

US-Iran Talks Undermined by Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) Presence

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*Iran has said talks will still go ahead in Vienna in spite of [an attack](#) on its nuclear facility at Natanz on Sunday. **Foreign Minister Javad Zarif** said Israel was behind the cyber-attack but stressed Iran would not fall into the trap of halting talks. Indeed, efforts to move beyond the Trump legacy in relation to the JCPOA last week have been constructive. Shuttle (or rather hotel hopping) diplomacy between Iran and America with France, Germany, UK, China, Russia and EU negotiators acting as go between have brought the sides closer to agreement. All sides have been willing to engage. The Americans – the Biden administration – fronting a deeply divided nation successfully navigated the dangerous rocks of the [domestic audience](#). Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araghchi later [reported](#) there were signs that the Americans would be willing to lift all the sanctions in one go to return to the JCPOA. Talks resume this week.*

It is inevitable though that as the two sides inch toward making workable compromises that will lead to the reinstatement of the JCPOA, enemies of the deal will do their utmost to derail it. As well as Israel, Saudi Arabia and US neocons are poised to oppose. For this reason, at the outset of the talks the Iranians passed their concerns to the Austrian police and security services, warning that the Albanian based **Mojahedin-e Khalq** terrorist cult would be sure to lob a symbolic stink bomb or two to toxify the atmosphere. Forewarned, Austrian police were able to curtail MEK activity [People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran] except for one [lone MEK protestor](#) who managed to shout at Araghchi and his colleague as they emerged from the building to get into their car.

This alone was such a trivial incident that analysts examining the talks in Vienna may be forgiven for missing the significance of this small detail. But there it was, hidden in plain sight, the west’s go to tool for regime change. The MEK, as ever, threatening to hijack the Iran agenda. It is beyond a joke that this rogue group which is infamous for using violence – whether in terrorist attacks in and beyond Iran, against its [own members](#) and [former members](#), in the service of [Israeli assassinations](#) and false ops – and which threatens [mass suicide](#) whenever it feels existentially threatened, should be free to deploy ‘protesters’ to interrupt these high-level talks in Europe.

How come the MEK is still tolerated?

It’s certain that the Biden administration officials did not want the MEK to interfere in these

efforts to engage Iran in talks. It's even likely that the majority of Republicans would not condone this. The MEK has become synonymous with Donald Trump's approach to Iran – fabricate and inflate the threat posed by Iran to the Middle East (read Israel and Saudi Arabia), and threaten war and punish the whole country with extreme sanctions. This cannot be and was not the American opening position in Vienna this week.

Even Facebook has tired of [them and their ilk](#). Last week, Facebook blocked 300 MEK-linked accounts; though this is the [tip of the iceberg](#) in terms of MEK's social media presence. After 2017, the MEK [took advantage](#) of the Trump administration's confrontational approach to Iran and built a slave camp in Albania under the auspices of the CIA in which it housed a click farm and troll accounts to [unduly influence](#) western opinion on Iran. It was in this camp, remember, that [Rudi Giuliani](#) symbolically spat on and tore up a copy of the JCPOA document. However, it is worth noting that the majority of the MEK's propaganda sites and social media accounts are in English.

Their Farsi presence is negligible. The few Farsi sites they have are only viewed in the hundreds by their own supporters. Among the 80 million population of Iran the MEK are either unknown or hated as a treacherous group that sided with Saddam Hussein to attack their homeland in the 80-88 war. For a group which has spent millions of dollars and uses click farm slaves to convince western policy makers that the group is the vanguard of regime change, they have not shown any evidence that anyone in Iran is [behind them](#) – or even aware of them. So, to answer the question, 'why are the MEK still here in 2021?' It's not because they are successful, it's because no one has chosen to stop them.

As the Vienna talks demonstrate, rolling back the Trump administration's errors in relation to Iran can be difficult. In some cases, such as the assassination of [general Qasem Soleimani](#), impossible. But direct talks are not the only means to that end. [We wrote in January](#) that a quick, effective and pain free policy win for Biden on Iran would be to return to the Obama administration's [plan to dismantle](#) the MEK in Albania. This would achieve several outcomes. It would signal to the Iranian people that America will not pursue a foreign policy based on terrorism and violence against them. It would free the two thousand slave members of the MEK in Albania and allow them to return to their families and civilian life. It would help stem an inflow of some foreign funds into America that is used to skew analysis and policy making on Iran. (The MEK is funded largely by Saudi Arabia and amplifies its anti-Iran propaganda.) It would also, and this is relevant at this moment, rob the Iranian hardliners of their weapon; the MEK is used as the stick to beat the west over 'terrorist interference' in the country, as indeed happened in Vienna. If compromise is to be reached, the Iranians should at least not be given grounds by the MEK presence there to complain of American double standards.

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*help rescue other victims of the Mojahedin-e Khalq cult. Since the MEK transferred to Albania in 2016, his activity has been focused on Albania and the European Union where he has been consulted by committees and political groups and parties. As an acknowledged expert on the MEK, Khodabandeh is a regular writer and contributor on Middle East issues in print, broadcast and documentaries. He co-authored the book 'The Life of Camp Ashraf - Victims of Many Masters' with his wife **Anne Singleton**, who was also involved with the MEK as a foreign national.*

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