

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, January 6, 2012 4:18 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Iran group say US responsible for members in Iraq (Reuters)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Friday, January 06, 2012 03:35 PM
To: NEWS-Mahogany; NEWS-Iran; NEWS-Iraq; NEWS-DRL
Subject: Iran group say US responsible for members in Iraq (Reuters)

PARIS (Reuters) - The leader of an Iranian dissident group in Iraq said on Friday the United States would be responsible for any harm that came to 3,000 of its members who could be forcefully moved to a camp outside Baghdad that they describe as a prison.

Maryam Rajavi, who heads the People's Mujahideen Organization of Iran (PMOI), had in principle backed a proposal to begin moving the residents of Camp Ashraf based on assurances from both U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the United Nations that their safety and security would be respected.

Mortars hit the camp at the end of last year, just days after Baghdad extended a Dec. 31 deadline for the facility to be closed as the United Nations negotiated resettlement of its residents.

Rajavi said, contrary to what had been agreed as part of a U.N. deal, Iraqi authorities were turning the proposed new camp, previously a U.S. military base, into a prison.

"The U.S. has adopted irresponsible positions vis-à-vis the criminal and unlawful actions of Iraq against the residents of Ashraf," she told about 1,000 of her supporters, who had gathered in Paris from across Europe. "The U.S. government would be completely responsible for any harm to the residents."

Ashraf, 65 km from Baghdad, has been home for 25 years to the PMOI, an Iranian opposition group the United States and Iran officially consider a terrorist organization, which makes relocating its members to other countries difficult.

Rajavi's opposition group, exiled in Paris, invited dozens of former high-ranking U.S. and European officials -- including ex-U.S. ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, ex-Federal Bureau of Investigation chief Louis Freeh and General David Phillips, a former commander responsible for protecting Camp Ashraf -- to speak on its behalf.

She called for a special conference that would gather players from all sides to break the impasse.

"At end of the Bush administration the recommendation of the coordinator for counter-terrorism was to delist the group, but Condoleeza Rice kept them on the list in hope of facilitating negotiations with the regime in Iran," Bolton told Reuters, adding that he saw no reason to keep the group on a terror list.

NOT A SIDE ISSUE

Camp Ashraf's future became unclear after Washington turned it over to the Iraqi government in 2009, a move that provoked a backlash in the United States, with former officials saying the country had broken promises to protect the residents.

Baghdad has repeatedly said it does not want the group on Iraqi soil.

The United Nations, along with the European Union, has been trying to resolve the issue. The mortars fell just a week after the last U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq, almost nine years after the 2003 invasion.

The PMOI's political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), has blamed the rockets on the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps "and its Iraqi agents," although Baghdad has not said who was behind the attacks.

In the 1970s the group, which is also known as the Mujahadin-e Khalq (MEK), led a guerrilla campaign against the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran, including attacks on U.S. targets. It says it has since renounced violence.

"Ashraf is not a side issue," said 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean. "We gave our word to protect them. When the U.S. makes a promise it should keep it."

NewsTickers alert senior Department officials to breaking news. This item appears as it did in its original publication and does not contain analysis or commentary by Department sources.