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State Dept. Briefing on Delisting of the Mujahedin-e Khalq

28 September 2012

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesperson

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BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Senior State Department Officials on

An Announcement Regarding the Mujahedin-e Khalq

September 28, 2012

Via Teleconference

MODERATOR: Thank you, Gwen. Welcome, and thanks to all of you for calling in on a Friday afternoon. I know it's been a long week for many of you who've been at UNGA.

Let me just begin by reading a short statement on background, one that you already should have in your Blackberries or on your computers, and then we'll open it up to your questions.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL THREE: The Secretary of State has decided, consistent with the law, to revoke the designation of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, better known by the acronym the MEK and its aliases, as a foreign terrorist organization under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

The Secretary of State has also decided to de-list the MEK as a specially designated global terrorist under the Executive Order 13224. These actions are effective today. Property and interest in property in the United States or within the possession or control of U.S. persons will no longer be blocked, and U.S. entities may engage in transactions with the MEK without obtaining a license. These actions will be published in the Federal Register.

With today's actions, the Department does not overlook or forget the MEK's past acts of terrorism, including its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil in 1992. The Department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organization, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members. The Secretary's decision today took into account the MEK's public renunciation of violence, the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism by the MEK for more than a decade, and their cooperation in the peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf, their historic paramilitary base.

The United States has consistently maintained a humanitarian interest in seeking the safe, secure, and humane resolution of the situation at Camp Ashraf, as well as in supporting the United Nations-led effort to relocate eligible former Ashraf residents outside of Iraq.

QUESTION: Thank you, sir. Just if I could get a sense of how the State Department came to this conclusion that they have not acted as a terrorist group or violated U.S. laws as far as terrorism is concerned, because the laws are very clear – it's both about intent and also the act itself. How did you come to the conclusion that they do not have the intent to commit another violent act in the future? We know that NBC has reported back in February that a U.S. Government official had said that MEK was involved in killing the scientist – nuclear scientist – in Iran as a (inaudible) for Israel.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Right, number one here. The judgment – and it is a judgment – was made on the basis of those criteria that are enunciated by the Secretary: the public renunciation of violence, the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism over more than a decade, and cooperation in the peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf, their military base. And I should add that the United States Government has not claimed that the MEK was involved in the assassination of scientists in Iran. And that's really all we're going to have to say on that.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

OPERATOR: Thank you. Our next question comes from Ashish Sen, Washington Times. Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: Thank you so much for doing this. Just to follow up on that question. The review that was done of the MEK's intents and actions, did that also include the group's activities in Iran? I know you talked about there was no sign that it's been involved in terrorist activities, but does that also include the group's activities within Iran? And

the second question is, do you anticipate any kind of change in provision of – are the countries now to accept members of the MEK now that the U.S. has delisted the group?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Well, why don't I take the first question and then I'll hand it to Senior Official Number Two for the second one.

Our decision is based on an evaluation – a global evaluation – of the group's activities. There are no exceptions. We believe that terrorism is terrorism no matter what country on earth it may be practiced in or against any party that it may be practiced against. So we do not distinguish between actions in or against Iran or in or against any other country.

And let me then turn it over to my colleague.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: Number Two here. I can't speak with authority as to how foreign governments will react, but it is certainly plausible to assume that this action will assist in our efforts to support the UNHCR in its efforts to find homes for these people outside of Iraq.

Certainly, now with Camp Ashraf effectively closed, only a residual group remaining, and with over 3,000 of its – Camp Ashraf's former residents peacefully relocated to Camp Hurriya, the major task in our humanitarian efforts with respect to this organization's members is their peaceful, orderly resettlement outside of Iraq. If this decision assists in those efforts, so much the better. I will be working intensely in the days and weeks to come with European Governments and other governments bilaterally and with the UNHCR to advance this process.

MODERATOR: Next question, please.

QUESTION: Thanks so much, and just last follow-up: What is the actual impact of this now? Does this mean that U.S. citizens can support them through groups that are registered in the United States, support groups, they can financially or in other way give them material support now?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: Yes, it does.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Ros – or, thanks, Indira. I think we have probably time for just one more question. I think [Senior State Department Official One] has to go, so go ahead, operator.

OPERATOR: Okay. And that comes from Rosiland Jordan, Al Jazeera English TV. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks for taking the call. In terms of the relationship now between the U.S. Government and the MEK, can either of you speak to what kind of engagement there might be, what kind of discussions, does the U.S. now look at the MEK as a party to what happens or what doesn't happen with the Iranian Government from this point on?

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL ONE: I'll take a first shot at that, and then Number Two can take it on, and he may have things to say regarding the issue of resettlement. But I want to be very clear about this. We do not see the MEK as a viable opposition or democratic opposition movement. We have no evidence and we have no confidence that the MEK is an organization that could promote the democratic values that we would like to see in Iran.

There is nothing in the way they govern themselves that would suggest they're interested in adopting democratic principles, and there is a long and fairly rich set of documentation on how they treat their own personnel that really does suggest to the contrary. So we continue to have serious concerns about the group with regard to allegations of abuse that's committed against its own members. They are not part of our picture in terms of the future of Iran.

SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TWO: This is Number Two. The U.S. Government has had and will continue to have contacts with the MEK with respect to their movement from Camp Ashraf to Camp Hurriya, which is largely complete. We have had and will continue to have contacts with them with respect to their resettlement abroad. Limited to that, we have had direct contacts usually by telephone and email. Those, as I said, will continue. On these issues, those contacts have been constructive and have – and I believe have contributed to the peaceful relocation of these people out of Camp Ashraf and to Camp Hurriya. Those contacts are irrespective of any of the issues that Number One has raised. We're obviously mindful of the organization's history, but because we have an overriding humanitarian interest in a peaceful and orderly and humane relocation effort, we have been in contact with them, and we will continue to be to this end.

<http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/09/20120928136845.html#ixzz28Rp9Abws>