

Injustice in Washington is a threat to justice everywhere

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UPI - By Baroness Turner - It is time for justice for Iranian dissidents in Iraq.

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By MURIEL TURNER

LONDON, May 14 (UPI) -- Outlandish is probably the polite way to describe a claim made by the U.S. State Department during a recent court hearing on the People's Mujahedin of Iran.

State Department counsel told the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that the U.S. government had never had access to Camp Ashraf, the town to the north of Baghdad where many PMOI activists have lived for decades.

The United States has no way of knowing whether the PMOI still supports terror, counsel claimed, because its members have never allowed a thorough inspection of the 15-square-mile camp.

"They say that they have turned over a new leaf but that has never been verified by the U.S. military," counsel said.

This brazen lie was all the more surprising given that the most qualified people on this very subject were sitting in the courtroom.

U.S. Army Brig. Gen. David Phillips and Col. Wesley Martin, both now retired, were among the senior U.S. military officers charged with protecting Ashraf from 2003-09. They have testified that U.S. military had complete access to every nook and cranny in Camp Ashraf. After conducting many searches, they reported to their superiors that they were completely confident there were no weapons or ammunition in the camp.

The fact that Ashraf residents cooperated totally with the searches is also on the record.

When State Department counsel testified that Ashraf hadn't been searched for weapons, Phillips and Martin immediately stared at each other as if to say, "What does he think you and I did at Ashraf?"

As the 89th Military Police Brigade Commander from 2004-05, Phillips ran numerous inspections and search missions. There is not a building there he has not been in. He was in charge of the consolidation and collection of weapons when U.S. military first took charge of the camp upon liberating Iraq from Saddam Hussein.

Under his watch, every resident was interviewed and investigated by the FBI and several other U.S. agencies. It was concluded that none of the residents had any terrorism link.

Martin came to the exact same conclusion when he served as the senior antiterrorism officer for all coalition forces in Iraq in 2003-04.

Later, in 2006, as Ashraf Base commander, Martin also conducted numerous inspections. Many of these were in response to rumors generated by State Department employees in Baghdad, which in turn had originated from within the Iranian regime and its agents in Iraq.

The PMOI is after all the main opposition to the mullahs, who will stop at nothing in their attempts to slander the movement. But like Phillips before him, Martin's inspections uncovered no sign of any alleged weapons.

To claim, therefore, that Camp Ashraf has never been searched is utter nonsense. The State Department is even now saying that an inspection must be conducted after Ashraf residents have completely abandoned the camp in order to determine what is left inside.

Only the Iraqi government could undertake such a search, the same government that is overseeing the transfer of Ashraf residents to a new, prison-like location in Baghdad, a former U.S. military based ironically named Camp Liberty. Iraqi troops have raided Ashraf on two occasions, killing dozens, let us not forget.

The State Department's willingness to take the word of the Iraqi government over the U.S. military is despicable, especially when considering the Iraqi military's well-earned reputation for corruption.

The truth of the matter is that the U.S. State Department is in need of a lie to coverup its flouting of the law. The United States has failed to implement the July 2010 ruling by the D.C. appeals court, which ordered the State Department to review its 1997 designation of the PMOI as a terrorist organization.

The PMOI has therefore gone to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to force the State Department to remove it from the terrorist list.

PMOI lawyer Viet Dinh asked a three-judge appeals court panel to force the hand of the Obama administration. The terrorism designation had "severe implications on constitutional liberties" for the group, he said. The PMOI, he pointed out, had renounced violence more than a decade ago.

The terror list, meanwhile, has been just the excuse Tehran has needed to continue killing PMOI activists in Iran. The Iraqi government, which is increasingly reliant on Iranian support, has used the same excuse to suppress the residents of Ashraf and Liberty.

Of the 3,400 residents of Camp Ashraf, around 2,000 have been transferred to Camp Liberty under a deal brokered by the United Nations in a good faith. But is the United States returning the good faith by such an outlandish lie?

Martin Luther King once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." It is time for justice for Iranian dissidents.

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