because they are Our Terrorists. NBC News reported that “deadly attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists are being carried out by an Iranian dissident group [MeK] that is financed, trained and armed by Israel’s secret service,” while The New Yorker’s Seymour Hersh detailed in April that the U.S. has provided extensive training to MeK operatives, on U.S. soil. This entire MeK controversy has, as vividly as any event in a long time, illustrated the core truth of Terrorism and the laws against it: the entire concept has no purpose in American political discourse and law other than to delegitimize and criminalize support for groups which use violence in opposition to American violence and aggression, while sanctioning and enabling those groups which use such violence to advance America’s interests.

MeK used to work in close cooperation with Saddam (during the time Saddam was America’s decreed Enemy, rather than Ally), so they were therefore Bad: Terrorists. Indeed, in 2003, when the Bush administration was advocating an attack on Iraq, one of the prime reasons it cited was “Saddam Hussein’s Support for International Terrorism,” and it circulated a document purporting to prove that assertion, in which one of the first specific accusations listed was this:

Iraq shelters terrorist groups including the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), which has used terrorist violence against Iran and in the 1970s was responsible for killing several U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilians.

So just nine years ago, Saddam’s links to MeK were cited by the U.S. Government as proof that he sheltered Terrorist groups. Now, the MeK works for the interests of (and in cooperation with) Israel and the U.S., so suddenly, they are now Good, and the most Serious Beltway officials are free to openly take money from and advocate for this Terror

group (as a result, the MeK is, predictably, highly likely to be rewarded by being removed by the Obama administration from the Terrorist list). They are basically the Ahmad Chalabis of Iran: despite being widely despised in Iran for their support for Iraq in its war against Iran, they are being deceitfully held out as the True Pro-American, Pro-Israel, Pro-Western-Intervention Voice of the Iranian People (paid MeK shill Howard Dean actually argued that the U.S. should recognize MeK's leader as the legitimate President of Iran). That HuffPost responded to yesterday's pressure by removing the MeK post and citing its policy against publishing those "affiliated with designated terrorist organizations" is valuable in the sense that it highlights the absurd travesty of "Terrorism" in U.S. politics. For legal purposes, at least, MeK is every bit the Terrorist organization that Al Qaeda is, yet they are now Our Terrorists, and are thus heralded and rewarded rather than scorned.

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It was recently revealed that Clarence Page, the long-time Chicago Tribune columnist, was paid \$20,000 to speak at this same MeK rally in Paris, along with travel expenses; once that was revealed, The Chicago Tribune reprimanded him and he announced that he would return the fee. It's just extraordinary how much cash is flying around and ending up in the pockets of prominent and influential Americans in order to shill for this Terror group. On a different note, The Guardian's Iranian columnist, Saeed Kamali Dehghan, today details how sanctions against Iran are severely harming ordinary Iranians while doing little to undermine the government or its nuclear research program. The foreign policy analyst Reza H. Akbari points out the same thing here.

Finally, a new Pentagon report to Congress stresses, as the Federation of American Scientists put it, that "that while developing offensive capabilities, Iran's military posture is essentially defensive in character" – specifically, "Iran's military doctrine remains designed to slow an invasion; target its adversaries' economic, political, and military interests; and force a diplomatic solution to hostilities while avoiding any concessions that challenge its core interests." Let's repeat that: quite understandably, "Iran's military posture is essentially defensive in character."

Caught in a Bad Alliance

Jeremiah Goulka, The American Prospect, July 12,2012

The Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) is in the news again. Images of Newt Gingrich bowing to the Iranian dissident group's leader, Maryam Rajavi, after speaking to MEK members at a Paris rally, and Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page's unauthorized, paid speech at the same event have brought renewed attention to the MEK's expensive (and possibly illegal) lobbying operation in Washington.

Gingrich and Page aren't the only high-profile figures the MEK has enlisted in its bid to get off the State Department's foreign terrorist organization list. The group has persuaded a number of onetime officials, including former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former Homeland Security Adviser Francis Fragos Townsend, former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and former Vermont

Governor Howard Dean, to argue its case. These public figures have taken money, in some cases more than \$30,000 per speech, to speak on the group's behalf. As a result, the U.S. Treasury Department has begun to look into the fees, because, according to the Supreme Court, "advocacy performed in coordination with, or at the direction of, a foreign terrorist organization" constitutes the federal crime of "material support of terrorism." The speakers have also failed to register as lobbyists under the Foreign Agent Registration Act, and there is an increasing push for criminal investigations.

As it turns out, however, many of the public figures openly admit that they did not know much about the MEK when they agreed to attend the events. Many were invited by suspected MEK front groups with names such as the Organizing Committee for Convention for Democracy in Iran and the Iranian American Community of North Texas, and they approached the ex-officials through their agents. Former chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and co-chair of the 9/11 Commission Lee Hamilton, who also spoke in support of the MEK, told *The New York Times*, "I don't know a lot about the group." Clarence Page told ProPublica that he thought he was giving a talk on promoting democracy and regime change in Iran.

Accidentally or not, though, the speakers were helping to raise the profile and legitimize the aims of a cult group that will not bring democracy to Iran and has no popular support in the country. And while the latest news stories on the MEK highlight its immediate goal of getting off the terrorist list, they miss the group's real aim: to have the United States install the MEK as Iran's new government. That would mean war. The MEK may deny wanting violent regime change, but the only conceivable way it could become the next government in Tehran would be at the head of a U.S. invasion force.

Once upon a time, the MEK did enjoy some measure of popular support in Iran. But after getting shoved aside by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's party after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the MEK spent the next two decades launching terrorist attacks against the new regime and its military, harming bystanders in several instances. The MEK joined sides with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), moving to camps in Iraq in 1986 and fighting against Iranian conscripts. Frustrated that Saddam failed to install it in power in Tehran by the end of the war, the MEK attempted its own invasion of Iran (using more of Saddam Hussein's military munificence), resulting in the death of thousands of its members. These acts destroyed the MEK's credibility among Iranians. Trapped in the Iraqi desert, the group's leaders transformed the MEK into a cult after the failed invasion—engaging in such practices as mandated divorce and celibacy, sleep deprivation, public shaming, separation of families, and information control—and continued its terrorist attacks in Iran.

Now the MEK, through its Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran, has ramped up its public-relations campaign to convince the outside world that it is the biggest Iranian opposition group, one dedicated to the values of Western liberal democracy. (It just happens to have a parliament-in-waiting and a president-elect—Rajavi, of course.) To bolster its case, the MEK inflames fears of a nuclear Iran, consistently claiming that the

country has an ongoing nuclear-weapons program, notwithstanding the opposite, unanimous opinion of U.S., European, and Israeli officials and the Iranian supreme leader's fatwa against building one.

It remains to be seen if the MEK's costly lobbying campaign will pay off. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has until October 1 to decide whether to keep the MEK on the foreign terrorist organization list; otherwise, a federal court will automatically delist it. That's just a few short weeks before the presidential election. Republican candidate Mitt Romney claimed in December that he had never heard of the MEK. Nevertheless, he is using the question of Iranian nukes—kept in the public eye by the MEK and its skills—in a desperate effort to make President Barack Obama look weak on national-security issues. Romney has also surrounded himself with a hawkish national-security team that includes several MEK supporters, such as Bush administration veterans like former U.N. Representative John Bolton, who believes that engagement with Tehran is “delusional” and that “the only real alternative to a nuclear Iran is pre-emptive military force”—the sooner the better. Bolton's writings suggest that he hopes that the so-called P5+1 talks over Iran's nuclear program will fail. (The next round of negotiations is next week.)

But the MEK's supporters and other hawks who insist on wanting regime change in Iran need to understand that, in this case, the enemy of my enemy is not my friend. The MEK is a bad ally. It has been a bad ally in peace, and it would be a bad ally in war and reconstruction. Aligning ourselves with the MEK would undermine any attempt at credibility among Iranians because it would make us look like dupes. The public figures who have spoken in support of the MEK are dangerously mistaken when they describe the group as “a force for good, and the best hope we have” (Rendell) and “a massive worldwide movement for liberty in Iran” (Gingrich). On the contrary, this deceptive foreign cult is pouring millions of dollars into an effort to steer the United States toward war.