

By James Morrison
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Ali Safavi had waited 15 years for a chance to celebrate the legal return of the Iranian resistance to Washington.

This week, he and about 200 other Iranian dissidents and congressional supporters gathered on Capitol Hill to recognize the efforts of members of Congress and former top U.S. officials to force the State Department to remove the resistance from the U.S. list of terrorist groups.

“We’re back,” said Mr. Safavi, a member of the Iranian parliament in exile and president of the Near East Policy Research think tank.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran now hopes to reopen a Washington office that the U.S. ordered closed 10 years ago, as the Clinton and Bush administrations gradually included various Iranian dissident groups on the terrorist list.

“This is a day for us to celebrate,” said Ivan Sascha Sheehan, a counterterrorism specialist at the University of Baltimore who helped organize American supporters of the Iranian dissidents. “The mullahs’ cages are rattled.”

Iran’s brutal theocratic regime has long demanded that any nation that wants to negotiate with it first must list the dissidents as terrorists.

President Bill Clinton added the resistance to the U.S. terrorist list in 1997 when he was trying to

open talks with Mohammad Khatami, whom some Western analysts considered to be a moderate Iranian president.

President George W. Bush added U.S.-based groups that supported the resistance in 2003, closing all offices of the dissidents in the United States.

Fifteen years after Mr. Clinton added the resistance to the terrorist list, his wife, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, took it off. A federal court had ordered Mrs. Clinton to justify the dissidents' continued presence on the list or remove them.

At the Wednesday congressional reception in the Rayburn House Office Building, Rep. Mike Coffman said: "We must stand shoulder to shoulder with the Iranian people in their quest for a democratic government."

The Colorado Republican, who served as a soldier and a Marine in the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and in Iraq in 2005, noted President Obama's failure to support Iranian protesters when they took to the streets in 2009 to accuse Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of stealing the presidential election.

"This administration must never be silent again," Mr. Coffman said.

The crowd cheered as Rep. Ted Poe — Texas Republican, former criminal court judge and one of the leading congressional supporters of the resistance — joined the celebration in the House Science and Technology Committee room.

"Thank you, Judge. Thank you, Judge," they shouted.

"Liberty's beacon shines a little brighter because of your work," he told the dissidents and congressional supporters. "Liberty is showing her strength."

Mr. Poe told the crowd that they must continue to fight until the Iranian regime is overthrown.

“The battle is won, but the war is not over. There will be more battles to be fought,” he said.

Allan Gerson, a former Justice Department criminal prosecutor and a leading attorney for the resistance, called the removal of the dissidents from the terrorist list “a victory that will lead us to the ultimate victory” of a free Iran.

“The delisting is a victory for all Americans. It is a victory for civil liberties. It is a victory for a more just world order,” he said.

The dissidents also were joined by Reps. Judy Chu, California Democrat; Trent Franks, Arizona Republican; Ralph M. Hall, Texas Republican; and Laura Richardson, California Democrat.