

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Richardson Deserves Our Praise for Backing Iranian Democracy

By Wes Martin / Army Colonel (Retired) on Fri, Jul 6, 2012

A few days ago at an Iranian democracy rally, I watched former Gov. Bill Richardson stand up against a wrong being committed by our government. I could not help admiring his courage in doing this, especially after the unwarranted attacks he has been receiving in his own country and home state for defending the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MeK.

The MeK was founded on three principles: equality between those in power and those led, clerics not having sole right to interpret the Quran, and clerics not being able to expect blind obedience from the congregations.

Previously opposed to the shah of Iran, now realizing a brutal dictatorship was being replaced by an oppressive fundamentalist regime, they began to oppose the Ayatollah Khomeini.

In the late '90s, in an attempt to appease and gain concessions from the Ayatollah's government, the U.S. State Department labeled the MeK a foreign terrorist organization. No one could then foresee to 2003, when the United States inherited responsibility of MeK's military arm, the National Liberation Army, based in Iraq facing the Iranian border.

The National Liberation Army surrendered their weapons to us, consolidated at Camp Ashraf 50 miles north of Baghdad, and accepted protected person status from the United States.

For six years the U.S. military honored and fulfilled that protection. In 2009, the U.S. State Department turned these 3,400 people over to the pro-Iranian Iraqi government. Since then Camp Ashraf has been attacked twice by the U.S.-trained and -supplied Iraqi military.

It was American-made vehicles that were used to run people over, American-made bulldozers that crushed them into embankments, and American weapons used to gun them down.

The only thing our government has done concerning these attacks is to forbid U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., from conducting an investigation.

To the appreciation of the American warriors who served those six years beside the now-former National Liberation Army in Iraq, scores of senior European and American political and former government leaders have joined together to speak out. Yet, our State Department refuses to admit it is wrong.

It also continues to ignore the 2004 legislation identifying foreign terrorist organization criteria passed by Congress, which MeK does not meet. State Department even ignored the 2010 D.C. Court of Appeals ruling requiring compliance with that law. In April 2012, this same federal court did not buy State Department's limp argument that Hillary Clinton is "too busy" to comply with their previous mandate.

The court's just-released decision proves even the State Department is not above the founding principles of the U.S. Constitution.

These issues are among many Richardson and others have long been addressing. Instead of listening to American and European leaders, our executive branch launched an attack on the American defenders of MeK.

Thoroughly stomping the First Amendment, the accusations include supporting terrorism and accepting speaking fees from that organization.

I have personally witnessed the amount of work these dignitaries do to help correct this wrong, the vast majority of which is done without compensation. As I recently testified before the Canadian Parliament, and specifically used the attacks on Richardson as case-in-point, the speed in which an initial Treasury Department inquiry went to the open media can only suggest a not-so-hidden agenda.

That agenda is to get these MeK defenders to back off and stop interfering with State Department's appeasement of the current Iranian government. It is an honor to see the attacks on them have not silenced their testimony of truth.

Instead of criticizing Richardson, as has been done in the media and in the Albuquerque Journal based on misinformation quickly supplied by our executive branch, examination of all facts should be accomplished.

It's time to tell the truth about the MeK and Richardson's support for Iranian democracy.

Army Col. (Retired) Wes Martin, a resident of Albuquerque, served as the senior antiterrorism officer for all coalition forces in Iraq and later as commander of Camp Ashraf.