

# ParsBrief

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### UN envoy welcomes last major transfer of Iranian exiles MEK

UN News Centre, September 18, 2012

The United Nations envoy in Iraq on Sunday welcomed the last major relocation of Iranian exiles from a camp outside of the capital, Baghdad, and called for a renewed focus on resettling the residents in third countries.

"This is an important step as we near the end of the relocation process. I would like to thank the residents for their cooperation," said Martin Kobler, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

"I would also like to thank the Government of Iraq for ensuring this last major relocation and paving the way for the peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf under the terms of the memorandum of understanding," he added in a news release.

The issue of Camp Ashraf – located in eastern Iraq and 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.

The last major relocation convoy, carrying 680 residents, has arrived in Camp Hurriya, where a process to determine refugee status is being carried out by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Of the 3,280 residents originally in Camp Ashraf, only a small group now remains on a temporary basis to arrange the details pursuant to the closure of the camp, according to UNAMI.

UN monitors will continue to oversee the process, including the relocation of remaining residents to Camp Hurriya.

Now that the majority of the residents have been transferred, Mr. Kobler called for a renewed focus on resettlement. "I urge the international community to speed up its efforts to accept residents in third countries," he said.

### Syrian security forces arrest five MKO terrorists

Press TV, August 12, 2012

Syrian government forces have reportedly arrested five members of the terrorist Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) along with 35 other gunmen as they were trying to sneak across the border into the crisis-hit Arab state.

A Syrian security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the government forces arrested 40 terrorists on Monday as they attempted to enter Syria, Fars News Agency reported on Sunday.

The unnamed official added that five of the detainees were identified as MKO members following a full-scale investigation into the capture.

The detained MKO terrorists have confessed that the MKO is training insurgents on the Turkish soil near the border with Syria, while certain Arab and Western states are providing necessary support for their activities.

The report comes as Iraqi and Syrian security officials maintain that a large number of MKO members have entered Syria over the past few days.

The officials have also warned against MKO's training of terrorists in Turkey as well as the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq.

Director of Iran's Habilian Association Seyyed Mohammad Javad Hasheminejad had announced on May 28 that the MKO is preparing to launch a massive terrorist operation in Syria.

Syria has been experiencing unrest since mid-March 2011, with many people, including large number of security forces, killed in the turmoil.

While the West and the Syrian opposition accuse the government of the killings, Damascus blames outlaws, saboteurs and insurgents for the unrest, insisting that it is being orchestrated from abroad.

#### MEK decision: multimillion-dollar campaign led to removal from terror list

Chris McGreal in Washington, guardian.co.uk, September 22, 2012

Revealed: the steady flow of funds to members of Congress, lobbying firms and former officials in support of Iranian group

Supporters of a designated Iranian terrorist organisation have won a long struggle to see it unbanned in the US after pouring millions of dollars into an unprecedented campaign of political donations, hiring Washington lobby groups and payments to former top administration officials.

A Guardian investigation, drawing partly on data researched by the Centre for Responsive Politics, a group tracking the impact of money in US politics, has identified a steady flow of funds from key Iranian American organisations and their leaders into the campaign to have the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran removed from the list of terrorist organisations.

The US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, is expected to notify Congress that the MEK will be removed from the terrorism list in the coming days.

The campaign to bury the MEK's bloody history of bombings and assassinations that killed American businessmen, Iranian politicians and thousands of civilians, and to portray it as a loyal US ally against the Islamic government in Tehran has seen large sums of money directed at three principal targets: members of Congress, Washington lobby groups and influential former officials.

Prominent among the members of Congress who have received fund is Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the chair of the House of Representatives foreign affairs committee. She has accepted at least \$20,000 in donations from Iranian American groups or their leaders to her political campaign fund.

Other recipients include Congressman Bob Filner, who was twice flown to address pro-MEK events in France and has pushed resolutions resolutions in the House of Representatives calling for the group to be unbanned. More than \$14,000 in expenses for Filner's Paris trips were met by the head of an Iranian American group who also paid close to \$1m to a Washington lobby firm working to get the MEK unbanned.

A Texas Congressman, Ted Poe, received thousands of dollars in donations from the head of a pro-MEK group in his state at a time when he was a regular speaker on behalf of its unbanning at events across the US, describing the organisation as the ticket to regime change in Iran.

Mike Rogers, chairman of the House of Representatives intelligence committee, has also received the backing of individuals and groups that support the unbanning of the MEK. Rogers has been among the strongest supporters in Congress of delisting the group, sponsoring resolutions and pressing other members of Congress to support the cause.

A leading advocate of unbanning the MEK and chairman of the foreign affairs committee's oversight subcommittee, congressman Dana Rohrabacher, has received thousands of dollars in donations from supporters of the banned group this year alone.

The Guardian sought comment from Ros-Lehtinen, Rogers, Filner, Poe and Rohrabacher. Only Rohrabacher responded.

He said he was comfortable accepting donations from MEK supporters but that the money has no influence on his position that it should be unbanned.

"I wouldn't doubt that people would donate to my campaign if it's something that they see as beneficial to them, to what they believe in, whether it's the MEK or whether it's anybody else," he said.

"The question is whether it's the right position to take or not and whether it's a benefit to the people of the United States as a whole. In this case I've no doubt that supporting the MEK under this brutal attack from the Mullah regime [in Tehran] is in the interests of what I believe in but also in the interests of the people of the United States."

Rohrabacher said the MEK's past attacks on Americans, its bombing campaign in Iran that killed top politicians and civilians, and its support of Saddam Hussein were history and the group has turned its back on violence. He also denied that public support for a designated terrorist organisation might put him in conflict with the law.

"This isn't a bad group. A long time ago, in their history, they certainly had a questionable time – 20, 30, 40 years ago. But I don't know of any evidence they've engaged in terrorism for many, many years," he said. "They're not a terrorist group simply because some bureaucrats in the state department say so."

Three top Washington lobby firms - DLA Piper; Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld; and DiGenova & Toensing - have been paid a total of nearly \$1.5 million over the past year to press the US administration and legislators to support the delisting of the MEK and protection for its members in camps in Iraq.

Two other lobby groups were hired for much smaller amounts. The firms employed former members of Congress to press their ex-colleagues on Capitol Hill to back the unbanning of the MEK.

Scores of former senior officials have been paid up to \$40,000 to make speeches in support of the MEK's delisting. Those who have received money include the former

chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, General Hugh Shelton; ex-FBI director Louis Freeh; and Michael Mukasey, who as attorney general oversaw the prosecution of terrorism cases.

The former Pennsylvania governor, Ed Rendell, has accepted more than \$150,000 in speaking fees at events in support of the MEK's unbanning. Clarence Page, a columnist for the Chicago Tribune, was paid \$20,000 to speak at the rally. Part of the money has been paid through speakers bureaus on the US east coast.

Others accepted only travel costs, although in some cases that involved expensive trips to Europe.

In June, Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the US House of Representatives and Republican presidential candidate, flew to Paris to address a pro-MEK rally and meet its co-leader, Maryam Rajavi. He was criticised for bowing to her.

Congressman Rohrabacher has described the lobbying campaign as one of the most effective he has seen on Capitol Hill. It has galvanised powerful support for delisting the MEK far beyond those receiving political contributions, lobbying fees or other payments.

Ros-Lehtinen has been a vigorous proponent of recognition of the MEK, flying around the country to speak in support of unbanning the group and pressing the issue among fellow members of Congress. She has accepted an award from one group funding the campaign to delist the MEK. Other recipients of political donations, including Rogers, Filner and Rohrabacher, have also lobbied other members of Congress to support the unbanning. As a result, nearly 100 members of Congress have co-sponsored a resolution demanding the Obama administration to delist the MEK.

Last month, 17 former senior officials and US generals called on the state department to remove the group's terrorist designation. Among them were General James Jones, Barack Obama's former national security adviser; Tom Ridge, the former homeland security director; as well as Mukasey, Freeh and Rendell.

Some of the same politicians and former officials have also targeted newspapers and online publications in a campaign of opinion articles and letters aimed at changing the image of the MEK as a terrorist group.

The campaign has in part been funded by substantial donations from Iranian Americans and a web of organisations they lead from Florida to Texas and California.

The most generous benefactors include:

- Saeid Ghaemi, head of Colorado's Iranian American Community, who paid close to \$900,000 of his own money to a Washington lobby firm for its work to get the MEK unbanned.
- Ali Soudjani, president of the Iranian American Society of Texas. He gave close to \$100,000 over the past five years to congressional campaign funds. His organisation paid more than \$110,000 in fees to lobbyists last year.
- Ahmad Moeinimanesh, leader of the Iranian American Community of Northern California. The group paid \$400,000 to a lobby firm. Moeinimanesh made personal donations to Ros-

Lehtinen's campaign even though her constituency is several thousand miles from where he lives.

Some of the payments have prompted an investigation by the US treasury department. It is examining the fees paid to Shelton, Freeh, Mukasey and Rendell, and possibly others, to see if they breach laws against "material support for a terrorist group". In cases involving links to other banned organisations, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, individuals have received long jail sentences for indirect financial support.

The original source of the considerable sums involved is not always clear as groups making political donations or funding lobby firms are not required to declare their origin. Previously the MEK has relied in part on funding from Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

Soudjani told the Guardian that the moneys were raised from Iranian Americans in the US. "The Iranian community is wealthy. It has more than \$600bn in the United States. This is pennies for supporting freedom," he said.

Asked if his own donations to members of Congress was specifically because of their positions on the MEK, he replied: "Yes, it is."

However, Soudjani was careful to say that the support is not for the MEK as an organisation, which could open donors to investigation under anti-terrorism laws.

"We are not giving material support to the MEK. We are supporting freedom of speech for justice and peace in Iran," he said.

### Terror delisting the MEK is a cynical sham

By Richard Silverstein ,guardian.co.uk, September 22, 2012

The dissident group's lavish lobbying has paid off: hoping to look tough on Iran, the Obama administration has enlisted the MEK in a proxy war

The MEK, which was banned in 1997, supported the Islamic revolution in Iran and later allied itself with the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Photograph: Jose Luis Magana/AP  
US officials leaked to several news outlets Friday an impending decision by the Obama administration that it intends to remove the Iranian dissident group Mujahadeen e-Khalq (MEK) from the treasury department's terror list.

Historically, the group joined together with Islamists to topple the Shah in 1979. But after it assassinated an Iranian president, prime minister and supreme court justice, Ayatollah Khomeini turned on its members and approved the massacre of hundreds of them.

At that point, the MEK set itself the mission of overthrowing the Iranian Islamist regime. It went into exile to France and Saddam Hussein also offered it refuge in Iraq. It is also known for assassinating US diplomats, military personnel and others.

It now claims it has renounced terror and devotes itself to establishing an Iranian democratic form of government that would replace the rule of the Ayatollahs. But former leaders and members of the MEK have noted the ruthlessness and duplicity of the group. They believe that the Iran it envisions would be a dictatorship rather than a democracy. These dissident former members decry the MEK's slavish worship of its leader Maryam Rajavi in a cult of personality not unlike that of North Korea and other Communist regimes.

The Iranian dissidents have plotted for years to be removed from the terror list. They enlisted numerous Republican and Democratic officials to lobby on its behalf. Instead of paying lobbying fees to them, it offered honoraria ranging from \$10,000-\$50,000 per speech to excoriate the US government for its allegedly shabby treatment of the MEK.

Among those who joined the group's gravy train are former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell, Rudy Giuliani, Alan Dershowitz, and former FBI director Louis Freeh. Many of them profess to have little interest in the money they have collected. Instead, they claim they are sincerely moved by the group's suffering in Iraq and wish to correct an injustice. I'm sure the money doesn't hurt.

Analysts writing about the MEK and alienated members reject the group's claim that it has renounced terror. Seymour Hersh recently published an expose reporting that as late as 2007, US special forces had offered Iranians training at a secret Nevada facility in covert operations. It provided them arms and communications equipment and black ops training for their anti-regime terror activities inside Iran.

A confidential Israeli source who is a former senior minister and IDF officer reported to me that the Mossad has used the MEK over many years, both to leak purported Iranian government documents of questionable provenance and engage in acts of sabotage against key figures in the Iranian regime. My source and other journalists have reported the MEK assassinated four nuclear scientists and caused an explosion that obliterated an Iranian Revolutionary Guard missile base.

Last week, the director of Iran's nuclear program reported an August explosion disrupted the power lines to the new Fordo uranium enrichment facility. My source says this sabotage was also a product of the Mossad-MEK collaboration.

The US delisting of the group is a sham. The Obama administration isn't even claiming the MEK has renounced terrorism. If it did, it knows that it's likely such a statement would rebound should the MEK's activities become exposed. The chief argument offered in defense of the change of heart is that the group has agreed to relocate from Camp Ashraf, where it's been a thorn in the side of the Iraqi Shi'ite led government, to a US facility, from which the residents would be relocated to foreign countries.

So, we're removing a terror group from the list not because it's stopped being a terror group, but because it's agreed to leave Iraq, where it had been a destabilizing influence. That's not a principled position. It's a position based on pure political calculation.

The MEK is useful in the covert war the US and Israel are waging against Iran's nuclear program. It is our proxy, much as the Cuban rebels involved in the Bay of Pigs operation served our interests in the fight against Fidel Castro; and the Afghan mujahideen fought a dirty war for us against the Soviets.

In fact, Alan Dershowitz has argued that the MEK should be removed from the treasury list not because it has stopped being terrorist, but because it collaborated with US covert activities inside Iran, meaning that it was serving US interests. Or put more simply: the MEK may be terrorists, but they're our terrorists.

Delisting the MEK serves several goals for President Obama. He can flex his muscles in the face of both the Iranians and Republicans. To the Iranians, he's implicitly saying he will make alliance with their worst enemy as long as they resist him at the negotiating table. To Mitt Romney, he's saying he's willing to get tough with the Iranians. This inoculates him



from campaign attacks claiming he's soft on Iran or that he's willing to let Iran get the bomb.

You can bet that one of the president's campaign talking points will be that he delisted the MEK. It will establish his anti-Iran bona fides when the TV ads paid for by Sheldon Adelson's anticipated \$100m start airing in the coming weeks.

Just as President Obama's anti-terror policies, including targeted assassinations and drone strikes, have betrayed his previous denunciations of such violations of constitutional principles, so his granting a seal of approval to the MEK marks a further erosion of his commitment to diplomacy and negotiation as the means for resolving international disputes, including the one with Iran.

### Five lessons from the de-listing of MEK as a terrorist group

By Glenn Greenwald ,guardian.co.uk, September 23, 2012

A separate justice system for American Muslims, the US embrace of terrorism, and other key political facts are highlighted

The Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), or People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, is an Iranian dissident group that has been formally designated for the last 15 years by the US State Department as a "foreign terrorist organization". When the Bush administration sought to justify its attack on Iraq in 2003 by accusing Saddam Hussein of being a sponsor of "international terrorism", one of its prime examples was Iraq's "sheltering" of the MEK. Its inclusion on the terrorist list has meant that it is a felony to provide any "material support" to that group.

Nonetheless, a large group of prominent former US government officials from both political parties has spent the last several years receiving substantial sums of cash to give speeches to the MEK, and have then become vocal, relentless advocates for the group, specifically for removing them from the terrorist list. Last year, the Christian Science Monitor thoroughly described "these former high-ranking US officials - who represent the full political spectrum - [who] have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to speak in support of the MEK." They include Democrats Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Wesley Clark, Bill Richardson, and Lee Hamilton, and Republicans Rudy Giuliani, Fran Townsend, Tom Ridge, Michael Mukasey, and Andrew Card. Other prominent voices outside government, such as Alan Dershowitz and Elie Wiesel, have been enlisted to the cause and are steadfast MEK advocates.

Money has also been paid to journalists such as The Washington Post's Carl Bernstein and the Chicago Tribune's Clarence Page. Townsend is a CNN contributor and Rendell is an MSNBC contributor, yet those MEK payments are rarely, if ever, disclosed by those media outlets when featuring those contributors (indeed, Townsend can go on CNN to opine on Iran, even urging that its alleged conduct be viewed as "an act for war", with no disclosure whatsoever during the segment of her MEK payments). Quoting a State Department official, CSM detailed how the scheme works:

"Your speech agent calls, and says you get \$20,000 to speak for 20 minutes. They will send a private jet, you get \$25,000 more when you are done, and they will send a team to



brief you on what to say.' . . . The contracts can range up to \$100,000 and include several appearances."

On Friday, the Guardian's Washington reporter Chris McGreal added substantial information about the recipients of the funding and, especially, its sources. As he put it, the pro-MEK campaign "has seen large sums of money directed at three principal targets: members of Congress, Washington lobby groups and influential former officials", including the GOP Congressman who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, Mike Rogers.

What makes this effort all the more extraordinary are the reports that MEK has actually intensified its terrorist and other military activities over the last couple of years. In February, NBC News reported, citing US officials, that "deadly attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists are being carried out by [MEK]" as it is "financed, trained and armed by Israel's secret service". While the MEK denies involvement, the Iranian government has echoed these US officials in insisting that the group was responsible for those assassinations. NBC also cited "unconfirmed reports in the Israeli press and elsewhere that Israel and the MEK were involved in a Nov. 12 explosion that destroyed the Iranian missile research and development site at Bin Kaneh, 30 miles outside Tehran".

In April, the New Yorker's Seymour Hersh reported that the US itself has for years provided extensive training to MEK operatives, on US soil (in other words, the US government provided exactly the "material support" for a designated terror group which the law criminalizes). Hersh cited numerous officials for the claim that "some American-supported covert operations continue in Iran today." The MEK's prime goal is the removal of Iran's government.

Despite these reports that the MEK has been engaged in terrorism and other military aggression against Iran - or, more accurately: likely because of them - it was announced on Friday the US State Department will remove MEK from its list of terrorist organizations. This event is completely unsurprising. In May, I noted the emergence of reports that the State Department would do so imminently.

Because this MEK scam more vividly illustrates the rot and corruption at the heart of America's DC-based political culture than almost any episode I can recall, I've written numerous times about it. But now that the de-listing is all but official, it is worthwhile to take note of the five clear lessons it teaches:

Lesson One: There is a separate justice system in the US for Muslim Americans.

The past decade has seen numerous "material support" prosecutions of US Muslims for the most trivial and incidental contacts with designated terror groups. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any Muslim who gets with sneezing distance of such a group is subject to prosecution. Indeed, as I documented last week, many of them have been prosecuted even for core First Amendment activities: political advocacy deemed supportive of such groups.

When they're convicted - and marginalized Muslims, usually poor and powerless, almost always are - they typically are not only consigned to prison for decades, but are placed in America's most oppressive and restrictive prison units. As a result, many law-abiding Muslim Americans have become petrified of donating money to Muslim charities or even speaking out against perceived injustices out of fear - the well-grounded fear - that they

will be accused of materially supporting a terror group. This is all part of the pervasive climate of fear in which many American Muslims live.

Yet here we have a glittering, bipartisan cast of former US officials and other prominent Americans who are swimming in cash as they advocate on behalf of a designated terrorist organization. After receiving their cash, Howard Dean and Rudy Giuliani met with MEK leaders, and Dean actually declared that the group's leader should be recognized by the west as President of Iran. That is exactly the type of coordinated messaging with a terrorist group with the supreme court found, in its 2010 Humanitarian Law v. Holder ruling, could, consistent with the First Amendment, lead to prosecution for "material support of terrorism" (ironically, numerous MEK shills, including CNN's Townsend, praised the supreme court for its broad reading of that statute when they thought, correctly, that it was being applied to Muslims).

Yet other than a reported Treasury Department investigation several months ago to determine the source of Ed Rendell's MEK speaking fees - an investigation that seems to have gone nowhere - there has been no repercussions whatsoever from this extensive support given by these DC luminaries to this designated terror group. Now that MEK will be removed from the terror list, there almost certainly never will be any consequences (as a legal matter, the de-listing should have no impact on the possible criminality of this MEK support: the fact that a group is subsequently removed from the list does not retroactively legalize the providing of material support when it was on the list).

In sum, there are numerous American Muslims sitting in prison for years for far less substantial interactions with terror groups than this bipartisan group of former officials gave to MEK. This is what New York Times Editorial Page Editor Andrew Rosenthal meant when he wrote back in March that the 9/11 attacks have "led to what's essentially a separate justice system for Muslims". The converse is equally true: America's political elites can engage in the most egregious offenses - torture, illegal eavesdropping, money-driven material support for a terror group - with complete impunity.

Lesson Two: The US government is not opposed to terrorism; it favors it.

The history of the US list of designated terrorist organizations, and its close cousin list of state sponsors of terrorism, is simple: a country or group goes on the list when they use violence to impede US interests, and they are then taken off the list when they start to use exactly the same violence to advance US interests. The terrorist list is not a list of terrorists; it's a list of states and groups which use their power to defy US dictates rather than adhere to them.

The NYU scholar Remi Brulin has exhaustively detailed the rank game-playing that has taken place with this list: Saddam was put on it when he allied with the Soviets in the early 1980s, then was taken off when the US wanted to arm and fund him against Iran in the mid-1980s, then he was put back on in the early 1990s when the US wanted to attack him. And now, with the MEK, we have a group that, at least according to some reports, appears to have intensified its terrorism, and yet they are removed from the list. Why? Because now they are aligned against the prime enemy of the US and Israel - and working closely with those two nations - and are therefore, magically, no longer "terrorists". As the Iran experts Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett wrote on Friday:

"Since when did murdering unarmed civilians (and, in some instances, members of their families as well) on public streets in the middle of a heavily populated urban area (Tehran) not meet even the US government's own professed standard for terrorism?"

They answered their own question: "We have seen too many times over the years just how cynically American administrations have manipulated these designations, adding and removing organizations and countries for reasons that have little or nothing to do with designees' actual involvement in terrorist activity." In other words, the best and most efficient way to be removed from the list is to start engaging in terrorism for and in conjunction with the US and its allies (i.e. Israel) rather than against them.

Lesson Three: "Terrorism" remains the most meaningless, and thus the most manipulated, term in political discourse.

The US government did not even pretend that terrorism had anything to do with its decision as to whether MEK should be de-listed. Instead, they used the carrot of de-listing, and the threat of remaining on the list, to pressure MEK leaders to adhere to US demands to abandon their camp in Iraq. But what does adhering to this US demand have to do with terrorism? Nothing. This list has nothing to do with terrorism. It is simply a way the US rewards those who comply with its dictates and punishes those who refuse.

Terrorism, at least in its applied sense, means little other than: violence used by enemies of the US and its allies. Violence used by the US and its allies (including stateless groups) can never be terrorism, no matter how heinous and criminal.

Lesson Four: Legalized influence-peddling within both parties is what drives DC.

MEK achieved its goal by doing more than merely changing the beneficiaries of its actions from Saddam to the US and Israel. It also found a way - how it did so remains a mystery - to funnel millions of dollars into the bank accounts of key ex-officials from both parties, a bipartisan list of DC lobbyist firms, and several key journalists. In other words, it achieved its policy aims the same way most groups in DC do: by buying influence within both parties, and paying influence-peddlers who parlay their political celebrity into personal riches.

So pervasive is this scam that most people have become utterly numb to it (that's because people are willing to acquiesce to most evils when they become perceived as common; that acquiescence is often justified as worldly sophistication). As a result, there was no pretense here to hide these sleazy transactions. The very idea that Ed Rendell suddenly woke up one day and developed an overnight, never-before-seen passion for the MEK and Iran policy is just laughable. But the former Pennsylvania governor is a key advocate to enlist - he remains well connected within the Democratic Party and now has an important platform on MSNBC - so on the payroll he went.

Once the bipartisan list of DC officials receiving cash from MEK became known, it became almost impossible to imagine any outcome other than this one. As one person tweeted after reading this State Department decision: any American billionaire could easily have his birthday declared a national holiday by simply spreading the cash around enough to DC political and media figures on a bipartisan basis.

Lesson Five: there is aggression between the US and Iran, but it's generally not from Iran. Over the last decade, the US has had Iran almost entirely encircled, thanks in part - only in part - to large-scale ground invasions of the nations on its eastern and western borders. Some combination of Israel and the US have launched cyberwarfare at the Iranians, murdered their civilian scientists, and caused explosions on its soil. The American president and the Israeli government continuously and publicly threaten to use force against them.

And now, the US has taken a key step in ensuring that a group devoted to the overthrow of the regime, a group that sided with Saddam in his war against Iran, is able to receive funding and otherwise be fully admitted into the precincts of international respectability. Just imagine if Iran took steps to legitimize an American rebel group that has long been devoted to the overthrow of the US government and which has a long history of serious violence on US soil.

Not just the Iranian government, but also most of its citizens, are likely to perceive this de-listing as exactly what it is: yet another act of aggression toward their nation. As the Christian Science Monitor said of the group, it is "widely despised inside Iran". But the US has now officially offered a clear gesture of legitimization, if not support, for this group, one that only exacerbates the war-threatening tensions between the two nations.

#### UPDATE

Several commenters have raised questions about the motives of Dershowitz and Wiesel in supporting MEK. While motives can never be known with certainty - one can attempt only to make inferences based on conduct and circumstances - it was the JTA, the self-described "global news service of the Jewish people", which reported their involvement, and they suggested the motive was not any receipt of money but rather MEK's alignment with Israel:

"The names on the growing list of influential American advocates to de-list the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK -- known in English as the National Council of Resistance of Iran -- suggest an effort to give the bid a pro-Israel imprimatur. . . .

"On the record, the people involved insist there is no Israel element to what they say is a humanitarian endeavor to remove the movement's followers from danger.

"I don't see any Israel issue at all," Dershowitz told JTA in an interview, instead casting it in terms of Hillel's dictum, 'If I am only for myself, who am I?'

"Off the record, however, figures close to the campaign use another ancient Middle Eastern dictum to describe the involvement of supporters of Israel: 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend.'"

"A source close to the effort to bring pro-Israel voices into the initiative cited reports that Israel has allied with the MEK, which reportedly maintains agents in Iran and in the past has published details of Iran's nuclear weapons program."

A separate JTA article reporting on the de-listing noted that "Iranian Americans sympathetic to the plight of MEK enlisted the support of a number of pro-Israel figures, including Nobel Peace laureate and Holocaust memoirist Elie Wiesel; Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz; and Irwin Cotler, the former Canadian justice minister." The original sentence has been clarified to reflect this report.