

Contribution by Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, MP to debate on Iran in House of Commons

Tuesday, 27 February 2007

Mr. Mackinlay: The PMOI cannot with any legitimacy be charged with being a military or terrorist organisation. It is simply not true, and the British Government acknowledge that. What is perverse is that the British Government, along with other EU countries, are still resisting taking the organisation off the terror list.

Westminster Hall Iran Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard) for securing this debate and for allowing some of us to piggyback on to his initiative. Having said that, I disagree with a number of things that he said, which I shall address in a moment. I reiterate the view that was expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), who reflected the common denominator among Iranian resistance groups in exile. Whatever their differences, they do not want the contemplation of any invasion or military strike against Iran, as is being canvassed by the United States. Those exiles are proud patriots and they love their country. Not only do they not want it invaded or attacked militarily, but they share the view of the majority of hon. Members that such a course of action would be counter-productive and exacerbate a worrying situation in an enormously dangerous region, in a fragile world. If nothing else, we should acknowledge that the people in exile, who are suffering the denial of both access to their country and democracy in that land, do not want a military strike. The situation is grave. The backdrop of this morning's discussion is the export of terrorism from Tehran—that is generally acknowledged to be a fact; indeed, it is boasted of—and the growing encouragement of suicide brigades to create destruction, mayhem and death in various parts of the region. Iran has snubbed the views of the international community, particularly UNICEF, on how it handles juveniles. Furthermore, human rights abuses continue, whether in respect of a person's sexual orientation, their religious belief, as has been referred to, or, indeed, whether they are secular. Of course, anybody who wants to create a pluralistic society is clearly unacceptable to the regime. All that comes in addition to its determination to enrich uranium—for military purposes, I believe. The situation is very threatening. My concern is that the United Kingdom sends mixed messages to Tehran. I acknowledge that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who went on the IPU delegation, has approached this issue in a very dilatory—diligent, I mean—manner. However, what was dilatory was our letting him go, because such visits send all the wrong signals. I invite him to consider this: we would not send an IPU delegation to Belarus. They are all pretty bad on the league table of rotters, but we would not send a delegation to Belarus, where, for example, there are no executions today, certainly not by the state. Sometimes, we genuflect to some pretty wretched regimes and we are not consistent. The biggest problem of mixed messages comes from Her Majesty's Government. The Prime Minister talked robustly two or three months ago at the lord mayor's banquet. I could read what he said into the record, but time is short. Basically, he made it clear that, as the Prime Minister, he considers that Iran is exporting terror. On other occasions, he has inferred that ordnance and weaponry from Iran, with the regime's fingerprints on it, are being used against British forces around the world. Those are the views of the Prime Minister—pretty strong stuff. Yet I invite this Minister to consider that Ministers—not only him, but others—send different messages. They are much more appeasing. The Leader of the House is one, as is the Home Secretary. They were singing from a different song sheet. We will probably hear more of that this morning in the 15 minutes allocated to the Minister. If nothing else emerges from this debate, there should be a consistent approach by Government spokespersons when they are dealing with Iran, because their utterances are read in Tehran. The hon. Member for The Wrekin referred to resistance around the world. He referred to the People's Mujaheddin Organisation of Iran, or PMOI, as a military wing. His view might be different from mine, but it is a matter of fact that the PMOI has not embarked on any military action since 2001. That is recognised by Her Majesty's Government. So the PMOI is no more a military or terrorist organisation than Sinn Féin or the IRA, with whom sensibly—albeit reluctantly—we have had to have dialogue. The PMOI cannot with any legitimacy be charged with being a military or terrorist organisation. It is simply not true, and the British Government acknowledge that. What is perverse is that the British Government, along with other EU countries, are still resisting taking the organisation off the terror list. They have done that cynically. It is in the public domain that the EU3, which includes the United Kingdom Government, said in November 2004, as an offer to the Tehran regime: "If Iran complies, we would continue to regard the MEK—and that is, the PMOI—as a terrorist organisation". That is cynical and dishonest and diminishes our case. I should have thought that those of us who are peace loving would want to encourage peaceful resistance as a proud weapon. We know that some of the most effective resisters around the world are people who have abandoned terrorism, often in the face of serious physical attack both at home and abroad. There ought to be rewards for the PMOI and similar groups if and when they abandon their armed action. That is why I ask the British Government to reflect again. When challenged, the hon. Member for The Wrekin overlooked that unfair, unjust and imprudent terror tag. There is an old-fashioned virtue called the rule of law. In that sense, courts are above Governments. They sit in judgment, and the court that has determined the issue says that it is unlawful and unfair for the PMOI to be on the terror list. It is time that the British Government reflected. First, they should send much more consistent messages to Tehran, rather than variable ones from different Ministers—the more junior they get, the more variable they are. Secondly, they should stand by the decision of an independent court that has found them to have made a wrong judgment. We should stress that we look to the British Government to do everything that they can to resist armed conflict in that land, but also to find the distinction between appeasement, which has been the pattern so far, and sensible, prudent and robust dialogue.