

US dishonours its promise to Iranian refugees

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Why are world leaders ignoring the fate of exiles belonging to the People's Mujahideen of Iran, asks Christopher Booker.

By Christopher Booker

In recent weeks, widely reported in the US but virtually unnoticed here, an extraordinary drama has been unfolding over the ruthless attack by Iraqi government forces on Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad, which for years has been home to exiles belonging to the People's Mujahideen of Iran (PMOI), the leading group opposed to the murderous tyranny in Tehran.

In July, despite the fact that each of the 3,500 residents had been given a personal guarantee of safety by the US government, Iraqi troops, supported by Iranian special forces, stormed into Ashraf, bulldozing homes and civic buildings, killing 11 unarmed refugees, injuring 500 and taking 36 people hostage (an action which has since been ruled illegal by Iraq's criminal court).

For six weeks in London, backed by Amnesty International, the Law Society and an all-party group of MPs and peers, Iranians have been camped outside the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square, pleading with the US government to honour its pledge. Six protesters, related to Ashraf residents, have been on hunger strike for 40 days, three now so seriously ill that they were last week removed to hospital. Similar scenes have taken place outside the White House.

Yesterday, hundreds of Iranians staged protest rallies in London, Washington and Stockholm, outside a meeting of EU foreign ministers, calling on the EU, the US, the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross to take action on this continuing outrage.

The remaining Ashraf residents, denied proper medical or food supplies, fear that unless the US and international bodies intervene, they face forcible deportation to Iran, where most would be imprisoned or executed.

The EU is compromised because only last year it was forced by both British and EU courts to lift the ban it imposed on the PMOI as a "terrorist" organisation, to appease the Tehran regime. But the real onus to stop this horror lies with the UN, the Red Cross and above all the US government, which should honour the pledge it gave, in writing, to each of those refugees it has since betrayed.