

US removes Iranian MEK from terrorist list

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The US State Department last Friday delisted the Mujahedin Khalq (MEK)—an Iranian opposition group—as a foreign terrorist organisation. The decision again underscores the fraud of the US-led “war on terror.” Whether a group is branded as “terrorist” or not is determined purely by the degree to which it serves the interests of American imperialism.

In its regime-change operations in Libya and now Syria, the Obama administration has supported various Islamist militias, including those linked to Al Qaeda. The delisting of the MEK opens the door for the US military and intelligence to collaborate with it as the confrontation between Washington and Tehran intensifies and the build up for a US attack on Iran continues apace.

The MEK was formed in the 1960s on the basis of an eclectic mixture of nationalism, Islam, Marxist phraseology and an “armed struggle” against the Iranian regime of Shah Reza Pahlavi. It backed the Islamic regime established following the ousting of the Shah in 1979. The conservative theocracy, after using the MEK to help stabilise its rule, turned on the group in 1981, imprisoning and executing thousands of members.

Popular support for the MEK within Iran largely collapsed after its leaders fled to Iraq and fought alongside the Iraqi army in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War. While carrying out hit-and-run attacks inside Iran, the MEK sought support in the US and Europe, recasting itself as a pro-Western movement supportive of free market policies.

Washington branded the MEK as a terrorist organisation in 1997 for its alleged attacks on American citizens from the 1970s. Despite this status, it

enjoyed the protection of the US military after the 2003 invasion toppled the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. Until 2009, American troops guarded the MEK’s base—Camp Ashraf—north of Baghdad, some 80 kilometres from the border with Iran.

Now MEK members are being moved out of Camp Ashraf to a base near Baghdad for relocation in other countries. The Shiite-dominated Iraqi government has close links with Tehran, which has repeatedly denounced the group’s presence inside Iraq. Since 2009, two clashes with Iraqi security forces have resulted in the deaths of nearly 50 MEK members.

The MEK has been lobbying heavily in the US for delisting as a terrorist organisation, drawing on support from wealthy Iranian exiles. Among the prominent American figures supporting the MEK have been: former CIA directors James Woolsey and Porter Goss, former FBI director Louis Freeh and General James Jones, President Obama’s first national security adviser. Some of these backers have received fees of \$15,000 to \$30,000 for each speaking engagement in support of the MEK.

As a means of installing a regime in Tehran more amenable to American interests, the US and its allies backed the so-called oppositional Green movement inside Iran in 2009 following the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. After the collapse of this “colour revolution,” based largely among dissident sections of the Iranian bourgeoisie, clerical establishment and upper middle classes, there are few illusions in Washington that the MEK could lead a popular movement for regime change.

The MEK, however, serves a more sinister purpose. The MEK’s links to Israel and its intelligence agency, it

Mossad, stretch back at least to 2002, when, according to former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter, Israeli intelligence used the group to publicly expose the existence of Iran's uranium enrichment plant at Natanz.

Over the past decade, significant evidence has emerged that the MEK has worked closely with Mossad in carrying out acts of sabotage and assassination inside Iran. These include the murder of four Iranian nuclear scientists over the past four years and the attempted assassination of a fifth. Citing a top-level Israeli source, *Guardian* journalist Richard Silverstein has linked Mossad and the MEK to these crimes, as well as an explosion in August that disrupted the power lines to Iran's new Fordow enrichment plant.

While Washington denies any responsibility, US intelligence agencies undoubtedly support these criminal activities. Writing in the *New Yorker* in April, veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh revealed that the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) had trained MEK members at a secret site in Nevada, at least between 2005 and 2007.

The article, entitled "Our men in Iran?" cited a former senior US intelligence official who explained that the training was top secret. "We were deploying them over long distances in the desert and mountains, and building their capacity in communications," he said. A retired four star general told Hersh that batches of MEK operatives got "the standard training in comms [communications], crypto [cryptography], small-unit tactics, and weaponry—that went on for six months."

A *Washington Post* article detailed a "surge" in US intelligence operations against Iran that began during the Bush administration and continued under Obama. It reported that the Iran Operations Division had swelled to "hundreds of [CIA] officers" and had "a robust budget." As well as electronic and satellite espionage, and the extensive use of unmanned drones, the article noted, the CIA had "an expanded network of spies" inside Iran. All this points to close ties between American intelligence and the MEK.

As a result of its delisting as a terrorist organisation, the MEK can operate openly in the United States, carry

out political lobbying and receive funds. The decision also means that American intelligence agencies can intensify their collaboration with the MEK in covert activities and acts of provocation inside Iran as the US prepares a new war of aggression in the Middle East.



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