

# ParsBrief

## **Number 93** **November 2016**

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I was at State when we took the MeK off the terrorist list. But team Trump's ties to the group still worry me.

Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, Politico Magazine, November 24 2016

You can tell a lot about potential Cabinet nominees by the terrorist group they shill for. As President-elect Donald Trump settles on his nominees for secretary of state and other front-row positions, he has his pick of people who have lobbied for the bizarre and brutal Mujahidin e-Khalq (MeK), an Iranian resistance group that helped launch the Islamic revolution and then fell out with the Tehran regime. The MeK has plenty of American blood on its hands, as well as that of thousands of Iranians killed while the group was a strike force serving Saddam Hussein in the 1980s and '90s.

Perhaps the best known MeK votary is none other than former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, reported to be on the shortlists for Trump's secretary of state and director of national intelligence, whose ties to the group have resurfaced as the press examines the numerous possible conflicts of interest created by his international business activities. The MeK has paid Giuliani handsomely for years—\$20,000 or more, and possibly a lot more—for brief appearances before the group and for lobbying to have it removed from the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO), which occurred in 2012.

Among other MeK devotees are former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton—another secretary of state in waiting—and champion Trump booster Newt Gingrich. Former Labor Secretary Elaine Chao (also the wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell), who suddenly appeared at Trump's Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club on Monday for a meeting with the president-elect, has also been on the MeK payroll, as has former Bush 43 security aide Fran Townsend, whose name has been in play as a possible Trump secretary of homeland security or director of national intelligence.

Press accounts of MeK support by Giuliani and these others often treat their ties as a curiosity or, at most, some kind of peccadillo, because the group was taken off the State Department list in 2012. I was the coordinator for counterterrorism at that time, and my office was responsible for leading the effort to decide whether the group should be removed from FTO list. While I stand by that action, I also believe that any connection to the MeK is a lot more than a curiosity. Those who embrace the group show an alarming lack of concern about its past and heedlessness about core principles of American counterterrorism policy.

In Giuliani's case in particular, the hypocrisy is rather stunning. "America's mayor" has presented himself as a centurion in the fight against "radical Islamic terrorism" and famously doubted Barack Obama's patriotism, saying, "I do not believe that the president loves America." Yet he appears to feel that gorging at the table of Islamo-Marxist terrorists who have murdered Americans is in no way unseemly.

The history of the MeK stretches back to the 1960s, when it was founded by a group of Iranian students who opposed the shah and espoused an ideology that mixed Shiism—particularly the cult of martyrdom—and Marxism. Along with the group's anti-regime sentiment came a hefty dose of anti-imperialism and hatred of the United States and Israel. Some of its members trained in PLO camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

From the outset, the group advocated violence. Among the MeK's many terrorist operations in the 1970s were bombings and shootings directed against American military personnel stationed in Iran—three U.S. colonels were killed during this period, as were three contractors. There was an attempted kidnapping of the U.S. ambassador to Iran, an assassination attempt against the general heading the U.S. military mission, as well as attacks against Iranian facilities belonging to General Motors, Shell Oil, Pepsi, Pan Am Airlines and others. When the revolution occurred, the MeK joined forces with the religious hard-liners looking to overthrow the regime. The group supported the takeover of the U.S. embassy in November 1979, and, according to some eyewitnesses, MeK members took part.

But as Iran's revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini consolidated power, he became suspicious of the MeK's leadership and its Marxist ideology and blocked the group from a role in the government. The MeK then took up arms against Khomeini and his followers. Before its top cadres fled to Paris in 1981, the organization carried out a series of bombings in Tehran, and it is believed to be responsible for one that killed more than 70 members of the new regime's leadership, including Ayatollah Mohammed Beheshti, the second most powerful man in the country.

In 1986, about 7,000 MeK members relocated to Iraq, putting themselves in the service of Saddam Hussein during his war against Iran. Armed with Iraqi heavy weapons, the MeK claimed its fighters killed upward of 50,000 Iranian troops. After the Iran-Iraq War ended, MeK, Saddam's "Praetorian Guard," as Iran expert Ray Takeyh has called it, continued launching terrorist attacks against targets inside and outside Iran. After the 1990 Gulf War, the group participated in Saddam's bloody repression of the Shia and Kurdish uprising in Iraq. In April 1992, it staged attacks on Iranian embassies in 13 countries. Among these was a strike against the Iranian mission to the United Nations, making the MeK, along with al Qaeda and a scattering of others, one of the few international terrorist organizations to actually operate on U.S. soil.

In 1997, the MeK was among the first group of 30 terrorist organizations the State Department put on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, along with the worst of the worst from that period: Hezbollah, Hamas, the Abu Nidal Organization, Aum Shinrikyo and others. The group richly deserved this distinction. Although little known to most Americans, the MeK had considerably more blood on its hands than the large majority of the other groups included. The listing meant, among other things, that individuals who provided "material support" to the group could be prosecuted under U.S. law.

The MeK's inclusion on the FTO list also underscored a central principle of U.S. counterterrorism policy, namely, that the target of terrorist violence is irrelevant, and the killing of innocents to advance a political agenda is always wrong. So even though the United States may have few more determined and even deceitful foes than the government of the Islamic Republic, we still condemn terrorist violence against the regime. The U.S. has continued to embrace this policy through Republican and Democratic administrations, and opposition to terrorism in all its forms has been essential for U.S. leadership on counterterrorism issues.

In the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the administration of President George W. Bush cited Saddam's provision of safe haven to the MeK as one example of his support for international terrorism. Faced with the juggernaut of the American invasion of 2003, the group surrendered its tanks and other weapons to U.S. forces and gathered its personnel at the largest of its military installations, Camp Ashraf, 40 miles outside Baghdad. Inexplicably, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared the MeK forces, members of a listed Foreign Terrorist Organization, to be "protected persons" under the Geneva Convention. Thus began the incredible anomaly of the U.S. military protecting the MeK at Ashraf until 2009, when a new status of forces agreement turned responsibility over to the Iraqi authorities.

With its world turned upside down in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the MeK sought to recast itself as the legitimate opposition to the Islamic Republic and endear itself to U.S. advocates of regime change in Iran. Beginning around 2003, the group was led, as it is today, from Paris by Maryam Rajavi, the wife of group founder Massoud Rajavi, who mysteriously disappeared around the time of the invasion. The MeK, whose ability to carry out attacks appeared to be sharply curtailed by the American occupation, claimed—though with scant proof—that it had long since renounced violence—and claimed, as well, to have embraced democracy. Sometime around then, it also began enlisting U.S. politicians to support its effort to have the FTO designation removed.

Money washes away all sins in Washington, and the cash that the MeK offered would-be proponents came in a geyser. In addition to longtime regime-change advocates like Bolton, who recently boasted before a MeK crowd in Paris that he had been engaged with them for a decade, the group signed up Republicans and Democrats en masse. Former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former FBI Director Louis Freeh, former DNC chair Howard Dean, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Hugh Shelton, former Obama National Security Adviser General Jim Jones, former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell—the list went on and on.

The MeK appears to have built its stable of supporters by offering them lavish fees to speak at events in the U.S. and abroad that denounced Iran and promoted the group itself. They lobbied the secretary of state and the Bureau of Legislative Affairs for the most part, though they occasionally tried to get to me too, as coordinator for counterterrorism. Scores of notables were enlisted in Europe, too—a member of the British House of Lords showed up in my office one day under false pretenses to discuss the FTO listing only to be summarily ejected. No designated terrorist group had ever mounted a campaign like this before. Indeed, as a stampede of hogs to the trough, it was astonishing by any Washington standard.

Exactly where all the money came from remains unknown. Most of those who hitched their wagon to the MeK appeared to be getting \$15,000 to \$20,000 or more per appearance at these public events, and they were presumably happy to add their names to whatever open letters demanding better treatment for the group that were put in front of them. Many added their name to amicus briefs in support of an unprecedented legal action by the group seeking delisting—the MeK's lawyer was former New Jersey Democratic Senator Bob Torricelli. (I'm pretty confident about these figures. Shortly after leaving the State Department, I was offered a five-figure sum to appear at a MeK-sponsored event. I know other former senior officials who received similar offers and declined them.) Group supporters claimed the money came from the contributions of ordinary Iranians in exile, but the sums seemed far too great. Rumors circulated about a vast hoard of cash that Saddam had bestowed on the group. Another view was Iran-hating Gulf Arabs were providing the lucre.

Wherever the money came from, plenty of it was being soaked up. And Congress became fixated on the MeK issue, too. Hearings into the case of the MeK were held, and hearings on other issues were hijacked by congressmen such as Republican Ted Poe of Texas and Democrat Brad Sherman of California, who championed the terrorist group. (Hill adoration for the MeK continues to be flabbergasting. Last April, Poe's House subcommittee invited Maryam Rajavi to testify on the issue of ISIS by videolink. According to at least one House staffer, no one else has enjoyed that privilege since the Democrats were in the majority (2009-11), and Cuban dissidents were interviewed from the U.S. Interests Section in Havana.)

The spectacle of so many current and former legislators, Cabinet members and the like falling over themselves to praise the MeK caused plenty of bemusement and also outrage within the administration. Many officials were repulsed by the campaign for delisting—what, they wondered, was promoting the MeK through public appearances and lobbying if not material support for a designated terrorist organization? In March 2012, the Treasury Department seemed to be leaning toward that conclusion, when it started issuing subpoenas to prominent MeK surrogates

In 2012, the issue of the MeK FTO designation became even more high-profile—in part because of the lawsuit but, more urgently, because of the possibility of a massacre at Camp Ashraf. American troops were no longer defending the camp, and the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, who had a close relationship with Tehran, wanted the hated MeK gone. Beginning in 2009, Iraqi military and Shia militias attacked the camp on several occasions. In April 2011, 34 inhabitants of Ashraf were killed and hundreds wounded in one such attack. For Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the priority became averting more killing and getting the MeK members relocated. Such a movement, however, was inconceivable until the group was delisted. No country would give refuge to a bunch of terrorists.

The issue consumed an enormous amount of the time and energy of the Department's 7th floor, my team in the Counterterrorism Bureau, the Office of the Legal Advisor, the Near East Bureau and the Justice Department. The staff of the Counterterrorism Bureau opposed delisting, a step that is itself a rare occurrence reserved almost exclusively for groups that had become defunct. Although the MeK professed to having forsworn violence, there was insufficient confidence in that pledge. The 3,400 or so remaining MeK members were of course unlikely to do much of anything while bottled up in Camp Ashraf, but who knew what they

would do if let out? Moreover, by presenting itself as an opposition force that supported the overthrow of the regime in Tehran, the MeK seemed only a few steps from taking up arms again.

Even more unsettling was the sheer creepiness of the group. While Maryam Rajavi was presiding over enormous conferences with American political celebrities and seas of smiling, waving people in Paris, at Camp Ashraf, the MeK leadership treated its people appallingly. Visitors, including from the U.N., painted a picture of relentless intimidation, shaming and coercion of the inhabitants by camp leaders. The MeK, which is often described as a cult, had a long history of requiring that its members divorce and remain celibate. Now, its leaders were resolved that the group would remain together and none of the members would be relocated individually or in small groups—the Ashraf group was a bargaining chip that the leadership was cynically using for future leverage.

As the discussion within the U.S. government went on in 2012, the Iraqis became increasingly impatient, and the fear of renewed violence grew. The State Department finally designed a solution that would make delisting in essence a self-fulfilling step. That is, the MeK leadership was informed that only by accepting relocation to a place called Camp Liberty near the Baghdad Airport and agreeing that its members would be farmed out to new homes around the world would the group be removed from the FTO list. In essence, the group was being dissolved as it was delisted. Even this the MeK objected to, and it haggled over the plan for weeks.

Faced with the possibility that the U.S. would leave the MeK on the terrorist list and walk away, the group finally capitulated.

The decision to remove the MeK from the FTO list had taken so long that there was relief at State that the ordeal was over, but little satisfaction. When the department announced the delisting in September 2012, it made its ambivalence evident.

With today's actions, the Department does not overlook or forget the MEK's past acts of terrorism, including its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil in 1992. The department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organization, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members.

The secretary's decision today took into account the MEK's public renunciation of violence, the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism by the MEK for more than a decade, and its cooperation in the peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf, its historic paramilitary base.

The United States has consistently maintained a humanitarian interest in seeking the safe, secure and humane resolution of the situation at Camp Ashraf, as well as in supporting the United Nations-led efforts to relocate eligible former Ashraf residents outside of Iraq.

The final Ashraf inhabitants were relocated from Camp Liberty to Albania—where many of the group's members wound up after being turned down by most other countries—just this past September. What the group does with its rank-and-file next is hard to know, and there has been little reliable reporting on their activities in Albania. For the moment, all eyes are on the group's effort to ingratiate itself with U.S. policymakers and legislators, which it conducts now from its office on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Treasury ended its inquiry into the funding of MeK surrogates after the group was delisted—and with it any hope of gathering more information from MeK proponents on their financial relations with the group, or where all that money came from.

It is difficult to capture just how surreal the entire MeK denouement was. In the end, the protestations of Giuliani, Bolton and others made no difference to the process, though the former New York mayor has boasted of his success in the matter: "My ties to them are very open. We worked very hard to get them delisted—by Hillary Clinton, by the way."

The love affair with the MeK continues to mystify. For some, like Bolton, there is clearly an unshakeable certainty that the MeK will play a role in changing the regime in Tehran. Bolton's reputation for dogmatism is well-earned in this case: Serious scholars of Iran all agree that the MeK is universally loathed in Iran, where no one forgets its service to Saddam or its slaughter of Iranian conscripts and others.

Iranian reformers, for their part, fear the MeK is girding to play such a role, and they were aghast at the delisting. "The MEK does not have a political future in Iran, but they will turn into a dangerous arm to serve U.S. interests," one reformist political analyst told the Financial Times at the time. "Intellectuals have long been disappointed with the U.S. but now even ordinary Iranians realize that the U.S. does not support any democratic change in Iran." That

analyst may have been premature in his denunciation of the U.S. But if Bolton and his fellow ideologues do get a chance to pursue their regime-change designs by arming the MeK and others to carry out attacks, the U.S. can forget being a global bulwark against state-sponsored terror.

With Giuliani, as perhaps with Gingrich and others, the attraction to the MeK may be more grounded in plain old greed than foreign policy. According to a financial disclosure reported on by The New York Times, Giuliani has been speechifying at hyperspeed for years, collecting \$11.4 million for 124 appearances in just one year—and that was before signing up for the MeK gravy train around 2011. Perhaps he just didn't have time to consider the character of his paymaster.

Or perhaps, in Giuliani, avarice and ideology melt into one another. His last appearance before the MeK's front organization, The National Council of Resistance of Iran, involved a scream fest not unlike his performance at the Republican National Convention. "The ayatollah must go," he yelled. "Gone! Out! No more!"

Whatever the case, the irony seems not to have dawned on America's mayor that his performance was in front of a group that had helped put the ayatollahs in power and that, at least historically, shared their general view on the utility of violence.

So Rudy Giuliani, hero of 9/11, is a buckraker with few principles. It's not so surprising to find someone like him near the head of the line for high office. The really depressing thing is—pace Gingrich, Bolton, Townsend, Chao et al.—how many others are behind him in the queue.

Ambassador Daniel Benjamin is Director of the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College and served as Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the State Department 2009-2012.

### Gaffney, Lopez, and the MEK

By Daniel Larison, The American Conservative Magazine, November 16, 2016

Phil Giraldi alerts us to some of the bad appointments Trump may end up making. Here is one example:

"Another former CIA officer who is a particularly polarizing figure and is apparently being looked at for high office is Clare Lopez, who has claimed that the Obama White House is infiltrated by the Muslim Brotherhood. Lopez is regarded by the Trump team as "one of the intellectual thought leaders about why we have to fight back against radical Islam." She has long been associated with the Center for Security Policy, headed by Frank Gaffney, a fanatical hardliner who believes that Saddam Hussein was involved in both the 1993 World Trade Center attack and the Oklahoma City bombing, that Americans for Tax Reform head Grover Norquist is a secret agent of the Muslim Brotherhood, that Gen. David Petraeus has "submitted to Sharia," and that the logo of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency reveals "official U.S. submission to Islam" because it "appears ominously to reflect a morphing of the Islamic crescent and star."

The chance that Lopez or others connected with Gaffney will end up in important positions seems certain to increase now that Frank Gaffney himself has reportedly joined the transition team to "assist on national security issues." There is even some talk that Gaffney might be considered as a possible nominee for CIA director. That last one seems like a long shot, but if he's part of the transition team in any way that would still be horrifying.

As if all that weren't bad enough, Lopez would also be another possible Trump appointee who has been a booster for the Mujahideen-e Khalq over the last few years. Lopez has referred to MEK members as "pro-democracy Iranian patriots," which would come as news to almost all Iranians and especially to the group's former members. She has also called for direct U.S. support of the MEK, and has engaged in the usual whitewashing of its record and its ideology that we have come to expect from the group's supporters.

Eli Clifton concludes a recent report on Lopez and the other pro-MEK figures around Trump this way:

If Lopez, Giuliani, Bolton, or Gingrich serve in the Trump administrations, the MEK will have the highest level access it's ever enjoyed in the U.S. government, a remarkable journey for a fringe Islamic-Marxist group that, until 2012, was on the State Department's terrorism list for its role in assassinating Americans.

Leaving aside the obvious danger these people pose on Iran policy, it is further proof of Trump's poor judgment that so many people that have been flacking for a foreign totalitarian cult are being seriously considered to serve in his administration.

### Why Donald Trump needs the Iran nuclear deal

The Guardian, November 23 2016

If Trump walks away from the agreement, Iran will revert to its previous policy of enriching uranium that could someday be used to create a nuclear weapon.

In March 2016, Donald Trump gave a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac). He was forthright about his support for Israel should he become president. He was particularly strong on Iran, and on the nuclear deal with Iran negotiated by Obama, saying straight off: "My No 1 priority is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran".

But dismantling the deal with Iran will not be so easy. In addition to Iran and the US, there are four other signatories – the UK, France, China and Russia, all of whom are convinced that the deal is important and valuable. Even Saudi Arabia seems recently to have come round to the idea that it's better to have the deal than to lose it. If Trump acts against the deal (or even if he just sits back and allows Republican hawks to enact new sanctions legislation) it is to be expected that the Iranians will walk away from it and revert to their previous policy: enriching uranium that could someday be used to create a nuclear weapon. That would be bad for Israel and everyone else, and would also make Trump look bad.

Some missed it at the time, but there was another strand to Trump's Aipac speech – a hint of something else. He said the deal was bad – "... and we got absolutely nothing in return". A little later he said that at the very least, he would enforce the deal "to hold Iran totally accountable".

It has to be the working assumption, for now, that a Trump presidency is worse for the prospects of the nuclear deal than a Clinton presidency would have been. But it may not necessarily turn out that way. Trump has suggested that he might work with the Russians to destroy Islamic State in Syria, which would in effect mean working with Iran too.

In the Aipac speech and repeatedly elsewhere, he has stressed his self-image as a dealmaker, and also his desire to put America first, and (one of his strongest campaign messages overall) to correct allegedly unbalanced international trade arrangements that disadvantage the US. Might he seek a new deal with Iran, with a major trade element, in return for not tampering with the nuclear agreement? Trump would present such a deal as creating new jobs and benefiting US industries. It would give the US the benefit from the nuclear deal that Trump claims Obama failed to secure, putting Trump ahead of Obama on his own ground by positive action. The idea fits well with a whole range of Trump's declared priorities, and if successful, would make him look good.

To make this happen, or indeed to come up with any Iran policy with any chance of success, Trump will need good foreign policy advice. It's not easy to see where that might come from. One candidate spoken of as a possible secretary of state under Trump has been John Bolton, whose favoured policy toward Iran has been to bomb the country. Others mentioned have been Newt Gingrich and Rudy Giuliani. All three of these candidates have something in common: they have spoken in support of the MKO, an exile opposition group (also referred to with an alphabet soup of other acronyms – MEK, PMOI, NCRI, etc). The MKO pays public figures to support them against the Iranian regime.

The MKO is a bizarre organisation. As it is today, it resembles a kind of religious cult, brainwashing its adherents, taking their money and property, and separating them from

partners and families. It was removed from the state department's list of terrorist organisations in 2012, but prior to that perpetrated bombings and assassinations within Iran. It originated in the 1960s as a violent Marxist-Islamic group opposed to the Shah; in the 1970s, it killed US servicemen in Iran, among others. It gave significant armed support to the revolution in 1979, but lost out to [Ayatollah]Khomeini's supporters in a bloody power struggle thereafter, was forced into exile, and later was based in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Because it fought on Saddam's side against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, it has since then been completely discredited with ordinary Iranians in Iran. No one with any claim to sound judgment, let alone high office, should have given the MKO their backing.

Another possibility in the air for secretary of state is Bob Corker, Republican senator and chairman of the Senate committee on foreign relations – strongly conservative, but an altogether safer choice.

The coincidence of Trump's election and Leonard Cohen's death prompted me (and not only me) to recall lyrics from Cohen's song The Future: "Things are gonna slide – slide in all directions ... " It's important for the Middle East as a whole that, with so much else on the slide, the Iran nuclear deal is not.

No Job in the Trump Administration for Rudolph Giuliani (Lobbyist for Mojahedin Khalq, MEK, Rajavi cult)

Will Bredderman, Observer, December 10 2016

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani—known to covet the post of secretary of state—will not have a role in President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration, supposedly not because of complications arising from his consulting work for terror-supporting organizations and interests, but due to undefined "reasons for remaining in the private sector."

Giuliani, Trump and White House chief of staff-to-be Reince Priebus released a joint statement announcing the decision late today, an age-old practice for burying unflattering news. Priebus, the outgoing chairman of the Republican National Committee, stated that America's mayor "was vetted by our team for any possible conflicts and passed with flying colors"—despite the payments he and his company Giuliani Partners have received from the Islamic State-funding government of Qatar or the registered terrorist group Mujahedin e-Khalq, a banished Iranian political party.

Instead, the president-elect's press office insisted Giuliani had voluntarily "removed his name from consideration for a position in the new administration" all the way back on November 29.

"Rudy would have been an outstanding member of the Cabinet in several roles, but I fully respect and understand his reasons for remaining in the private sector," said Trump in the statement, leaving open the possibility of a nomination for Giuliani at an unspecified time in the future. "He is and continues to be a close personal friend, and as appropriate, I will call upon him for advice and can see an important place for him in the administration at a later date."

Giuliani, who went from demurring over whether to back Trump to becoming one of his most strident surrogates, neglected to elaborate on what those "reasons" for preferring not to get a gig in the federal government were. He did, however, claim it was nothing personal.

"This is not about me; it is about what is best for the country and the new administration," said Giuliani, who last won an election in 1997. "Before I joined the campaign I was very involved and fulfilled by my work with my law firm and consulting firm, and I will continue that work with even more enthusiasm. From the vantage point of the private sector, I look forward to helping the President-elect in any way he deems necessary and appropriate."

Trump has also considered former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney—one of his loudest critics in the primary season—and disgraced former Central Intelligence Agency Director and retired General David Petraeus for the helm of the State Department, which sets the country's foreign policy.

Giuliani will remain a vice chairman of Trump's transition team.



Disclosure: Donald Trump is the father-in-law of Jared Kushner, the publisher of Observer Media.

Giuliani was paid advocate for shady Iranian dissident group

Rudy Giuliani for Trump's secretary of state?

By Josh Rogin, Washington Post, November 15, 2015

Reports say former New York City mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani has emerged as a leading candidate to serve as secretary of state under President-elect Donald Trump. (Reuters)

Former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani is reported to be in contention to be Donald Trump's attorney general or secretary of state. Senators who will be considering his confirmation may want to examine the fact that Giuliani took money to advocate on behalf of an Iranian dissident group while it was listed by the State Department as a foreign terrorist organization, potentially breaking the law.

For years, Giuliani has been one of the most prominent American officials to advocate on behalf of the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), a Marxist Iranian opposition group that claims to be the legitimate government of Iran and resembles a cult. A Treasury Department investigation in 2012 examined whether speaking fees paid by several MEK front groups to a long list of U.S. politicians, including Giuliani, violated laws on Americans receiving money from designated terrorist organizations.

The State Department added the MEK to the list of foreign terrorist organizations in 1997 due to its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil in 1992.

The group, which has about 3,000 members living in exile in Iraq, has not conducted a confirmed act of terrorism in more than a decade. In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the United States mostly disarmed the MEK and provided its members with protection at their Iraqi base, Camp Ashraf.

Throughout the first term of the Obama administration, Iranian American organizations with extensive links to the MEK paid prominent U.S. national security officials to speak on behalf of the group. They also contributed heavily to the campaign coffers of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. The payments ran through the lobbying law firm DLA Piper, which passed the money through a speakers' bureau that cut checks to the officials.

In 2011 and 2012, Giuliani gave several speeches, including at events inside the congressional office buildings, calling on the State Department to take the MEK off of the list of foreign terrorist organizations. He also heavily criticized the U.S. government's effort to help relocate MEK members when the Iraqi government evicted them from Camp Ashraf.

In March 2012, Giuliani traveled to Paris to speak at an MEK conference alongside the group's secretive leader Maryam Rajavi. While there, he called the U.S. military base in Iraq where the United States wanted to relocate the MEK a "concentration camp." Those comments later appeared in an MEK ad in the New York Times.

That same month, the Treasury Department's investigation into the payments made to American politicians became public when former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell admitted that he had received a subpoena related to his work on behalf of the MEK. It's illegal for American citizens to do business with a group designated as a foreign terrorist organization.

During a pro-MEK protest and rally outside the State Department in 2011, Rendell told me he had received \$20,000 for his appearance there. How much money Giuliani received per appearance is unclear, although he spoke on behalf of the MEK several times in 2011 and 2012.

Representatives of several of the front groups, which have names like the Iranian American Citizens of Northern California, have maintained that they have not broken any laws.

Other potential Trump administration appointees took money to advocate for the MEK while it was listed as a foreign terrorist organization, including former ambassador John Bolton and former CIA director James Woolsey, but they were less involved than Giuliani. Other officials who have given pro-MEK paid speeches include Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), former FBI director Louis Freeh, former senator Robert Torricelli, former representative Patrick Kennedy, former national security adviser Gen. James Jones, former Joint Chiefs chairman Gen. Richard Myers, former White House chief of staff Andy Card, retired Gen. Wesley Clark, former representative Lee Hamilton, former CIA director Porter Goss and former senator Evan Bayh.

At the time, top State Department officials often complained about the U.S. politicians who were advocating for the MEK, calling their interference unhelpful and misguided. The American supporters of the MEK were increasing tensions between the U.S. government and the MEK while negotiations were ongoing.

“The Americans who ought to know better and claim to be on the side of good solutions are really damaging it. Either they are too lazy or too arrogant to actually do their homework. They don’t spend the time to learn facts, they just pop off. They accept the MEK line without question and then they posture,” one State Department official told me in 2012.

In October 2012, after the MEK finally relented to State Department pressure and moved to Camp Liberty, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton decided to remove it from the foreign terrorist organization list. What happened to the Treasury Department’s investigation after that is unclear. The MEK story is complicated because the group does have legitimate grievances and has been the target of deadly attacks by Iranian-backed forces inside Iraq. There are also reports that the U.S. and Israeli intelligence services have used the group’s members at various times to conduct covert operations inside Iran.

Giuliani and the other MEK supporters’ argument that the group is the victim of human rights abuses and deserves protection from atrocities is valid. But by profiting from their advocacy while the group was a listed terrorist organization, they may have broken the law.

And if Giuliani really believes that the MEK could represent a viable alternative to the current Iranian government or a even a key pillar in U.S. policy on Iran, his potential tenure as a national security official in the Trump administration will mean a new and uncharted era in U.S.-Iran relations.