Avert a humanitarian catastrophe Mr President

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The Independent, By Lord Corbett: US President Barack Obama, who is visiting the UK at the moment, will be aware of the urgent humanitarian situation facing 3,400 Iranian pro-democracy supporters in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, who came under deadly attack by Iraqi armed forces last month at the behest of Iran.

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By Lord Corbett Notebook

US President Barack Obama, who is visiting the UK at the moment, will be aware of the urgent humanitarian situation facing 3,400 Iranian pro-democracy supporters in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, who came under deadly attack by Iraqi armed forces last month at the behest of Iran.

At least 34 unarmed and defenceless refugees, members of the main Iranian opposition PMOI, were killed and 350 others injured when Iraqi armed forces raided the camp and indiscriminately opened fire on them; however US officials who visited the camp following the massacre have not published their findings.

The attack was condemned by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the European Union and the US State Department. But Iraqi armed forces continue to occupy parts of the camp and there is a real risk of further attacks. The entry of medical supplies to the residents is restricted, and Parliamentary delegations and lawyers have been banned from visiting the camp. At least 42 seriously-injured residents have been denied access to the urgent medical care they need.

Without immediate international intervention there is real threat of a humanitarian catastrophe. Until an accord can be reached by all parties, it is imperative that the United Nations takes over protection of the residents and stations a permanent monitoring team at the camp.

The European Parliament's proposed solution for the transfer of the residents to third countries and the preconditions attached to it are realistic and practical. However any forcible displacement of the residents within Iraq, as has been suggested by some US officials, would be unlawful and illogical and could guite possibly lead to a bloodbath.

EU foreign policy chief Baroness Ashton said 27 EU foreign ministers discussed the Ashraf crisis at the European Council in Brussels on Monday, emphasising the need for Iraq to respect the residents' human rights and agreeing on the importance of working with the UN and US in particular to seek a lasting resolution to the issue.

Here in the UK, more than 500 Parliamentarians of all political parties have declared their support for a leading UN protective role, and we hope that President Obama will lend his support to the proposed European option.

Furthermore, President Obama needs to urgently take action on the continued proscription of the Iranian opposition PMOI by the US State Department. Following the Washington DC court order of July 2010 as well as the de-listing of the PMOI as a terrorist organisation by the UK and EU in 2008 and 2009, the designation of the group in Washington is legally unjustifiably, and we have seen the damage it has done as Iraq uses it to justify its deadly attacks on Ashraf residents.

There exists overwhelming bipartisan support in the US for the group's designation to be promptly revoked, and I ask and hope that President Obama pays personal attention to this matter to ensure that this happens.

Robin Corbett is Chairman of the British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom. He is a former Chairman of the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee

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