

## Iran: London basement is home to exiled opposition

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Global Research, June 25, 2009

[The Telegraph](#) 22 June 2009

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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It houses the offices National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), one of the fiercest opponents of the clerical regime, which has accused Iranian officials have accused it of planting a bomb at a Tehran petrol station and sending a suicide bomber to the shrine of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic republic.

Iranian security officials also claim to have identified and arrested a large number of NCRI members among protesters in Tehran on Saturday.

The Iranian government accused Britain yesterday of orchestrating a secret campaign seeking to destabilise the regime. "Great Britain has plotted against the presidential election for more than two years," Manouchehr Mottaki, the foreign minister, told diplomats in Tehran. "We witnessed an influx of people [from Britain] before the election.

Elements linked to the British secret service were flying in in droves."

The NCRI, which is officially based in Paris, has strong support among MPs. But it is unlikely to have the suggested links with British intelligence since it is affiliated to the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, a proscribed organisation that remains on Whitehalls' terrorism watch list despite a High Court ruling last month that it should be removed.

A spokesman for the NCRI said that the Iranian accusations were designed to play on long-established suspicions of foreign meddling in the country's affairs. "This is a lie," said Shahriar Kia. "The Iranian regime puts out these rumours to discredit the resistance and pave the way for more repression."

The NCRI it is only one of a number of enemies of the religious regime with offices in Britain. One of the longest running sores in bilateral ties is Tehran's allegations of MI6 backing for the Ahwaz League, a group that fights for the independence of the Arab province of Khuzestan, in south-east Iran.

A sympathetic website, run by the British Ahwazi Friendship Society, has accused the Iranian police and the Basijis - plainclothes militiamen - of killing dozens of people since the demonstrations began 10 days ago.

"Ahwaz City is in turmoil with 'many, many dead' at the hands of police and the Bassiji, supported by the Lebanese Hizbollah, according to numerous independent eye-witness accounts," it claimed yesterday.

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