

*“To those new States whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom ....”*

—President John F. Kennedy  
*Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961*

## FOREWORD

*by Dr. Ivan Sascha Sheehan*

HISTORY IS REplete WITH FIGURES THAT HAVE FAILED to bridge life in the public forum and life in the ivory tower. Public officials whose political pronouncements are not supported by available evidence are common. So too are scholars who, to avoid controversy, only study matters for which there is little utility and sometimes no immediate application.

In the pages that follow, Ambassador Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., a public servant who has served three US presidents in five administrations and operated at senior levels of government over the past thirty-two years, suffers from no such conflict as he challenges Washington’s conventional thinking on US-Iran policy.

In this groundbreaking study, Bloomfield brings his sterling reputation, attention for detail, and knowledge of US Government policymaking to bear on the most pressing security concern of our time: the management of an increasingly belligerent, nearly nuclear-armed Iran and the treatment of the Islamic Republic’s best organized and most determined grassroots opposition.

The author draws on extensive experience as a senior foreign policy and defense official to craft a careful, scholarly narrative that outlines how the actual history of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK)—a group that was formed to oppose the Shah but fell out with the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini—came to be “twisted” for diplomatic ends. He shows how US officials found it expedient to view political conflict as terrorism to promote a policy of engagement with Tehran and identifies the contemporary implications of these decisions for US foreign policy.

Bloomfield is admittedly hard on the State Department but, as a former Special Envoy and Assistant Secretary of State, he is also sensitive to the difficult tasks carried out by senior government officials. His intent is not simply to criticize but to correct misperceptions and errors of fact—many secretly promoted in foreign capitals by Iranian security services—that led to MEK’s terror tagging in the first place and persuaded administrations of both parties to sustain it. In so doing, he sets the stage for a fresh evaluation of Iran’s primary opposition to clerical rule.

Bloomfield’s report is the most comprehensive and compelling rebuttal to the US Government file on MEK to date and it is certain to shift Washington’s view on the nature and history of Iran’s political resistance.

Seldom do authors so eloquently challenge conventional thinking, correct the public record, and combine academic rigor with sound policy recommendations. Bloomfield proves that it is possible to be contemplative without falling victim to moral equivalency and that constraints on leadership do not provide immunity from accountability for policy missteps that have national security and human rights dimensions.

Washington's Clinton-era decision to succumb to Iranian demands to contain their opposition was intended to secure Tehran's compliance with international norms. It backfired. The decades-long struggle to please Tehran through negotiations and open-ended discussions only telegraphed weakness. Political engagement did not stem the tide of proxy violence nor did appeasement provide the impetus for Iran's theocrats to join the civilized world. Instead, a willingness to negotiate over the opposition's fate proved a weak negotiating posture and denied the world access to a key ally in containing Iranian aggression. Listing the MEK as a terrorist group was to become a bipartisan failure as successive US presidents bowed to Iranian demands in an effort to capitulate and concede their way toward a more peaceful relationship.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's September 2012 decision to remove the organization's terror designation was the shot heard around the world. The MEK's removal from the State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organization list was an acknowledgement that the group failed to meet the statutory criteria necessary for the designation. The US Court of Appeals issuance of a deadline by which the Secretary had to remove the listing or face judicial oversight was further incentive to act. But the move was also an illustration of the growing bipartisan consensus that the group's resistance represented a useful political check on the regime's regional influence and the best hope for a more peaceful and stable Iran. That the MEK had been a valuable and consistent source of intelligence on Iran's emerging nuclear weapons program was further indication of the group's constructive intent.

Some heralded Ms. Clinton's decision as the clearest indication to date that the policy of unending diplomatic engagement with the Iranian regime was over. Others took that all options for Iran's containment—including preemptive strikes—would be open for consideration.

A commentary I co-authored titled *Now the Cards are on the Table*, published in Israel's *Haaretz* on the morning of the State Department delisting announcement, concluded that Secretary Clinton's decision to remove the group's terror label marked an opportunity to reset Iran policy by embracing regime change from within as a priority and adopting a fresh approach toward the Iranian opposition.

On the heels of Ms. Clinton's decision and global calls for a new policy toward the MEK, Bloomfield's report takes on Washington's misconceptions by exposing and deconstructing Washington's policy initiatives and MEK myths in a manner that is at once informative, lively, readable, and well documented but also critical and, at times, even scathing.

On reading his report, I was reminded of Hans Christian Andersen's fable of two weavers who swindle a vain emperor into buying a suit of clothes that is invisible to those

who are unfit or stupid. Unable to see his own outfit but determined not to let anybody know lest they think *he* is stupid, he proceeds to the public square where he is met by others who, hearing of the emperor's magical clothes, also fear appearing stupid and congratulate him on his attire. It is left to a child to point out the obvious: "but the emperor is not wearing any clothes!" One can't help wondering how many Washington insiders willingly shared in perpetuating the poisonous image and allegations attached to the MEK—despite what we now know was a wealth of available evidence to the contrary—and were thus complicit in the suppression and mistreatment of Iran's opposition.



I first met Ambassador Bloomfield in the spring of 2012 when we appeared on a panel together at George Mason University alongside Professor Alan Dershowitz of Harvard Law School and former US Attorney General Michael Mukasey. The panel addressed US policy toward Iran in the context of the multilateral nuclear negotiations designed to curtail Iran's enrichment of uranium to weapons grade levels. Among the issues discussed at the event were the Iranian regime's deplorable human rights record, its longstanding campaign of state-sponsored proxy violence, and the options available to US policymakers seeking to promote peaceful, democratic change in Tehran.

I later met with Bloomfield in Paris where we were separately studying the Iranian resistance, meeting with exiles, and examining public statements and documents issued by resistance figures—including President-Elect Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). The NCRI, a Paris-based coalition of opposition organizations that reject clerical rule and stand for democratic change, serves as the opposition's parliament in exile and is widely regarded as the democratic alternative to the Ayatollahs.

During these meetings I was struck by Bloomfield's detailed understanding of the challenges posed by Iran and the careful manner with which he assessed the actions of policymakers and the evolution of US policy after the 1979 Revolution.

At a private dinner following a resistance rally in Paris, Bloomfield and I both heard a former UN human rights official in Iraq tell of his resignation from the mission and the direct role being exercised by Iran, but concealed from UN headquarters in New York, in the movement of Iranian exiles from Camp Ashraf to Camp Liberty. Ambassador Bloomfield subsequently arranged to bring the official to Washington and ensured that his important revelations were made known to senior officials and members of Congress.

At a moment when public officials are often captive to preconceived ideological inclinations and talking points featuring thin analyses, Bloomfield's prescriptions for addressing the Iran threat are sensible, grounded in evidence, and certain to have an impact across the political spectrum.

That national leadership figures as respected and distinguished as General James Jones, General George Casey, Lieutenant General Dell Dailey, Judge Michael Mukasey, Dr. Mitchell

Reiss, and Governor Bill Richardson would provide support and encouragement for the findings in this report speaks to its importance. Such endorsements are also indicative of Ambassador Bloomfield's reputation as a policy practitioner and expert in international affairs.



This publication arrives at a decisive moment when Iran's clerical rulers are on increasingly shaky ground. Ordinary Iranians are angry and restless. With their currency in free fall and an economy hampered by sanctions imposed by the international community to prevent Iran's rise as a nuclear power, the regime's leaders are looking to shift attention from domestic troubles by suppressing dissent, silencing minority voices, and pledging solidarity with the world's tyrants.

Iran's vast petroleum exports have so far shielded the regime from outright collapse but enhanced sanctions are taking a toll and a financial crisis looms large. With prices rising, inflation threatens social cohesion and discontent on the Iranian street is certain to continue its rise. To distract from its mounting internal woes, the regime has dug in by closing ranks with Shi'ite officials in Baghdad, expanding their violent arc of influence to include Damascus, Lebanon, Gaza, and the Arabian Gulf, and engaging in escalating rhetoric with the US and Israel while defying international nuclear norms.

If past is prologue, the regime is also likely to lash out at its most feared resistance. The regime has long sought to break the back of the MEK's organized opposition through harassment and violence. Attacks in 2009 and 2011 left scores injured and killed. In 2012, three-thousand vulnerable dissidents were transferred from Camp Ashraf, their home for decades, to a so-called temporary transfer facility run by the Maliki government in Iraq that is alternately described as deplorable and in utter disrepair.

On February 9, 2013, Camp Liberty came under missile and mortar attack during the early dawn hours by "unknown assailants." Seven individuals, including a woman, were killed in the attack and more than fifty were injured. In the weeks following the slaughter, three additional individuals died while being denied adequate medical treatment in Iraq. The attack likely originated with orders from the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and was facilitated by the Quds Force, a paramilitary wing of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, with assistance from the Shi'ite government in Iraq.

In spite of these setbacks, the MEK maintains a vast and intricate network of global support and a capacity to organize so sophisticated as to rival that of any political party the world over. The realization that there is a viable political alternative in the Iranian opposition has only increased calls for democratic change in Tehran. A bipartisan chorus of leading figures in the US Congress, and parliamentarians from around the world, are now expressing their belief that Iranians should be able to choose their leaders in free and

fair elections without fear of intimidation or reprisal and that the time has come for real change in Tehran.

A previous study of the MEK concluded that its stated positions and goals over many years had been consistent with democratic principles. The world will next need to consider whether a non-nuclear Iran that strives for human rights, gender equality, separation of church and state, freedom of speech, and positive relations with global powers is best achieved through a preemptive military campaign or through more robust and effective non-military support of those seeking regime change from within.

As the regime continues to deny the Iranian people an opportunity make their voices heard by tightly controlling participation in elections, Ambassador Bloomfield's report is a wake-up call for US officials who have fallen victim to misinformation and a guide for those seeking fresh policy prescriptions. The study is also a reality check on the regime's well-coordinated propaganda campaign and a reminder to those on the Iranian street—and their many supporters worldwide—that, while political change takes time, the arc of history bends towards justice.

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