

**Written evidence submitted by Mr Sina Adhami at Anglo-Iranian Professionals Association
(UKI0008)**

Anglo-Iranian Professionals Association

The following is presented by the Anglo-Iranian Professionals Association; an association that consists of Iranian-British lawyers, engineers and doctors who have been involved in and contributed to many human rights activities and causes, and participated in numerous Iran policy related conferences during the last two decades.

Why are we submitting this evidence?

We submit this evidence to present that the UK has not been successful in securing the UK's foreign-policy objectives due to the UK's inaccurate interpretation that a cooperative "moderate/reformist" faction exists within the Iranian government. Further, we present evidence that the UK's foreign-policy objective of appeasement has failed, and instead the UK should look at an alternative policy of maximum pressure, similar to the US, and cooperation with the Iranian opposition group in exile.

We address three key points in detail which are:

- The UK's policies towards Iran's role in the region and the UK's broader regional alliances;
- The FCO's role in multilateral diplomacy regarding Iran, and the UK's priorities therein; and
- Challenges of, and alternative's to, current methods of addressing bilateral disputes (past and present).

UK's Historic Legacy in Iran

The UK has been present and engaged in the Middle East for over a century and has played a historic role in the creation of countries in the region, in particular some Arab states of the Persian Gulf. As a result, the UK has deep ties to the region albeit much to its imperial past. During the past century, the UK has dominated and viewed Iran at times as a vassal state with the sole purpose of securing crucial natural resources such as oil and other minerals; and in more recent times, as an economic interest resulting in lucrative trade deals.¹

Guided by these interests, successive UK Governments had recognised and concluded that a popular government in Iran supported by the majority of its citizens, would be a challenge to the UK's imperialistic and exploiting goals. Thus, UK Governments have in the last century committed everything in their power to prevent the creation of an independent and sovereign Iran governed by a democratic and popular government. To achieve its goal, the UK has repeatedly undermined any attempt of democratic progress and creation of democratic institutions by the Iranian people. To this end, the UK aided to install and fully support Monarchical rule in Iran, knowing that the Monarchs ruled the country with an iron-fist as de facto dictators. The most known episode in this regard was the cooperation of the UK Government with the US to overthrow the popular and democratically elected Iranian government of Dr Mohammad Mossadeq in a coup d'état in 1953², that resulted in a reinstatement of the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as absolute ruler. To this day, this is the legacy that the Iranian people associate with the UK.³

Implications of UK's Policy of Appeasement with Iran

The 1979 democratic revolution in Iran which brought down Shah Pahlavi's dictatorial rule meant that the UK lost its most important ally in the region and consequently its strategic control over Iran's vast mineral

¹ <https://www.globalpolicy.org/us-military-expansion-and-intervention/iran/26389-oil-and-economic-interests-in-iran.html>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cswpt1>

³ <https://www.ft.com/content/9ea5c5e0-7c50-11e7-9108-edda0bc928>

and oil resources. Pursuing parochial economic interests, ever since the revolution, the UK has been trying to engage with the theocratic regime that usurped power in Iran shortly after the revolution. The UK has done this by continuously accommodating its leaders and attempting to cultivate trust with the ruling theocracy - beginning with dishonestly recognising the regime's characterisation of the democratic people's revolution as an "Islamic Revolution". This approach by the UK has translated into a strategy of appeasement whereby successive UK Governments and British diplomats have done everything possible within their means by way of statements, policies, and actions, for the last four decades, to convince the theocratic regime in Iran that the UK has been and is only interested in increasing trade between the two countries. The UK emphasises this interest so to indicate that they do not wish to bring down the current religious dictatorship that is in power in Iran, like it did in the coup d'état in 1953 of the government of Mossadeq.⁴

The UK hoped this approach would guarantee Iran's theocratic leaders to cooperate relatively easily in selling natural resources, and aiding other economic deals, including lucrative trade for British businesses. However, this policy of appeasement and submission to the Iranian regime's rule, has resulted in the theocratic rulers of Iran consistently using the 1953 coup d'état and the UK's imperial history and past hostility to Iran as tools and threats to advance their own dubious interests and survival. As a result, the Iranian people have suffered dearly, as the theocracy has strengthened its grip on power, and have plundered Iran's natural resources and wealth, at times through arranged trade deals with the UK so to achieve their own personal aims. In the past, the UK was able to dictate its wishes to the previous Monarchical regime in Iran, however, they can longer do this with the current theocratic regime. As such, the UK has compensated this loss of power by forging greater financial and military ties with the Gulf Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, and assisting such states as a counterbalance to Tehran's domination in the region.

At the turn of the 21st Century, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has used bilateral negotiations and multilateral diplomacy - within the framework of the United Nations, E3, and European Union in general - as a means to resolve disputes with Iran and remedy any concerns they may encounter. This engagement with Iran, in the last two decades, has been labelled under various names such as "Dialogue of Civilisations", "Critical Dialogue" and "Stick and Carrot Policy". Despite their different names, all share similar styles of negotiations centred on two deeply flawed misconceptions about Iran:

- 1) That Iran, under the ruling theocracy, is a regional superpower that must have its regional interests satisfied in any agreement in order to act as a normal and stabilising actor in the region; and
- 2) That the ruling theocracy is not a homogeneous entity under one faction, instead, there exists two competing factions within the regime namely the "moderates/reformists" vs "hardliners".

Consequently, on the basis of these two misconceptions, the FCO concluded that the best policy for the UK is to challenge and resist any punitive measures set by the international community against the interests of Iran, including sanctions; and to continue to favour engagement with the so-called "moderates/reformists" by offering incentives and trades, with a view to strengthen their hand within the corridors of powers within Iran.⁵

The FCO also believed that in order to establish and secure stability in the Middle East region, the UK had to recognise Tehran's "legitimate" regional interests, in particular in Iran's neighbouring countries, but to such an extent as to avoid any conflict in relations between the UK and the Gulf Arab states. This policy of recognition was apparent in Iraq and Afghanistan after the event of 9/11 when the UK joined US military campaigns in those countries. Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary at the time, relentlessly pursued diplomatic relations with Iran, travelling often to the country, attempting to charm the theocratic rulers to maintain trade deals and to prove that the UK is trustworthy, and will not interfere with Iran's regional

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-britain/uks-johnson-we-should-not-pursue-regime-change-in-iran-idUSKCN1IG1L6>

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/iran-trade-uk-sanctions-trump-theresa-may-nuclear-deal-economy-finance-business-a8618536.html>

affairs. As part of diplomatic discussions, the main Iranian opposition movement in exile - the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI/MEK) - was placed on the Government's list of proscribed terrorist organisations in March 2001 by Jack Straw.⁶

Subsequently, during the early part of 2003 Iraq War, as a result of quid pro quo between Washington and Tehran, bases of the Iranian opposition PMOI/MEK were repeatedly and intentionally bombed by Coalition forces, including the UK, despite the fact that the PMOI/MEK publicly declared its neutrality and played no part in the conflict. Members of the PMOI/MEK were killed indiscriminately during these attacks.⁷

During the subsequent years, the Shia militias in Iraq, armed by Iran, killed over 170 British soldiers but the UK Government did not hold the Iranian regime to account, although they were fully aware that Iran was behind these killings.⁸

The UK continued their appeasement policy, by overlooking and downplaying Iran's operations in Iraq, including an inhumane siege on Camp Ashraf, the home of the Iranian opposition, PMOI/MEK, in Iraq, and several deadly attacks orchestrated by Iran's Iraqi proxies and the Revolutionary Guards' Quds-Force, against the defenceless PMOI/MEK members who resided in Camp Ashraf and who were Protected Persons under the Geneva Convention.

Jack Straw, on a BBC Radio 4 programme on 1st February 2006, confirmed that he proscribed the PMOI/MEK as a terrorist organisation because Iran had demanded it "successfully of me when I was the Home Secretary"⁶. It was not until a legal battle that the UK Government was forced to remove the PMOI/MEK from the list of proscribed organisations on 24th June 2018. Before this ruling, the UK relentlessly attempted to keep the PMOI/MEK on the list, voicing its disappointment and challenging the Proscribed Organisation Appeal Commission ruling on 30th November 2007 that ruled for the UK Government to remove the PMOI/MEK off the list of proscribed organisations. Christopher Booker wrote in the Sunday Telegraph in May 2008 that the judgement in these legal cases was "a final rebuff to the Government's bizarre efforts to appease the murderous regime of the mullahs in Teheran".⁶

Jack Straw's legacy of using the Iranian opposition group as a bargaining tool in appeasing the theocratic government, still echoes today in subsequent and current UK Governments. For example, FCO ministers openly admit that the UK has no official contact with any particular Iranian opposition group.⁹

During the tenure of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, the UK played an active and prominent role in the EU's diplomatic outreach to Iran to convince the regime to halt its enrichment programme.¹⁰

The regime's clandestine nuclear weapons programme was exposed by the Iranian opposition movement, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), in 2002.¹¹

Together with the Obama administration, the UK was involved in the negotiations and dialogue with Iran which led to securing the nuclear deal known as the JCPOA. Since then, the UK together with France, Germany and the EU have been doing everything in their power to defend the JCPOA providing Iran with all sorts of incentives, deals and leeway. They have adopted this policy, even as the US under President Trump has withdrawn from the deal and Tehran has scaled back its compliance of many parts of the JCPOA. The UK and its European partners have gone so far to please Tehran, that they have set up a special-purpose vehicle named INSTEX which effectively helps Iran to circumvent some of the existing

⁶ BRIEFING PAPER Number CBP 5020, 7 March 2016: *The People's Mujahiddeen of Iran (PMOI)* by Ben Smith <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05020/>

⁷ <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/camp-ashraf-liberty/><https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/camp-ashraf-liberty/>

⁸ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1098175/iran-news-foreign-policy-briton-dead-iraq-general-gassem-suleimani>

⁹ <https://bit.ly/3bYZ4VZ>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/jan/24/iran.politics>

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/08/international/chronology-of-irans-nuclear-program.html>

US sanctions to boost trade with the UK and EU. This is another example of the UK's appeasement policy with Iran.

The UK's policy of appeasement aimed to further their economic interests, but this has inadvertently led to Iran destabilising the Middle East region, allowing Iran to consolidate its grip on Iraqi politics to gain regional power, and increased the Iranian regime's oppressive power over the Iranian people, as well as citizens of neighbouring countries. This shortcoming was highlighted by the NCRI President-elect Mrs Maryam Rajavi in her testimony to the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Non-Proliferation and Trade of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives in April 2015.

Mrs Maryam Rajavi stated: "The failure to thwart the Iranian regime's post-2003 meddling in Iraq enabled it to gradually occupy that country, propelling the unprecedented spread of extremism. Similarly, the atrocities perpetrated by (the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps') Quds Force in Syria and Iraq (to prop up Tehran's puppets, Bashar al-Assad and Nuri al-Maliki), and the massacre and the exclusion of Sunnis, coupled with Western silence, empowered ISIS."¹²

Alternative Methods of Addressing Bilateral Disputes with Iran

The UK is in a serious disadvantage when it comes to addressing and resolving bilateral disputes with Iran due to its policies towards Iran since 1979, emanating from its strategy of appeasement. Especially, as the UK has been unable to hold the regime in Iran accountable for its unacceptable behaviour and atrocities including many aggressions against British interests. The greatest weakness of the UK's bilateral and multilateral diplomacy with Iran is the FCO's continued focus on solving disputes with Iran by engaging the illusive "moderates/reformists" within the regime and convincing leaders in Tehran that they can trust the UK. This approach is the main challenge that the UK needs to overcome if it is to play any significant and decisive role in the region, in particular after it exits the European Union in entirety.¹³

In addition, the FCO's desire to assure leaders in Tehran that London does not support regime change under any circumstances has put the UK in direct opposition to the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people. This policy, like the UK's support of the oppressive Monarchical rule, indicates to the Iranian people that the UK is indifferent to whether their policy has beneficial or harmful effects, or whether their policies interfere with the Iranian people's aspirations and growing popular demand for free democratic change; which is especially evident at present times, and apparent in the continuous years of sustained popular protests and uprisings against the Iranian regime across the country, since 2018.

The UK, in line with the international community, has increasingly identified Iran as a serious concern and threat to worldwide security, recognising the Iranian regime's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, as well as its use of proxies to destabilise the Middle East region and export terrorism across the world.

Further, the UK has shown concern to Iran's appalling human rights situation and arbitrary arrest and torture of political prisoners, journalists, lawyers and British dual citizens under false claims of espionage.

However, the UK still sits at the negotiating table with Iran, relying on its policy of appeasement. In particular, the UK has failed to engage with Iranian activists and dissidents who seek a better future for Iran, that is: an Iran without the ruling religious dictatorship. This has more or less allowed the regime to have an upper-hand in any negotiations and dictate the UK's foreign policy objectives. The FCO should take an alternative approach, and engage with organised Iranian opposition movements, such as the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), as a new policy towards Iran to signal to the regime that there are other alternatives for the UK if Tehran refuses to change their appalling behaviour and act as a normal state. Consecutive UK Governments and the FCO, unfortunately to their detriment, have taken pride in refusing to acknowledge and talk to the Iranian opposition. This has been a severe weakness, as

¹² <https://www.maryam-rajavi.com/en/item/text-testimony-maryam-rajavi>

¹³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7268665/JACK-STRAW-Iran-never-trust-Britons.html>

it proves to the Iranian government that the UK lacks options and alternatives to the regime, and as such, the UK views the current Iranian theocracy as the only option for Iran - no matter what the regime does and how aggressive it behaves.

Following Britain's exit from the European Union, there is now a great opportunity for the UK to become a world leader on the international scene and align its policy with its greatest ally, the United States, and join the Americans in the correct policy of maximum pressure on Iran. Proponents of the appeasement policy and dialogue with Iran will criticise this principled approach deceptively arguing that maximum pressure on the regime and holding its leaders to account will only lead to another war in the region. This argument is fundamentally flawed and distant from reality because the regime in Iran is already waging an endless war against its own people, and proxy wars in neighbouring countries, and has no interest nor is in any shape or position to get involved in a direct military conflict with the West, which it knows it will certainly lose.

A correct policy of maximum pressure on Iran means the UK Government must:

- 1) Follow the US and proscribe the entire Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation;
- 2) Work with allies to evict Iran's regime and its proxies from Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon;
- 3) Impose sanctions on Iran's leaders who are responsible for serious human rights violations and past genocides, such as the 1988 massacre of political prisoners in Iran; and
- 4) Re-impose all nuclear-related sanctions on Iran given the regime walking back from several of its obligations under the nuclear deal rendering the JCPOA useless.

These steps and a new policy away from appeasement, and towards maximum pressure, are necessary if the UK wishes to have success with its diplomacy with Iran. The UK, after decades, has a great opportunity to be in the driver's seat in addressing disputes with Iran.

Additionally, the UK must make it clear to Tehran that any future agreements or talks are contingent upon it changing its unacceptable behaviour in the region, verifiably stopping its support for terrorism and ending cruel human rights violations of Iran's citizens.

Finally, and most significantly, the UK Government and the FCO must understand that the regime is at its weakest position in the last four decades and at a critical juncture in its history following years of nationwide popular protests across the country. The regime's inability to crush these protests with a brutal crackdown, mass arrests and indiscriminate killings show that the Iranian people are determined more than ever to continue their struggle to enjoy the democratic rights and freedoms offered to the British people. This development in combination with the existence of an organised opposition movement such as the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), that has a clear democratic vision¹⁴ and platform for future Iran, makes the prospect of regime change in Iran a future possibility which the UK ignores at its peril. The UK Government and FCO should move on from a policy of appeasement with an unpopular and obsolete Iranian regime, and instead, with cooperation with the Iranian opposition, adopt a policy of maximum pressure in support of the Iranian people.

April 2020

¹⁴ <https://www.maryam-rajavi.com/en/viewpoints/tomorrow-s-iran>