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By Christopher Booker



If it were reported that a senior UN official had been drawn into a conspiracy which, having already led to death or injury for hundreds of innocent people, would then trick thousands more into thinking they would reach freedom, only to find that they were trapped in a vile concentration camp, this might seem pretty serious. If the same official was then revealed to have fabricated a document assuring the world that all was well, the scandal might seem even worse. But such is the charge presented to a US Congress committee and now being levelled at Martin Kobler, the personal representative in Iraq of the UN's Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and head of the UN's mission there.

I have reported several times on the plight of the 3,200 Iranian dissidents belonging to the PMOI (People's Mujahideen of Iran), who for years lived peaceably in the neat little desert town of Camp Ashraf which they had built in Iraq, close to its border with Iran. In 2003, they were each given a personal guarantee of safety on behalf of the US government. But when US forces departed in 2009, Ashraf was immediately besieged by joint Iraqi and Iranian forces under the direction of Iraq's prime minister, Nouri Al-Maliki. In 2009 and 2011, the town was attacked, leaving 47 of the unarmed inhabitants dead and hundreds injured.

In 2011, Kobler joined with Maliki and the Iranians in playing a terrible trick on those remaining in Ashraf, telling them that, if they came to a former US base near Baghdad, Camp Liberty, they could then move on to a new life in other countries. On January 19 last year, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) confidentially reported that Camp Liberty in no way met the requirements for a camp for displaced persons. But 11 days later, under Kobler's direction, a new report was drafted saying the exact opposite, followed by a press release from his office claiming that the inspectors had found the camp wholly suitable.

On this basis the inhabitants of Ashraf agreed to move – only to find themselves in a closely guarded prison camp, without water or electricity, commanded by the very man, Colonel Sadeq, who had directed the murderous attacks on Ashraf. Conditions in the camp are still appalling: on Christmas Day the camp was flooded with sewage, making many of the inhabitants ill, particularly hundreds of women.

Much of this story I have told before, but what is new is the leaking of the suppressed UNHCR

draft report, which shows that the version published 11 days later was completely false. That this was fabricated under the personal direction of Kobler has been confirmed by one of his senior officials, Taher Boumedra, who testified to Congress that he was so horrified by what Kobler was up to that, last May, he resigned.

Ten days ago the senior Vice-President of the European Parliament, Alejo Vidal-Quadras, who is also president of the International Committee in Search of Justice, wrote to Ban Ki-moon. asking him to launch a full investigation into the “deception and concealment” by his personal representative in Iraq, and the treatment of the inhabitants of Ashraf (now renamed Camp New Iraq), which appears to be in clear breach of “all the values the UN has been built upon”. To support his case, Vidal-Quadras included a copy of the unpublished draft report, revealing just how grievously the inhabitants of Ashraf were made the victims of an “obvious deception”.

Their cause has been backed by hundreds of MEPs and thousands of other parliamentarians, along with senior former political and military figures from across the world, not least in the US. A great many people are anxious to see how Ban Ki-moon responds to this challenge.