

U.S. needs to be even handed in dealing with dissidents of tyrannical rules

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Yet, when it comes to Iran, perhaps the greatest threat to world peace, the U.S. refuses to support a group that is being oppressed, even though that group has been essential to the world's knowledge of Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

Am I missing something here?

I fully endorse what the U.S. has done and is doing in the two cases in China and Myanmar. Governments that oppress their own citizens don't deserve our support.

But a group wrongly labeled as terrorist, and using every legal means to overturn that label, does deserve much greater consideration than it is getting.

At issue is the case of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI/MEK), part of the leading Iranian dissident organisation, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). After fleeing the mullahs in Iran a quarter century ago, the MEK took up residence in Iraq and lived peacefully at a small city it developed called Ashraf.

After the U.S.-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein, these residents disarmed and accepted the protection of American forces under the Fourth Geneva Convention - and after every single individual was screened by U.S. authorities.

However, long before the Iraq invasion and in an effort to mollify the mullahs, the U.S. added the MEK to the State Department list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, all in the false hope of negotiating with "moderates" in Tehran. The UK and EU followed suit. Somehow, we never knew there were no moderates in Tehran.

The MEK fought in EU and UK courts to be delisted, and was successful. But the U.S. State Department has dragged its feet for almost two years, in spite of a U.S. District Court order for it to reconsider. Finally, the court ordered a hearing, took place on May 8.

During the hearing, the attorney for the U.S. Department of State aroused outrage among former U.S. military commanders - stationed at Camp Ashraf from 2004 until 2009 - when he alleged that weapons and ammunition might be hidden in Camp Ashraf.

In a joint statement, Brig. Gen. David Phillips (ret.), former commander of all police operations in Iraq, which included the protection of Camp Ashraf until 2006; Col. Wesley Martin (ret.), senior antiterrorism/force protection officer for all coalition forces in Iraq and the first colonel in charge of Camp Ashraf in 2006, and Lt. Col. Leo McCloskey (ret.), commander of Joint Interagency Task Force at Camp Ashraf until January 2009, described the remarks by the State Department attorney as "absurd" and a "denigration of the admirable work of thousands of American service-people who protected Camp Ashraf and verified its inhabitants were unarmed".

The MEK has right on its side - there is no evidence of any terrorist activity; indeed quite the opposite. And it has many "friends of the court" who have submitted briefs in support, including elected officials, former diplomats and military leaders (some of whom worked closely with the residents of Ashraf while they were in duty and serving their tours of duty in Iraq), and human rights leaders.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi government, firmly under the thumb of Tehran, has used the terrorist label to oppress Ashraf now that the American forces have left. A year ago, a military raid killed dozens of unarmed residents and wounded hundreds.

Then, the Maliki government of Iraq ordered Ashraf closed and its residents dispersed, but under pressure from the U.S.

and UN agreed to transfer them to a former U.S. base ironically named Camp Liberty, where they would be processed by a UN refugee agency for relocation in third countries.

Despite misgivings, more than half of the 3,400 Ashraf residents have gone to Liberty, where they face horrid, filthy, oppressive prison-like conditions. Subsequent to outlandish claim of the Ste Department counsel, the representative of Ashraf residents underscored that these false claims "are nothing but a replica of claims by the Iraqi government and the Iranian regime, are considered as a license to kill or massacre Ashraf residents. Such claims will provide them with a chance and pave the way for placing weapons and munitions in Ashraf and setting sage for another massacre as well as intensifying the siege, harassment and torture of Ashraf and Liberty residents." The dissidents urged the US to immediately inspect Ashraf with necessary equipments and announce their findings. This is an essential condition for continuation of the process of relocation of Ashraf residents to Liberty in order to prevent any justification for further massacres.

Secretary of State Clinton and the UN had promised to monitor the situation at Camp Liberty, but either they're not looking or their eyes are closed.

The crux of the matter remains the terrorist label. The State Department should remove it without delay. Otherwise, the court should order it removed. It never should have been imposed, and it surely should have been removed years ago.

The MEK has been the world's eyes and ears when it comes to Iran's nuclear activities, as well as its exporting terrorism around the world and its subversion of Iraq.

Now, it wants only the right to serve as the Iranian Resistance, to represent the millions of Iranians still in the country and in the Diaspora who seek freedom from the theocratic rule of the mullahs. It doesn't want Western arms or Western forces, only Western hands off, starting with removal of the terrorist label.

That should be a no-brainer.