



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Lawmakers complained on Sunday that President Barack Obama had failed to protect Iranian dissidents from persecution by Tehran following a deadly attack on their camp near Baghdad, and urged they be allowed back to their long-time base in Iraq.

A congressional delegation led by Dana Rohrabacher, chairman of the Republican-controlled House subcommittee on Europe, said that the Obama administration should not have backed the movement of members of Iranian dissident group Mujahadin-e-Khalq, or MEK, to a place where they would not be safe.

At least five people were killed in a February 9 rocket attack on their base in the former U.S. military compound "Camp Liberty" in the western part of the Iraqi capital. The attack was condemned by the United Nations.

"It was unethical for the United States to have endorsed the relocation of the people whom we promised to protect to Camp Liberty, where we knew they would not have proper protection, just because it wants to please Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the ruling mullahs of Iran," the delegation said in statement after meeting Iranian dissident leaders in Paris.

The MEK, which calls for the overthrow of Iran's clerical rulers and fought alongside the forces of former Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, was relocated last year from its long-time Iraqi home in exile at Camp Ashraf.

The MEK is no longer welcome in Iraq under the Shi'ite Muslim-led government, which came to power after U.S.-led forces invaded and toppled Saddam in 2003.

But some U.S. politicians view it as a potential opposition force to replace Tehran's rulers and have taken up their cause in Washington. The congressional delegation issued its statement after meeting with Maryam Rajavi, who heads the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI).

"Iran needs regime change and the MEK can help bring it about," the congressional delegation said, sharply criticizing the U.N. mission in Iraq for failing to grant more MEK members in Camp Liberty the status of refugees.

"The U.S. Government, the Secretary General of the United Nations, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees should give top priority to resolving the security situation of the residents of Camp Liberty - which can be ensured by their return to Camp Ashraf."

(Reporting By Alister Bull; Editing by Philip Barbara)