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## **US says Iran opposition in Iraq agrees to disarm**

NORTHEASTERN IRAQ, May 10 (AFP) - US forces struck a disarmament deal here Saturday with the Iraq-based Iranian armed opposition, a group listed as a terrorist organization in the United States, a US general told AFP.

The People's Mujahedeen's thousands of guerrilla fighters and heavy weapons are to assemble in camps in Iraq under the control of the US-led coalition, said General Ray Odierno, commander of the US Army's 4th Infantry Division.

"It is not a surrender. It is an agreement to disarm and consolidate," Odierno said after winding up two days of talks with the group, which has been termed a terrorist organization by the US State Department, the European Union and Iran.

Speaking at a Mujahedeen base near the Iranian border, the general said they appeared to be committed to democracy in Iran and their cooperation with the United States should prompt a review of their "terrorist" status.

"I would say that any organization that has given up their equipment to the coalition clearly is cooperating with us, and I believe that should lead to a review of whether they are still a terrorist organization or not," he said.

The Mujahedeen's 4,000 to 5,000 fighters -- many of whom were educated in the United States and Europe -- would gather at one camp in Iraq while their equipment, including scores of tanks, would be collected at another, Odierno said.

Both camps would be guarded by coalition forces and the weapons would not be available to the Mujahedeen "unless we agree to allow them to have access", the general said.

The fighters, including a large number of women, would not be categorized as prisoners of war but they would be under "coalition control." Their status would be decided by Washington at a later date.

They are likely to face brutal retribution if they are repatriated to Iran, while asylum in the United States could fuel charges of double standards in the US fight against terrorism.

The People's Mujahedeen was supported by Saddam Hussein's regime as a buffer against Iranian influence in Iraq, and could provide US forces with valuable information about the former Iraqi leadership and pro-Iranian militia groups in the region.

Asked what role they could play in the future of Iraq, Odierno said only that they shared similar goals to the United States in "forming democracy and fighting oppression" and that they had been "extremely cooperative."

Mujahedeen officials refused to comment publicly about the agreement, but one officer said the group had no quarrel with the United States and had not fired a shot at coalition forces during the war to topple Saddam's regime.

A "ceasefire" deal was agreed last month after the United States bombed some of the Mujahedeen's camps in Iraq.

US and Mujahedeen troops have mingled cordially during the discussions here over the past two days, although the US military was taking no chances with regular overflights by F-15 bombers and Apache attack helicopters.

Washington's dialogue with the Mujahedeen has infuriated Iran, which has accused the United States of hypocrisy in its "war on terror".

Also known by its Persian name Mujahedeen-e Khalq, the group has mounted major attacks inside Iran and has been fighting to overthrow the clerical regime in Tehran since shortly after it seized power.

Washington and Tehran do not have formal diplomatic relations, and US President George W. Bush labelled Iran as part of an "axis of evil" last year along with Saddam's Iraq and communist North Korea.

US officers are concerned that if the group is rendered powerless, rival guerrillas from the Badr Brigade, the Iran-based military wing of the main Iraqi Shiite faction, will gain influence in the region.