

Beware of Minefields On the Way to Iran!

by Hussein Askary

Jan. 29—While the Obama Administration is working intensively to draft a new U.S. policy in Southwest Asia based on friendly diplomacy, especially with Iran, the European Union foreign ministers stepped blindly into a British-created minefield on Jan. 26. In their meeting in Brussels, the ministers approved a new blacklist of terrorist organizations to be banned by the EU, which, for the first time, did not include the People's Mujahideen of Iran (PMOI—another name for the Mujahedeen-e Khalq, MeK or MKO—under which it operates in Europe.) This means that, not only would these 3,500 militants be free to relocate to Europe, but the already active group would be allowed to recruit and raise funds for subversive activities on European territory.

“What we are doing today is abiding by the resolution of the European Court,” EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana told reporters just before the meeting started.

Following a British Supreme Court ruling in June 2008, the European Court in Luxembourg ruled in December, that the EU was wrong to keep the group's assets frozen.

The British Supreme Court ruled in favor of removing the MKO from the British government's list of terrorist organizations. Subsequently, an order was issued by both houses of the British Parliament to remove the organization from the British blacklist.

According to the MKO's website (National Council of Resistance of Iran, the cover organization for its activities in Europe), on Jan. 14, British-based members of the group, and some members of the British Parliamentary Committee for Iran Freedom (including Lord Corbett of Castle Vale; Rt. Hon. Lord Archer of Sandwell QC, former United Kingdom Solicitor General; Lord Clarke of Hampstead; Mr. Brian Binley MP; and Mr. David Vaughan QC), held a protest in front of the EU

offices in London. Lord Corbett, chairman of the committee, who organized 400 signatures of British MPs to put pressure on the EU to follow in Britain's footsteps, told the demonstrators: “In the British Parliament, we support your demands and stand with you.” Mr. Binley, a member of the House of Commons, praised the demonstrators' resolve, telling them, “You are running an excellent political campaign. It is certain that you will win at the end. We continue to support the genuine goals of the Resistance.”

Lord Corbett personally travelled to Washington last year to mobilize American members of Congress to support the British plans, but he faced strong opposition there, and his mission failed. The new strategy was to implicate the whole EU in this British policy. With the help of EU parliamentarians in the Friends of a Free Iran group, and others such as European Parliament vice president Alejo Vidal-Quadras, the Spanish MP, who invited the exiled Iranian leader of the MKO, Maryam Rajavi, to the EU headquarters in December 2008. Vidal-Quadras challenged then-EU President Nicolas Sarkozy, declaring that keeping the PMOI on the list was illegal, unfair, and counter-productive.

The Iraqi Decision

The Iraqi government has ordered MKO members to leave their headquarters, Camp Ashraf, and return to Iran, or take refuge in a third country. (The MKO was formed in the 1960s, in Iran, and expelled after the Islamic Revolution in 1979.)

The Iraqis have accused the MKO of committing crimes against Iraqi citizens in collusion with the former dictator Saddam Hussein, in the 1980 and '90s. In Iran, the leaders of the MKO are wanted for bus bombings and assassinations of prominent political figures. However, the Iraqi government is not likely to try the leaders of the group, but rather, to ask them to leave for a third country within two weeks. Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, in his visit to Tehran last week, emphasized that Camp Ashraf will be closed forever in two months, and the members will have to leave the country.

The MKO has called on European governments and the former Bush-Cheney Administration to use military force to overthrow the Iranian government, and has been a source of disinformation on the Iranian nuclear program, used by Israeli, British, and Bush Administra-



Maryam Rajavi may have a pleasant smile, but she is, in fact, the exiled leader of the terrorist People's Mujahideen of Iran, which has just been removed, by the EU foreign ministers, from the terrorist watchlist. Rajavi has a permanent residence in France.

tion chickenhawks to justify a war against Iran. It also served as an asset for the Bush Administration's and the British government's irregular warfare operations deep inside Iranian territory, since the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Practically, what the EU decision means is that the member countries will have to take the 3,500 terrorists into Europe as "political refugees," with everything that implies, especially for France, where the leader of the group, Maryam Rajavi, has had a residence permit.

Interestingly, Egypt's foreign ministry officials and members of parliament refused to meet MKO representatives who arrived in Cairo yesterday to negotiate relocation of MKO members to Cairo. The MKO believed that Egypt, which has had a tense political relationship with Iran recently, would welcome its members, but it seems that the reality on the ground has changed since Dick Cheney rolled his wheelchair out of the White House, once and for all. The Egyptian officials instead referred the MKO delegation to the offices of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to arrange the relocation of the terrorists to other countries.

Politically, this will increase tension between the EU and Iran, as Iranian lawmakers are preparing legislation to try the leaders of the MKO. This could lead to a stiff Iranian position towards the upcoming 5+1 group meeting on the Iranian nuclear program.

Last week, Russia's ambassador to Britain said that representatives from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, China, and Russia—the so-called

5+1 Group—would meet in Berlin next month. The group has previously attempted to push a British line, promoted by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, to persuade Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities, in return for "some incentives," an offer, which the British knew well the Iranians would not accept.

Iran's Majlis (parliament) Speaker Ali Larijani said yesterday that Washington's actions during the upcoming 5+1 meeting would demonstrate whether the U.S. had adopted a change of policy toward Iran. "America's conduct in the 5+1 meeting on the nuclear issue is another test which can show Iran more clearly the reality of the 'change' approach by American politicians," Larijani told the Majlis. The major question is how the Obama Administration will react to this development. The MKO has been on the U.S. State Department's list of international terrorist groups for more than two decades.

Iranian representatives to the UN have filed a complaint on the EU decision. "The European Union must realize that a political approach to terrorism, which threatens the lives and security of people around the world, is totally unacceptable for the global public opinion," Iran's permanent envoy to the United Nations, Mohammad Khazaei, wrote in a Jan. 28 letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. "The EU's politically motivated decision will not change the terrorist nature of the group. It will not 'turn the page' of history on the cult's terrorist activities and massacre of innocent civilians, nor will it cleanse the terrorist group of its criminal past," he added.

U.S. and France Oppose EU Position

On Jan. 26, the same day that the EU was removing the MKO from its terror blacklist, the U.S. State Department reasserted the previous U.S. position that the MKO will remain on its terror list. In the daily press briefing, Robert Wood, acting spokesman for the State Department, answered reporters' questions about the EU foreign ministers' decision. Replying to a question on whether there is "any similar action being considered here at the State Department," Wood replied: "We've already done a review, and it was determined that there would not be a revocation of that status for the Mujahedin-e Khalq, so nothing has changed from our standpoint."

Wood stressed that the decision was taken in the

State Department “just a week ago,” and that “there has not been any change at this point,” with regards to the Obama Administration’s policy.

The French government has, for some time, clearly showed its opposition to removing the MKO from the EU blacklist, and in 2006, even arrested and investigated leaders of the group residing in France for suspected plans of using violence and terror tactics on French territory.

On Jan. 21, the French government filed an appeal to the European Court to argue against the ruling that was the basis for the EU Council of Ministers’ removal of the MKO from the terrorist list. The French government said it still believed that the organization merited its terrorist status.

In a discussion with *EIR*, a French diplomatic source reasserted the French position, and strongly denied reports that France would accept taking people from the MKO. “There has never been any intention of bringing anybody from the MKO to France. The MKO is considered in France a terrorist organization as per the lists established by French Tribunals,” he emphasized.

It is crucial for other European governments to understand what type of political debacle this sort of irresponsible British-inspired gimmick implies.

President Barack Obama himself, in his first television interview Jan. 27, with the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya satellite channel, expressed his keenness for opening a constructive dialogue with Iran. U.S. Joint Chiefs chairman Adm. Michael Mullen followed the President’s statement by asserting that U.S. positive cooperation with Iran would help in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and the region, which is one of the most important priorities of the new administration.

With the threat of war from their allies Bush and Cheney now eliminated, the British are laying new landmines all the way to Southwest Asia, in the path of the new U.S. Administration. Recently, the British government decided to finance a Persian-language BBC satellite television channel, sending live provocations daily into Iran. The Iranian government responded by banning BBC reporters from Iran. However, the classical mistake usually made by Iranian leaders is that they blame the “West” as a whole, and especially the United States for crimes committed by the British Empire. Will they change profile this time and target the real enemy?