

**MUJAHEDIN-E
KHALQ UNCOVERED;
THE TERRORIST GROUP IN THE
EYES OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA**



Table of Contents

|2| Preface

2000

|15| Terrorist And Insurgent Organizations Mujahedin-E-Khalq (MEK, MKO, NLA) – Iran

2001

|22| With Friends Like These

2002

|28| An Iranian Group And Its Surprising American Friends

|33| Ashcroft's Baghdad Connection

2003

|40| The Enemy Of My Enemy Of My Enemy Is My What?

|45| Iran: Cult Or Opposition Group? A Look At The Mujahedin Khalq

|50| Behind The Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)

|57| Iranian Dissident Group Labeled A Terrorist Cult

|61| Iranian Terror Group Planned Attacks, French Report Says

|65| Iranian Opposition Movement's Many Faces

|71| The Cult Of Rajavi

|85| Friends In High Places

|90| Transformations May Mark Demise Of Mujahideen

|95| Rice Clarifies Stand On Iranian Group

|98| Iraq Council Votes To Throw Out Iranian Opposition Group

|101| Inside A Group Caught Between Three Powers

2004

|111| Charity Event May Have Terrorist Link

|115| Why The US Granted 'Protected' Status To Iranian Terrorists

|120| The Reach Of War: People's Mujahhedin; U.S. Sees No Basis To Prosecute Iranian Opposition 'Terror' Group Being Held In Iraq

|125| [Terror Watch: Shades Of Gray](#)

2005

|131| [US Government Supports Iranian Terrorists When It Suits Them](#)

|135| [Iran's 'Terrorists' Helped Disclose Nuke Program](#)

|140| [Iran: Exiled Armed Group Abuses Dissident Members; Opposition Group Seeks Recognition And Support In Western Capitals](#)

|143| [No Exit](#)

|149| [Iran Opposition Group Seeks US legitimacy](#)

|152| [With Friends Like These](#)

2006

|160| [Monsters Of The Left: The Mujahedin Al-Khalq](#)

|173| [Opposition A Stick Against Tehran?](#)

|178| [Statement On Responses To Human Rights Watch Report On Abuses By The Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization \(MKO\)](#)

|189| [On Cheney, Rumsfeld Order, US Outsourcing Special Ops, Intelligence To Iraq Terror Group, Intelligence Officials Say](#)

|193| [Children Of 'The Resistance'](#)

2008

|200| [Foreign Policy Maverick](#)

|208| [Iran's Troubling Opposition](#)

2009

|214| [Seven Plead Guilty To Providing Material Support To Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization](#)

|217| [U.S. Handling Of Mujahedin-E-Khalq Since U.S. Invasion Of Iraq Is Examined](#)

|219| [The Mujahedin-e Khalq In Iraq; A Policy Conundrum](#)

2010

- |221| [Congressional Backers look To Exiled Iranian Group For Regime Change](#)
- |226| [Rudy Giuliani Proudly Supports Iranian Terrorist Group](#)

2011

- |229| [Rudy Giuliani And John Bolton Are Terrorists Now](#)
- |232| [Leading Conservatives Openly Support A Terrorist Group](#)
- |238| [Rudy Giuliani Denies Supporting Terrorist Organization](#)
- |242| [Anti-Terrorism Mouthpieces Now Supporting Terror](#)
- |245| [Why Are Some U.S. Politicians Trying To Remove An Iranian 'Cult' From The Terror List?](#)
- |250| [Camp Ashraf Escapee Says MKO Bans Marriage, Radio, Internet](#)
- |254| [The Foolish Embrace Of The MEK](#)
- |257| [War With Iran? US Neocons Aim To Repeat Chalabi-Style Swindle](#)
- |261| [US Move To Delist MEK As Terror Group Worries Iran's Opposition](#)
- |266| [Silencing The Moderate Middle](#)
- |271| [Top US Officials Paid To Endorse Iranian Terror Group](#)
- |273| [Iranian Group's Big-money Push To Get Off US Terrorist list](#)
- |289| [Mujahideen-e Khalq: Former U.S. Officials Make Millions Advocating For Terrorist Organization](#)
- |305| [Inside Mujahidin-e Khalq's Massive Lobbying Push](#)
- |308| [An Iranian Cult And Its American Friends](#)
- |314| [Mujahedin Machine vs. The Iranian-American Community](#)
- |318| [The Inside Story Of America's Favorite Terrorist Group](#)
- |322| [The Lobbying That Shouldn't Be Happening](#)
- |326| [Don't Be Fooled: MEK Is A Terrorist Group](#)

- |330| [WikiLeaks Releases Involving Mujahaddin e-Khalq \(MEK\)](#)
- |336| [Iran Exile Group MEK Seeks US Terror De-listing](#)
- |341| [Why Is There Such Widespread Support in DC for a Former Terrorist Group?](#)

2012

- |348| [For Obscure Iranian Exile Group, Broad Support In U.S.](#)
- |354| [Romney Tied To Terrorism](#)
- |356| [Former U.S. Base Opened To Iranian Terrorist Group](#)
- |359| [US Officials: Israel Works With Terror Group to Kill Iranian Scientists](#)
- |361| [Israel Teams With Terror Group To Kill Iran's Nuclear Scientists, U.S. Officials Tell NBC News](#)
- |371| [How Terrorism Becomes "Entirely Defensible"](#)
- |373| [Report: U.S. Officials Tie Controversial Iranian Exile Group To Scientist Assassinations](#)
- |375| [NBC Report: Israel And The MEK Responsible For Deaths Of Iranian Nuclear Scientists](#)
- |377| [Israel, MEK And State Sponsor Of Terror Groups](#)
- |383| [Why Are Some Americans Defending An Iranian Terrorist Group?](#)
- |387| [Right Wing Praises MEK For Conducting Acts Of Terrorism In Iran](#)
- |390| [Thai Muslim Leader: Mossad's MEK Responsible For Diplomat Attack](#)
- |392| [Suspected Assassins: We're No longer Terrorists](#)
- |396| [Are The MEK's U.S. Friends Its Worst Enemies?](#)
- |401| [Treasury Dept Probes Former Pennsylvania Governor's Terror Ties](#)
- |403| [Ed Rendell, Investigated In Mujahideen-e Khalq Speaker Fees, Backs 'Terrorist' Group](#)
- |406| [UN & Obama Supporting Islamo-Marxist Terror Group In Iraq](#)
- |412| [U.S. Supporters Of Iranian Group Face Scrutiny](#)
- |416| [Money vs. Facts: The Mujahedin-e Khalq Is A Terrorist Organization](#)
- |421| [Are Israel, US Secretly Paying Terrorists To Destabilize Iran?](#)

427	MEK And Its Material Supporters In Washington
432	Giuliani Claims ‘Terrorist’ MEK Only Chance For Regime Change In Iran
435	Our Men In Iran?
441	Training Terrorists In Nevada: Seymour Hersh On U.S. Aid To Iranian Group Tied To Scientist Killings
456	US Trained Iranian ‘Terrorist’ Group – Report
459	An Iranian Mystery: Just Who Are The MEK?
463	“Cyber Terrorism”: US-supported Terrorist Group MEK Plants Stuxnet Virus Malware To Disable Iran’s Nuclear Facilities
473	MEK And That Dastardly T-Word
475	Delisting The Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)
479	State Dept. Poised To Remove Iranian Terror Group From Terror List
481	Likely Victory For MEK Shills
485	State Department Poised To Raise Chances Of War With Iran
488	Apparently Terrorism Isn’t Terrorism If It Targets Iran
491	Iran Exile Group Nears U.S. Rebirth
497	Is One Man’s Terrorist Another Man’s Freedom Fighter?
500	Terrorists? Us?
511	US Warns Dissident Mujahideen-e Khalq To Leave Iraq Camp
513	US Sponsored Terrorists: The Menacing Plots Of The Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) against Iran
517	Forever in Exile: The Iranian Mujahideen-e Khalq
522	The Cult of MEK
526	John Bolton Shockingly Denies Being a ‘Terrorist Supporter’
528	Watergate Journalist Carl Bernstein Spoke at Event Supporting Iranian ‘Terrorist’ Group
535	State Department Set To Take Violent Iranian Group Off Terror list

- |539| [State Department Officially Removing MEK From US Terror List](#)
- |542| [By Delisting The MEK, The Obama Administration Is Taking The Moral And Strategic Bankruptcy Of America's Iran Policy To A New Low](#)
- |546| [Q&A: What Is The MEK And Why Did The US Call It A Terrorist Organisation?](#)
- |552| [Iranian Cult Is No Longer Officially A Terrorist Group](#)
- |556| [MEK Decision: Multimillion-dollar Campaign Led To Removal from Terror List](#)
- |562| [Iranian Exiles, DC lobbyists And The Campaign To Delist The MEK](#)
- |570| [Analysts Respond To Expected US Decision To Delist MEK From FTO List](#)
- |575| [Five lessons From The De-listing Of MEK As A Terrorist Group](#)
- |584| [MEK Still Isn't OK](#)
- |589| [Obama Decision On Islamo-Marxist Terror Cult Will Lead To U.S. Funding, Experts Say](#)
- |595| [Iranian Exile Group Removed From U.S. Terror List](#)
- |599| [U.S. Takes Iranian Dissident Group MEK Off Terrorist List](#)
- |603| [The MEK Is Bad News, But Delisting Them Was A Good Decision](#)
- |607| [MEK: When Terrorism Becomes Respectable](#)
- |615| [Mujahedin-e Khalq: America's Protected Terrorists Gearing up Against Iran \(Op-Ed\)](#)
- |620| [Iranian Terrorist Group Demands Delisting](#)
- |626| [Ottawa Drops Saddam Hussein-linked Iranian Group From Terror list In Bid To Ramp Up Pressure Against Tehran](#)

2013

- |631| [More Smoke And Mirrors From The MEK Propaganda Factory](#)
- |635| [Diary Of An MKO Rent-a-Crowd Demonstrator](#)
- |639| [The Cult In The Shadow War: An Interview With A Former Member Of Mojahedin-e-Khalq](#)

2014

- |648| [John Kerry Gets Pressed To Grant Asylum To Former Terrorist Group MEK](#)
- |652| [How US Policy On Iran Came To Be Based On Fabricated Documents](#)
- |659| [Rally Of Strange Bedfellows : To Change Iran, U.S. Group Backs Former 'Terrorists'](#)
- |665| [International Meeting For ISIL In France](#)
- |667| [Mujahadeen-e-Khalq \(MEK\)](#)
- |674| [Beware Of The MEK](#)
- |678| [US War on Iran Takes Bizarre Turn. US Covert Support to Mujahadeen-e-Khalq \(MEK\)](#)

2015

- |686| [Mujahedin-E Khalq \(MEK\)](#)
- |697| [Mujahedin Khalq Organization \(MKO\): US-Israel Sponsored Terrorist Entity Directed Against Iran](#)
- |701| [How To Stop Being Terrorists: A Guide For ISIS, Courtesy Of The MEK](#)
- |711| [Long March Of The Yellow Jackets](#)
- |730| [Poe's Financial Ties To MEK May Explain Maryam's House Testimony](#)
- |733| [Cult Leader Will Tell Congress: Fight ISIS by Regime Change In Iran](#)
- |738| [Why Is Congress Listening To An Ex-Terrorist Iranian Cult Leader?](#)

- |743| [Why Congress Is Embracing Former Iranian Terrorists](#)
- |749| [MEK In The European Parliament: The Well-Funded Exile Group's Desperate Attempts To Sabotage Diplomacy On Iran](#)
- |754| [The MEK Is A Cult, Not A Viable Iranian Opposition Group](#)
- |757| [The MEK And The Deal With Iran](#)
- |759| [Congressional Invite To MEK Sparks Furious Backlash](#)
- |763| [Brace Yourself, New York! The Annual Anti-Iran Terrorist Freak Show Is Back in Town!](#)
- |769| [The Mujahedeen e-Khalq \(MEK\): The US Prepares To Back A New Terrorist Army In Iran, Prelude To A Wider War?](#)
- |776| [How Do Terrorist Groups And Cults Attract Followers?](#)
- |783| [Schaefer Targets Rival Hawley Over Terrorist Group Case](#)

2016

- |788| [Can Albania Meet its Obligations And De-radicalize An Influx of Terrorists Into Europe?](#)
- |795| [From Iran To Nice, We Must Confront All Terrorism To End Terrorism](#)
- |801| [Congressional Research Service Expert And Gulf Lobbyist Headline MEK Event](#)
- |805| [Former Terrorist Group To Enjoy Close Ties To Rumored Trump Cabinet](#)
- |809| [Giuliani Was Paid Advocate For shady Iranian Dissident Group](#)
- |813| [Giuliani Took Money From A Group That Killed Americans. Does Trump Care?](#)
- |824| [The MEK And Its American Fans](#)
- |827| [STASI: Dear Don, Rudy Isn't Fit To Be Our Top Diplomat, He's Dr. Strangelove On Meth](#)

2017

|831| [Trump Cabinet Pick Paid By Controversial Iranian Exile Group](#)

|840| [Trump Appointee Paid \\$50,000 By Iranian Opposition MEK Group](#)

|844| [Trump Is At War With Iran, Not ISIS](#)

Preface

'Mujahedin-e Khalq Uncovered; The Terrorist Group in The Eyes of International Media', is a collection of articles on Mujahedin e-Khalq organization (MKO, also known as MEK, NCRI, PMOI, etc.), published in major international Media outlets from 2000-2017, and reports on the group published by governments, research institutes and think tanks that helps to understand how MKO's terrorism has been viewed by experts, journalists, politicians, governments and international organizations during the past 17 years.

Iran is estimated to have lost more than 17000 of its citizens to terror attacks since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, 12000 of whom are reportedly assassinated only by the MKO. The atrocities and crimes of the MKO set up one of the bloodiest chapters of Iranian history. Soon following the Iranian Islamic revolution, the organization started a phase of armed struggle in a bid to destabilize the newly formed government and have its revenge of failing to assume a share in the power. As a result, MKO's dedicated terrorist teams launched numerous blind suicide operations, bombings, gun-shot assassinations as well as street gun-battles in which many innocent civilians and key officials were killed. In 2005, a report titled 'No Exit' was released by Human Rights Watch describing the terrorist group as a cult of personality that systematically violates the human rights of its own members. There are also reports that members of the MKO deify Maryam Rajavi, who has already proclaimed herself "president" of Iran. Her photographs are frequently found in MKO camps, and MKO members staged forced public self-immolations to protest her 2003 arrest in Paris.

MKO's terrorist activities in Iran and abroad were not left unnoticed by global Media. The group's terrorist nature has been widely reflected in the Media during the past 2 decades. Although the MKO has been described as a terrorist group in

MEK
Uncovered

12

official documents released by various governments including the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, etc, in the past few years, the group succeeded to lobby its name out of the lists of terrorist organizations thanks to its big lobbying campaigns and large sums of money paid to the people that lobby on its behalf. Considering MKO's long history of adopting terrorism and cult-like practices as major tools to achieve its political aims, it is worth knowing how MKO's terrorist and cult-like nature is reflected in major international Media outlets and research institutes in the past 2 decades.





2000



TERRORIST AND INSURGENT ORGANIZATIONS

Mujahedin-E-Khalq (MEK, MKO, NLA) - Iran

July 2000

Internet Resources

Iran-e-Azad.

Available at: <http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/>

Home page of the supporters of the National Council of Resistance of Iran which is believed to have connections to MEK. Offers news and analyses.

Iranian Mojahedin.

Available at: <http://www.mojahedin.org/indexenglish.html>

Site offers access to news, the Iran Liberation Weekly, and online books by the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO).

Available at: <http://www.ict.org.il/>

Site maintained by the International Policy Institute for Count-

MEK
Uncovered

15



er-Terrorism. Under the 'International Terrorism' section choose 'Terrorist Organization Profiles' then 'Mujahedin-e Khalq'. Offers sections titled: History, Terrorist Activity, Updates and Attacks.



Books

Abrahamian, Ervand. The Iranian Mojahedin. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989. 307 p.

Book call no.: 955.053 A159i

Anderson, Sean and Sloan, Stephen. Historical Dictionary of Terrorism. Metuchen, NJ, Scarecrow Press, 1995. 452 p.

Mujahideen - Iran, pp 226-228.

Book call no.: R 303.62503 A594h

Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook 1999. Alexandria, VA, International Strategic Studies Association, 1999. 1760 p.

Iran: History, pp 685-694.

Book call no.: R 355 D313 1999

Facts on File, 1999. New York, Facts on File, 1999. 1 vol.

Iran: Opposition Group Kills General, April 15, 1999, p 274.

Book call no.: R 909.82 F11 1999

Facts on File, 2000. New York, Facts on File, 2000. 1 vol.

Iran: Mujahedeen Bombing, p 101, February 17, 2000.

News in Brief: Mujahedeen Shelling of Residential Area, p 175, March 16, 2000.

Book call no.: R 909.82 F11 2000

International Encyclopedia of Terrorism. Chicago, IL, Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997. 805 p.

Iraqi Sponsorship of Terrorism: Supporting Terrorism Against Iran, pp 390-391.

Book call no.: R 303.625 I612

Jane's Sentinel: The Gulf States. Alexandria, VA, Jane's Information Group, 2000. 541 p.

Iran, pp 47-138 (especially note sections '2.7.4 Threat Internal' and '2.14.4 Insurgent Forces - Organization').

Book call no.: R 953.6 J33 2000 May - 2000 Oct

Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism. Alexandria, VA, Jane's Information Group, 1999. 520 p.

Mujahideen-e-Khalq, pp 244-245.

Book call no.: R 364.1 J33 1999 May-August

Mawsilili, Ahmad. Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalist Movements in the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey. Lanham, MD, Scarecrow Press, 1999. 401 p.

Mujahiden Khalq, pp 197-198.

Book call no.: 297.09 M462h

Milani, Mohsen M. The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic. Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1988. 361 p.

See index under 'Sazeman-e Mojahedin-e-Khalq-e' and 'National Liberation Army' for specific references.

Book call no.: 955.053 M637m

Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1999. Washington, U.S. Dept of State, April 2000. 107 p.

Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO), pp 80-81.

Also available online at: <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1999report/1999index.html>

Book call no.: R 303.625 P316 1999

Reeve, Simon. The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama Bin Laden and the Future of Terrorism. Boston, MA, Northeastern University Press, 1999. 294 p.

See index under 'Mujaheddin-e-Khalq' for specific references.



Book call no.: 364.1097471 R331n

Russell, Malcolm B. The Middle East and South Asia 1999. 33rd ed. Washington, Stryker-Post, 1999. 257 p.
Islamic Republic of Iran: Domestic Concerns During and After the War, pp 97-100.

Book call no.: R 915 C635m 33rd ed 1999

Terrorism in Context, edited by Martha Crenshaw. University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. 633 p.
Terrorism and Politics in Iran, 553-596.

Book call no.: 363.32 T3285

Documents

Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, by Kenneth Katzman. Washington, Nov 1992. 6 p.

Doc. call no.: M-U 42953-1 no.92-824F

Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. Terrorism: Middle Eastern Groups and State Sponsors, 1999, by Kenneth Katzman. Washington, GPO, August 1999. 37 p.
People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), p 25.

Doc. call no.: M-U 42953-1 no.99-RL30277

Periodicals

Barzin, Saeed. Proxy Warriors. Middle East International No.627:16 June 16, 2000.

Mojahedin Khalq Organization steps up its military campaign. Boyne, Sean. Tehran Targets Iraq-Based Rebel Forces. Jane's Intelligence Review 12:20-23 April 2000.

Reviews the origins of the MEK, relations between the MEK and Iraq, NLA equipment, etc.

Burns, John F. Left-Wing Group in Iran Fires Mortars at a Military Base. New York Times, p A4, March 14, 2000.

Commentary on U.S. "Two-Faced Policy" on MKO. Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Near East & South Asia, p 70, November 16, 1994.

FBIS-NES-94-221 (Microfiche)

Dissidents Claim a Mortar in Teheran (against the Intelligence

Ministry). New York **Times**, p **A6**, **February 1, 1999**.

Entessar, Nader. Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran: Domestic and Foreign Policy Implications. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 17:21-43 Summer 1994.

Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Near East & South Asia.

For up-to-date information on the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK, MKO) and its National Liberation Army wing, check the FBIS online database under 'MKO'. MKO has been active in 1999 and 2000.

Gelb, Norman. The Problem of Iranian Resistance. *New Leader* 80:6-7 November 3, 1997.

Discusses the clash between U.S. government security forces and the Iranian National Liberation Army. Also offers information on the National Council of Resistance.

Iran. Pinkerton Global Intelligence Services 2000.

Military Exercises Target Opposition. 17:7 February 4, 2000.

Calm Prevails Despite Assassination Attempt. 17:7 March 17, 2000.

Iran: Events in Tehran Become More Tense and Complicated (attacks by Mujahedin-e-Khalq). *Pinkerton Risk Assessment Services Weekly* 1998 15, no.23:3-4 June 5, 1998.

Iran's Army: Don't Count on Us, Ayatollah. *Economist* 332:34 August 27, 1994.

Officers of Iran's armed forces warned their government that in the future they will not let the military be used to quell internal conflicts.

Iraq: Capital Hit by Rockets. Pinkerton Global Intelligence Services 2000. 17:9 May 5, 2000.

Kirschten, Dick. Who's the Real Terrorist? *National Journal* 26:2284-2285 October 1, 1994.

Details the debate in Washington over the People's Mujahedin of Iran. Miller, Bill. 2 Groups Appeal Designation as Terror Organizations. *Washington Post*, p A2, March 14, 1999.

Miller, Bill. State Department Listing of Terror Groups Upheld.



Washington Post, p A12, June 26, 1999.

Mojahedin-E-Khalq Claims Responsibility for Esfahan Attack. Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Near East and South Asia, p 52, April 25, 1996.

FBIS-NES-96-081 (Microfiche)

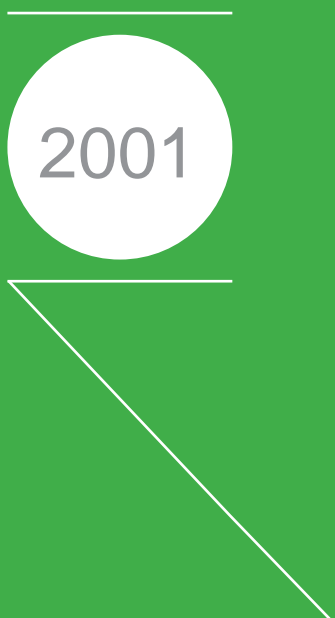
Mojahedin-e Khalq Denies Pressure by Baghdad. Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Near East and South Asia, p 64, November 22, 1995.

FBIS-NES-95-225 (Microfiche)

Sciolino, Elaine. Iraq Builds Base for Rebels Fighting Iran, U.S. Contends. New York Times, p A3, March 24, 2000.



2001





With Friends Like These

December 2001

WASHINGTON, D.C.—While U.S. forces circle the globe in search of every last terrorist organization, a group with just that label sits quietly a few blocks from the White House, making friends on Capitol Hill and sharing an address with major media outlets. According to the State Department, the Iraqi-based National Council of Resistance of Iran—which keeps an office in the National Press Building on 14th Street—is one of several names used by the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, a large and well-armed corps of dissident Iranian terrorists backed by none other than Saddam Hussein.

The council has been waging a legal battle to throw off the terrorist designation. Its congressional liaison, Alireza Jafarzadeh, says the council is a “parliament in exile” comprising several independent groups, one of which just happens to be the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK. Jafarzadeh insists the MEK stands apart from Hussein, and says press attempts to portray matters otherwise stem from a smear campaign orchestrated by Iran’s violent fundamentalist regime. “Our members and supporters are being gunned down everywhere in the world,” he says. “This is a very serious issue.”

Much of the attention focused on the council has to do with the MEK, which until recently had been considered friendly to the U.S. because its venom was directed at Iran’s religious leadership. During the early 1970s, the MEK did kill Americans and later helped seize the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, but some in

MEK
Uncovered

22



Washington have come to see it as a surrogate force against Iran, along the lines of a Northern Alliance fighting the Taliban. That characterization conveniently crops out the MEK's ties to Hussein, who welcomed the members and let them set up camps. From bases in Iraq, the MEK sent hit-and-run assassination squads to Tehran. Hussein also availed himself of MEK fighters as a mercenary force against the Kurds during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.

Suspicion that Hussein was involved in the September 11 attacks has renewed questions about the MEK. Al Qaeda leaders are reported to have met with Iraqi intelligence during the run-up to this year's strikes. Defectors report Saddam has constructed an elaborate terrorist training camp where people are taught how to hijack planes, complete with a fuselage of a 707 for practice. And in 1998, Hussein blocked UN inspectors from a site controlled by the MEK, says Richard Butler, head of the inspection team.

Still, MEK has powerful friends here. New Jersey Democratic senator Robert Torricelli has questioned the government's 1999 designation of MEK as a terrorist group, on grounds we are turning against what could be helpful opposition to Tehran. An aide to Senator Torricelli told the Voice last Friday, "He did support them in the past and his position hasn't changed."

In arguing the case, council lawyers say the State Department





pegged the coalition as an alias for the MEK without holding hearings, conducting a public review, or providing a forum for the groups to defend themselves. The attorneys have gained some ground. A Washington federal appeals court ruled in June that the council and the MEK had been denied due process, overturning a federal district court decision that sided with the State Department. Last week, the department refiled the case at the appellate level. Ronald Precup, the mujahideen's attorney in Alexandria, Virginia, says the department's "unilaterally" compiled record "consists of hearsay and newspaper accounts. . . . A lot of the record is secret." As a result, he says, his client's hands have been tied.

While the court challenges are under way, the State Department continues to list the council and MEK as terrorist organizations on its Web site.

The MEK's presence in Washington raises other problems. With thousands of adherents, it has organized anti-Iranian opposition in 13 different countries. So long as the U.S. strictly opposed Tehran, this wasn't an issue for Americans. But Bush has now expressed an itch to sidle closer to Iran—a move the country's reformist president, Mohammad Khatami, seems to welcome. That shift may mean the U.S. can no longer afford to shelter terrorists hell-bent on killing Iranian officials wherever they can get them.

After their welcome by Iraq, fighters of the MEK set up campsites and proceeded to build up a sizable armed force that Hussein brutally used to help wipe out the Kurds in the northern part of that country.

Jafarzadeh, the resistance council's representative, says the MEK has exposed Iran's plans for biochemical warfare, but when asked about Iraq's similar programs—used with horrifying results on the Kurds—he says the MEK "passed the litmus test" of independence by remaining neutral in Iraq over the past decade. As for the gassing of Kurds, it appears the MEK had nothing to do with it.

In recent years, the mujahideen have carried out various assassinations and armed strikes within Iran, managing to kill a top military commander in 1999. The MEK boasts a force of several thousand—from 5000 to 10,000, say published reports—complete with artillery.

In the U.S., the MEK has been accused of raising money for arms under the guise of a charity drive. The FBI, acting on a tip from German police, arrested seven individuals in Los Angeles in February on charges of supporting a terrorist organization. The government claims these individuals had solicited travelers in airports, among other places, on behalf of orphans. According to the feds, over the last several years the charity operation had transferred \$400,000 to a used auto parts store in the United Arab Emirates, with people connected to the MEK moving more than \$1 million.

During a rare interview with a Western reporter in 1994, MEK leader Masud Rajavi said his group had collected \$45 million from supporters that year.

That's a lot of cash for what started out, in the 1970s, as an urban guerrilla organization mixing elements of Islamic fundamentalism with leftist radicalism. The MEK soon killed a number of American civilians and military personnel to draw attention to the old U.S.-Shah symbiosis. After the revolution, the group briefly supported the Khomeini government before falling out with it. Members then waged an armed uprising in the early 1980s, quickly suppressed by the capture and summary execution of thousands of its soldiers.

From its current base in Iraq, the MEK conducts acts of assassination and sabotage against the Islamic regime. Periodically, the Iranian government responds with air attacks against their base deep inside Iraqi territory.

Life in the MEK camps is no picnic, reported Wall Street Journal writer Peter Waldman, who visited the group's Baghdad headquarters in 1994. MEK fighters "write detailed reports to



their superiors,” Waldman relayed. “Bunkmates inform on bunkmates, siblings tell on siblings, and spouses spy on spouses. The rare dissident is publicly humiliated, jailed, sometimes beaten until ‘wrong thinking’ is confessed. Those who ask to leave Iraq are often accused of betrayal and threatened with death.”

Even so, the MEK—also known as the People’s Mujahideen—has picked up supporters in the States. Reports that its activists gave nearly \$200,000 to members of Congress in the mid 1990s have been slammed as untrue by the resistance council. Mainstream political support, however, is well documented. During a congressional hearing last June, Senator Torricelli questioned why the U.S. was singling out the MEK. “More than a hundred members of the House of Representatives, the majority of the United States Senate in previous years, have actually asked the State Department to engage in dialogue with the People’s Mujahideen,” Torricelli told the National Commission on Terrorism. “They have the objective of overthrowing the Iranian government.”

Others, like New York City Democratic congressman Gary Ackerman, agree with that kind of “enemy of my enemy” approach. “I don’t give a shit if they are undemocratic,” he told the Voice. “OK, so the [MEK] is a terrorist organization based in Iraq, which is a terrorist state. They are fighting Iran, which is another terrorist state. I say let’s help them fight each other as much as they want. Once they all are destroyed, I can celebrate twice over.”



2002



NATIONAL REVIEW

An Iranian group and its surprising American friends

March 2002

In a Senate speech after the September 11 attacks, New Jersey Democrat Robert Torricelli suggested ways in which Congress might help the federal government fight terrorism. The first change he proposed was to abolish the five-year statute of limitations on prosecution of terrorists. “The nation has no statute of limitations for treason or for murder,” he said. “Terrorism is every [bit] as insidious, and the statute of limitations should be lifted.”

But even as he spoke, Torricelli continued his active support for the National Council of Resistance of Iran -- an organization the State Department classifies as a front group for the People’s Mujahedin of Iran, a terrorist group supported by Saddam Hussein. From its inception over 35 years ago, the Mujahedin has consistently engaged in attacks on American interests overseas. It has killed U.S. servicemen and civilians, and bombed U.S. business offices; it participated in the 1979 seizure of the American embassy in Tehran. Despite its inclusion on the State Department’s select list of global terrorist organizations for the last six years, a spokeswoman for Torricelli claims the senator still fully supports the group.

Nor is Torricelli alone. Other members of Congress have also

MEK
Uncovered

28

been strong advocates of the People's Mujahedin. Indeed, at least two congressmen -- James Traficant, an Ohio Democrat, and William "Lacy" Clay, a Missouri Democrat -- wrote to Secretary of State Colin Powell on the group's behalf after September 11.

How has a terrorist group managed to win the support of mainstream U.S. politicians? Simple: Its political representatives in the U.S. have worked hard to repackage the group as a legitimate dissident organization fighting for democracy in Iran -- whitewashing its record and duping our leaders.

In its early years, the People's Mujahedin was devoted to reading Marx, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara, and adapting their principles to a Shiite society. Trained in terror tactics by the PLO, the group was devoted to the violent overthrow of the shah, whom it perceived as a CIA puppet. But soon after Ayatollah Khomeini deposed the shah, the People's Mujahedin found itself on the outside of Iran's new power structure. The group had always been more Marxist than Muslim, and the clerical forces in the new regime turned against their former comrades.

In 1981, the Mujahedin's leaders fled to Paris and threw their support behind Iraq's Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran and the ayatollah. In 1986, they moved to Baghdad -- where, with Saddam's assistance, they started another military wing known as the National Liberation Army. A 1994 State Department report indicates that the Mujahedin has trained and fought alongside Iraqi troops on a number of occasions, and that "Saddam Hussein has been one of [its] primary financiers, providing weapons and cash totaling an estimated hundreds of millions of dollars."

"They're a very, very bad bunch," says an official with the anti-Saddam Iraqi National Congress. "They take direct orders from Saddam, and they've hoodwinked people on Capitol Hill."





A spokesman for Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the former shah who advocates Iranian democracy, offers a more diplomatic assessment. “We do consider that the democratic movement in Iran should be all inclusive,” he says. “However, we cannot accept those groups that resort to violence and terrorism as a means of bringing democracy to Iran.”

Despite its violent history, the People’s Mujahedin would like to gain international legitimacy as Iran’s “government in exile.” Its immediate goal is to get its name off the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations; to that end, it now purports to support a host of democratic ideals, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to freedom of religion and the free market. It has even abandoned its revolutionary flag -- composed of a Koran verse, a sickle, and a Kalashnikov assault rifle -- for that of the former shah, whom they worked to depose. But there’s little evidence of real change. The group’s leaders are the same ones who led it during its anti-shah days, and the U.S. front group’s website openly admits its affiliation with the Iraq-based Mujahedin military force.

The Mujahedin’s Washington spokesman, Alireza Jafarzadeh, attempts -- unconvincingly -- to distance the group from its past. He says, for example, that the group assassinated Americans in the 1970s because it had been taken over by radicals; in fact, U.S. intelligence indicates that Massoud Rajavi, the group’s leader, was in firm control at the time. Jafarzadeh also claims that the 1979 U.S.-embassy takeover was a Khomeini scheme to test his supporters, and that the Mujahedin had to either “endorse [it] entirely” or take a vague and “very calculated” decision to sign on; Jafarzadeh claims the group took the latter.

But in fact, on the day of the takeover, the Mujahedin issued a statement: “After the shah, it’s America’s turn.” And when the hostages were released, the group boasted that it was “the first force who rose unequivocally to the support of the occupation of the American spy center.”

Still, the group continues to find naive supporters like Congressman Edolphus Towns, Democrat of New York. He says, "I think they could replace [Iran's mullahs], I really do." Experts on Iran scoff at this claim.

Congressman Gary Ackerman, also a New York Democrat, acknowledges that the Mujahedin's ties with Iraq are "disturbing," but he brushes them off as an acceptable tradeoff: "I think it would help if people understand that when you're trying to get rid of a terrorist regime, you use who you can." According to Iran Brief, an independent watchdog publication, Ackerman received more than \$32,000 from People's Mujahedin sympathizers in his 1998 race.

But the Mujahedin's strongest congressional ally is Torricelli, a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Iran Brief says he has received more than \$140,000 in Mujahedin-related contributions. Over the past decade, Torricelli has written a slew of letters to administration officials and participated in several of the U.S. front group's events. In his most recent letter, dated August 27, 2001, he urged the State Department not to redesignate the People's Mujahedin as a terrorist group. On October 5, the group was again listed among State's 28 targeted organizations. "Our position remains the same," a Torricelli spokeswoman says, "and that is that the [group] is a political organization advocating democracy in Iran."

The spokeswoman claims that "more than 200" members of Congress support the Mujahedin; but this is seriously misleading. While a lengthy "Dear Colleague" letter decrying the Iranian regime -- distributed in October 2000 by Ackerman and Florida Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen -- did garner 228 signatures, mention of this group was buried at the bottom of the back of the page. Had it been more prominent in the letter, support could well have been considerably lower. Indiana Republican Dan Burton signed the letter, but his spokesman now says that the Mujahedin "are not exactly the kind of people



we want to associate with. Most members will sign on to the generic anti-Iran stuff, but they stay away from these guys.” Burton supported the Mujahedin until 1995, when evidence presented by the State Department convinced him to withdraw his backing.

Burton has it right: There are growing signs that young Iranians are displeased with their regime, and they certainly deserve our support. But anti-American terrorists, just as clearly, do not.



Ashcroft's Baghdad Connection

September 2002

When the White House released its Sept. 12 “white paper” detailing Saddam Hussein’s “support for international terrorism,” it caused more than a little discomfort in some quarters of Washington.

The 27-page document--entitled “A Decade of Deception and Defiance”--made no mention of any Iraqi ties to Osama bin Laden. But it did highlight Saddam’s backing of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO), an obscure Iranian dissident group that has gathered surprising support among members of Congress in past years. One of those supporters, the documents show, is a top commander in President Bush’s war on terrorism: Attorney General John Ashcroft, who became involved with the MKO while a Republican senator from Missouri.

The case of Ashcroft and the MKO shows just how murky fighting terrorism can sometimes get. State Department officials first designated the MKO a “foreign terrorist organization” in 1997, accusing the Baghdad-based group of a long series of bombings, guerilla cross-border raids and targeted assassinations of Iranian leaders. Officials say the MKO--which originally fought to overthrow the Shah of Iran--was linked to the murder of several U.S. military officers and civilians in Iran in the 1970s. “They have an extremely bloody history,” says one U.S. counterterrorism official.

MEK
Uncovered

33

NEWS

ASHCROFT'S BAGHDAD CONNECTION

When the White House released its Sept. 12 "white paper" detailing Saddam Hussein's "support for international terrorism," it caused more than a little discomfort in some quarters of Washington. The 27-page document—entitled "A Decade of Deception and Defiance"—made no mention of any Iraqi ties to Osama bin Laden. But it did highlight Saddam's backing of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO), an obscure Iranian dissident group that has gathered surprising support among members of Congress in past years. One of those supporters, the documents show, is a top commander in President Bush's war on

MEK
Uncovered

34

But the MKO, which commands an army of 30,000 from bases inside Iraq, has tried to soften its image in recent years--in part with strong backing from politically active Iranian-Americans in the United States. The MKO operates in Washington out of a small office in the National Press Building under the name the National Council of Resistance of Iran. According to the State Department, the National Council of Resistance is a "front" for the MKO; in 1999, the National Council itself was placed on the State Department terrorist list. But National Council officials adamantly deny their group has earned the terror label and have aggressively portrayed itself to Washington lawmakers as a "democratic" alternative to a repressive Iranian regime that itself is one of the world's leading sponsors of terrorism. "You're talking about a really popular movement," says Alireza Jafarzadeh, the National Council's chief Washington spokesman, who insists that the MKO "targets only military targets." Only two years ago, these arguments won sympathy from Ashcroft--and more than 200 other members of Congress. When the National Council of Resistance staged a September 2000 rally outside the United Nations to protest a speech by Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, Missouri's two Republican senators--Ashcroft and Chris Bond--issued a joint statement of solidarity that was read aloud to a cheering crowd. A delegation of about 500 Iranians from Missouri attended the event--and a picture of a smiling Ashcroft was later included in a col-

or briefing book used by MKO officials to promote their cause on Capitol Hill. Ashcroft was hardly alone. Among those who actually appeared at the rally and spoke on the group's behalf was one of its leading congressional supporters: Democratic New Jersey Sen. Bob Torricelli.

That same year, Senator Ashcroft wrote a letter to Attorney General Janet Reno protesting the detention of an Iranian woman, Mahnaz Samadi, who was a leading spokeswoman for the National Council of Resistance. The case quickly became a cause celebre for the MKO and its supporters in the United States.

U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service agents had arrested Samadi at the Canadian border, charging her with failing to disclose her past "terrorist" ties as an MKO "military commander"--including spending seven months in a MKO military-training camp inside Iraq--when she sought political asylum in the United States several years earlier, according to court documents obtained by NEWSWEEK.

Senator Ashcroft saw the case differently. In his May 10, 2000, letter to Reno, the Missouri lawmaker expressed "concern" about the detention, calling Samadi a "highly regarded human-rights activist" and a "powerful voice for democracy." (As part of a later settlement with the INS, Samadi admitted her membership in MKO but denied that she personally participated in any "terrorist activity." While her grant of political asylum was revoked, the INS dropped its deportation proceedings and she was permitted to remain in the United States.)

Alireza Jafarzadeh, the National Council's top Washington lobbyist, said he had "several" meetings with Ashcroft aides about the matter and that he "certainly" viewed the Missouri senator as a supporter of his group. But backers of the MKO acknowledge the real lobbying was done by Iranian-Americans in Missouri who wrote letters and made repeated phone calls on Samadi's behalf. How much Ashcroft got personally involved isn't clear. A Justice Department spokeswoman told NEWSWEEK





that Ashcroft's letter to Reno was the result of a "straightforward, constituent-type inquiry," adding that the current attorney general would never "knowingly" back any terrorist group. When he signed the joint statement with Bond that was read at the National Council rally at the United Nations, Ashcroft did not "intend to endorse any organization," the spokeswoman, Barbara Comstock, said. "He was supporting democracy and freedom in Iran," she said. Comstock said Ashcroft currently has "no problem" prosecuting all U.S.-based terror groups, including the MKO.

Ashcroft isn't the only one now distancing himself from the MKO. The Senate's most aggressive promotor of the MKO for years has been Bob Torricelli, who in recent years has circulated numerous letters among his colleagues--including one as recently as last year--describing the MKO as a "legitimate" alternative to the repressive Iranian mullahs and urging that the group be taken off the State Department terrorist list. Torricelli told NEWSWEEK he saw his support for the group as a way of putting pressure on the Iranian regime. "They [the MKO] were the only game in town," he said. But Torricelli also said last week said he would no longer push the group's cause after getting hammered over the issue by his GOP opponent, Doug Forrester, who accused Torricelli of receiving more than \$100,000 in campaign contributions from Iranian-Americans who supported the group. (Torricelli aides say the amount is exaggerated and that others, including some leading Republicans, have also received contributions from some of the same Iranian-Americans.) As a result of the September 11 attacks and new concerns about any allegations of terrorism, Bond also has put his backing for the group "in abeyance," an aide said.

Much of the new skittishness among MKO's congressional backers also stems from the decision by the Bush White House to emphasize the connections between MKO and Saddam. It isn't the first time this was done. Former Clinton administra-

tion official Martin Indyk, who served as assistant secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs in 1997, told NEWSWEEK that one of the reasons the group was put on the terrorism list in the first place was part of a “two-pronged” strategy that included ratcheting up pressure on Saddam. Like the Bush White House, the Clinton administration was eager to highlight Iraqi ties to terrorism and had collected extensive evidence of Saddam providing logistical support to the MKO in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War. (The MKO’s headquarters are located on a heavily guarded street in central Baghdad.) But the United States could find no other hard evidence linking Saddam to terror groups, Indyk said. “That was about all we had on [Saddam] when it came to terrorism,” Indyk told NEWSWEEK. National-security adviser Condoleezza Rice said in an interview Wednesday on PBS’s “The NewsHour” that the United States had new evidence from “high-ranking detainees” that Iraq has provided “some training to Al Qaeda in chemical-weapons development.” But a top U.S. law-enforcement official recently cast some doubt about the strength of the evidence connecting Saddam and Al Qaeda, telling NEWSWEEK there is far more substantial evidence that Iran was harboring top Al Qaeda leaders.)

The other “prong” in the Clinton strategy that led to the inclusion of the MKO on the terrorist list was White House interest in opening up a dialogue with the Iranian government. At the time, President Khatami had recently been elected and was seen as a moderate. Top administration officials saw cracking down on the MKO--which the Iranians had made clear they saw as a menace--as one way to do so. Still, Indyk said the basic decision to label the MKO as terrorists could be justified anyway. “Yes, they’re bad guys,” he told NEWSWEEK. “But no--they’re not targeting us.”

Indyk’s comments lend partial support to one of the main contentions of MKO and its congressional supporters: that geopolitical strategy--a tilt toward Iran--was an important factor in the

State Department decision to accuse MKO of terrorism. “They wanted to appease the Iranian regime,” said Jafarzadeh, the National Council of Resistance lobbyist.

Still, the Justice Department appears only to be stepping up investigations into MKO members. Early last year, the FBI broke up a ring of Iranians who were raising money at the Los Angeles airport under the guise of helping suffering children when, according to a court complaint, they were routing the funds to the MKO. (A federal judge recently tossed the case out of court, but the Justice Department is appealing.) Then, last December, FBI agents showed up at the home of Jafarzadeh. Armed with a search warrant, the agents hauled away boxes of documents, including files on the group’s dealings with members of Congress. One in particular must have gotten the agents’ attention. It was labeled ASHCROFT.





2003



The Enemy of My Enemy of My Enemy Is My What?

March 2003

What to do about the Iranian terrorist group that is helping Saddam, and helping us.

One of the many hard questions about the war in Iraq is what the United States will do about something called the National Liberation Army. The NLA is a well-trained brigade of perhaps 15,000 men outfitted with heavy artillery, rockets, and tanks. Its troops are headquartered less than 30 miles west of Baghdad, though some recent news accounts say they have moved toward Kurdish areas in northern Iraq. Although the NLA soldiers are Iranians, they are avowed opponents of Iran's clerical rulers and have made common cause with Saddam Hussein. Indeed the NLA has served as part of Saddam's internal security operation and even helped him put down Kurdish and Shiite rebels.

They are also purportedly enemies of the United States. The State Department considers the NLA part of an international Iranian terrorist group that has killed Americans and thousands of civilians. That means fund raising for the NLA in the United States is just as likely to land you in prison as fund raising for, say, al-Qaida. Some press accounts say the NLA has recently helped Saddam hide weapons of mass destruction and may be ready to fight for him in the coming days. In short, these guys seem like prime candidates for a good carpet-bombing.

MEK
Uncovered

40



But wait, hold the MOABs! The NLA's parent organization—called the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK)—or “People’s Holy Warriors”—is also a leading Iranian political opposition group, which has done the Bush administration some big favors lately. The pro-democracy MEK has undermined the rule of Iran’s anti-American mullahs, and during the past few months has dished precious new details about Iran’s alarmingly advanced nuclear weapons program. The group also has many defenders in Congress and even its own lobbying office in downtown Washington. In fact, on any given day it’s often not clear whether the MEK are America’s friends, its terrorist enemies—or both. The war with Iraq may finally force the Bush administration to decide.

Like many “revolutionary” groups, the MEK has a strange and convoluted history. Originally founded in the 1960s by a group of educated Iranian leftists opposed to the Shah’s Western ties, the group was motivated by a strange ideological blend of Marxism and Islamism. In the ‘70s, the MEK carried out several attacks on Westerners, including the assassinations of three U.S. military officers and three more American civilians. It supported the 1979 Islamic Revolution that installed the Ayatollah Khomeini and participated in the takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran.

Unfortunately for the MEK, the Ayatollah never cared much for its Marxism. He executed thousands of MEK members and





drove its leader from the country in 1981. After a few years in Paris, the group allied with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War and moved its headquarters to Baghdad, from where it could easily harass Tehran. Hence the NLA brigade in Iraq today.

During the '90s, the MEK carried out hundreds of attacks, almost all of them aimed at Iranian government buildings and officials within Iran. In 1999, for instance, the MEK assassinated a top Iranian military leader. The next year, it fired mortars at the Iranian presidential palace, killing a civilian print-shop worker. The State Department says that MEK hit-and-run raids against Iranian government buildings along the Iran-Iraq border have become “commonplace” and that the group’s attacks in Tehran “constitute the biggest security threat” to the regime. The State Department also says the MEK’s soldiers helped Saddam suppress Kurdish and Shiite rebellions in 1991 and 1996.

MEK’s internal structure remains murky. A 1994 Wall Street Journal article described it as an “authoritarian personality cult” whose military leader, Massoud Rajavi, brutalizes dissidents and insists his fighters divorce their wives so they can love only him. MEK leaders insist they’re not terrorists, don’t target civilians, and seek nothing less than a “pluralistic, democratic, multiparty, and secular system in Iran.” Hoping to destigmatize itself in the West, the group constantly emphasizes its support for human rights. And it has apparently been some time since the MEK did any harm to non-Iranians. For that reason, the MEK has made plenty of friends in American politics, especially among Washington hard-liners opposed to the Iranian regime. Being a terrorist group doesn’t mean you can’t operate in the United States—you just can’t raise money. And so the MEK, under the rubric of the National Council of Resistance, opened an office at the National Press Club in Washington and set about urging Congress to rescind its terrorist designation.

Over the past few years it has made good progress. In 2000, 225 House members signed a letter encouraging a U.S. “dialogue” with the group. A year later, 30 senators expressed “support for the democratic goals” of the MEK. (Attorney General John Ashcroft was a passionate supporter of the group when he was in the Senate.) In January, the NCR proudly touted its congressional support in a full-page New York Times advertisement. The MEK’s congressional supporters argue that the group represents the best challenge to Iran’s dictatorial mullahs. “When you’re trying to get rid of a terrorist regime, you use who you can,” New York Democratic Rep. Gary Ackerman told National Review last year.

But nothing has done more for the group’s reputation than its disclosures about Iran’s secret weapons programs. Virtually every recent story about the Iranian nuclear program now credits this “opposition group” with tipping off the world to a hidden uranium-enrichment plant in northern Iran. Even the White House has publicly congratulated the group. “Iran admitted the existence of these facilities only after it had no choice, only because they had been made public by an Iranian opposition group,” White House press secretary Ari Fleischer said. “Iran was far, far ahead of where they were believed to be in the development of this. And if it had not been for the Iranian opposition group, this too may have gone unnoticed.”

Does that mean the MEK/NCR/NLA are our friends, and that we won’t fight its troops in Iraq? Not necessarily. Last month Reuters quoted an unnamed U.S. official saying that the NLA brigade in Iraq is “an element that would have to be removed” during an invasion. And when State Department spokesman Richard Boucher was asked about a possible fight with the MEK just a few weeks ago, he didn’t dismiss the idea, pointing out that it is a “terrorist group” that has murdered Americans and that it’s allied with Saddam, before warning that it could “face the consequences” unless it changes its ways.

What “face the consequences” means in practice isn’t clear.



When retired Gen. Anthony Zinni testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month, he warned the MEK could be a major headache for American troops: “There’s a major Iranian opposition group in here, the MEK. What do you want me to do with that if I’m the commander in chief? Do I lock them up? Do I send them back across the border to be slaughtered? Exactly what happens to them?”

Whatever happens when American troops encounter NLA—either outside Baghdad or in northern Iraq—may offer a hint about Bush administration policy toward Iran (the third stop on the Axis of Evil Tour). If we leave the NLA brigade alone, it may signal that U.S. relations with Iran are likely to turn icy.

After the Sept. 11 attacks George W. Bush vowed that the war against terrorism “will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” At a press conference last month the Iranian foreign minister mocked this claim, saying Bush’s implicit tolerance for the MEK suggests he believes there is both “good and bad terrorism.” Unfortunately, the man has a point.



**RadioFreeEurope
RadioLiberty**

Iran: Cult Or Opposition Group? A Look At The Mujahedin Khalq

May 2003

The U.S. has struck a cease-fire in Iraq with an unlikely group -- the Mujahedin Khalq, or People's Mujahedin. The armed Iranian opposition group has sought for decades to overthrow Iran's Islamic government, activity that's earned the group's political front some support among politicians in Europe and the United States. But the United States still lists it as a terrorist organization -- and some have likened it more to a cult than an opposition movement.

The rebels driving tanks and learning to use artillery in this unit in Ashraf are distinctive in one key respect -- they're all women, many of them Iranian exiles from around the world, like Laleh Tarighi, who grew up in Britain.

"It is the best decision I made in my life," Tarighi said of joining the group. "I would say it is the best place here for any Iranian or other people, as well. I'd say we have a goal: we have been fighting for Iran to get Iranian people out of that situation."

Tarighi and her fellow rebels-in-headscarves belong to the Mujahedin Khalq, or People's Mujahedin, an armed Iranian opposition group of several thousand men and women with

MEK
Uncovered

45



bases in Iraq.

It has sought the overthrow of the Iranian government for decades and is held responsible for a string of bombings and mortar attacks that have killed a number of top Iranian government and military officials -- as well as several U.S. soldiers and civilians in the 1970s.

The United States considers the Mujahedin Khalq a terrorist group and bombed its bases in the first stages of the latest Iraq war. But in recent weeks, U.S. forces have taken a softer line on Mujahedin Khalq fighters. Last month, they struck a cease-fire so the rebels can keep their weapons in what's described as a "non-combat formation."

The deal rattled the Iranian government. The Foreign Ministry in Tehran said this week that it's unacceptable for the United States to be in partnership with what it called "terrorist hypocrites." And it warned the United States not to allow the group to attack Iran from Iraq.

The cease-fire has also raised questions of double standards. Critics say a cease-fire is a strange way to deal with terrorists who've killed more Americans than any other Iranian group.

But despite the cease-fire and recruits such as Tarighi, analysts say the outlook for the Mujahedin Khalq has never been bleaker. They say the cease-fire is a temporary arrangement to create security on the ground. And they say it's not likely to lead to broader backing for the group, which ultimately will

probably have to disarm or leave Iraq.

The Mujahedin Khalq was formed in the 1960s on a platform that mixed Marxism with Islamism. The group took part in the 1979 revolution that replaced the Shah with the regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. But it soon split with Khomeini. Many of its leaders were killed, and it was forced to leave Iran in 1981.

Aside from a brief stint in France, the group has been based in Iraq ever since. It received financial and military support from Saddam Hussein's regime and even sided with Iraq during the Iraq-Iran War of the 1980s -- a move that cost it most of its credibility at home.

The organization is really made up of three overlapping groups. The fighters belong to the National Liberation Army (NLA) of Iran, which is the armed wing of the Mujahedin Khalq. That, in turn, controls the political front, called the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

Ali Ansari, head of the Center for Iranian Studies at Durham University in the United Kingdom, told RFE/RL: "They used to get a lot of money from Saddam Hussein. They were based north of Baghdad, and they used to do a lot of the dirty work of the Saddam Hussein regime. They were essentially Iranian mercenaries. They did very little agitating in Iran, and frankly they didn't have the credibility to do it."

Ansari says the movement has evolved into a leadership cult centered around Masud Rajavi and his wife, Maryam. There are reports that members are not allowed to marry -- as well as some older claims that married members were forced to divorce.

"Masud Rajavi takes the role of leader, in an imitation of the leader in Iran, and then his wife has been sort of 'elected' -- in very thick inverted commas -- as president," Ansari said. "So they have this dual structure of husband and wife team, and frankly it's caused quite a bit of discomfort from those Iranian families who find that their young idealistic types have headed



off to Iraq to be part of the armed wing of the mujahedin.”

Rajavi joined the group early on while he was still a law student at the University of Tehran. He appears to have taken control of the group while in prison in the 1970s.

RFE/RL tried to contact the National Council of Resistance officials in France and Britain, but they were unavailable for comment. In previous interviews, however, they have denied that members of the Mujahedin Khalq are terrorists. And they dismiss other criticism as propaganda put out by their opponents or agents for the Iranian government.

Certainly, the group’s talk of women’s rights and the need for greater democracy has earned it support among politicians in Europe and America. Some see it as the best alternative to Iran’s current regime. But that support can hardly be described as unwavering.

A few years ago, 30 U.S. senators asked the administration to reconsider its designation of the Mujahedin Khalq as a terrorist group. Some of them later backtracked on that request.

In 1997, London representatives of the National Council of Resistance associated with top government officials -- but one month later, Maryam Rajavi was banned from the United Kingdom.

Ansari said the current cease-fire is only a temporary measure and is unlikely to lead to broader backing for the group. “The Americans have made it very clear and the [British] Foreign Office has been quite adamant on this -- and also expressed quite a lot of concern at the initial reports -- that this is purely a temporary measure to restore order before they proceed with the disarming of various groups, not just the Mujahedin Khalq but various militias in Iraq, and then they will sort problems out from there. I think there will be very strong agitation in America both ways, but I think those who have concrete interests in Iran will realize that to back the Mujahedin Khalq in any sort of anti-Iran policy would be a cataclysmic mistake,” he said.

Kenneth Katzman, a Middle East analyst with the Congressio-

nal Research Service in Washington, said he would be very surprised if Iraq's future government allows Mujahedin Khalq fighters to stay on Iraqi territory, since it's likely to be much more friendly toward Tehran than was Saddam Hussein's regime.

"I would certainly envision some sort of arrangement between Iran and this new Iraqi government to have the NLA expelled from Iraq," Katzman said. "I very much doubt that this cease-fire is going to reflect a permanent situation where the NLA is going to continue to base itself on Iraqi territory and especially if the Shi'ite Islamic parties are dominant in a new Iraqi government, like [SCIRI leader Ayatollah] Mohammad Baqer al-Hakim. He's very close to the Iranian leadership, and it's not a stretch of the imagination to say that he would try to move very quickly to get the People's Mujahedin army out of Iraq." But at the Ashraf base, commander Pari Bakhsai said that prospect does not concern her. "We are not worried about the future because the Iranian resistance [was] not born in Iraq and is not going to die in Iraq, even if the new Iraqi government and the Tehran regime reach an agreement about us," she said. "Our roots are deep in Iranian history, and we are confident that our destiny will be in Iran."





50

Behind the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)

June 2003

Introduction

Raids conducted by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in June 2003 on the homes of Iranian Australians reportedly suspected of involvement with the Iranian opposition group, the MEK, have raised questions about the justification for such action, particularly as the MEK is not a proscribed organisation in Australia.

The MEK is the largest of the Iranian opposition groups, and is sometimes referred to as the Mujahideen-e-Khalq Organisation (MKO), or The People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI). The group also maintains a military wing in Iraq, known as the National Liberation Army (NLA).

Background [1]

The MEK was formed in the mid-1960s as a splinter group of the Liberation Movement of Iran. The MEK's philosophy mixes Marxist and Islamic principles, and its primary objective is to overthrow and replace the Iranian Government with its own secularist administration.

In the early 1970s, the MEK fought an armed struggle against the Shah, whose Government the MEK viewed as a puppet regime of the US.

During the 1970s, the MEK was accused of conducting several assassinations of US military personnel and civilians working in Iran, and of actively supporting the takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979. That same year, the MEK helped to overthrow the Shah and install the new Shiite regime led by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Ironically, despite popular support, the MEK came under increasing attack for its secularist ideology, from the very regime it helped install.

After being driven out of Iran, the MEK resettled in Paris. Having supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War, the MEK moved most of its operations there in 1987, whereupon the NLA was formed.

At the end of the Gulf War in 1991, the MEK was alleged to have assisted the Iraqi Republican Guard in suppressing Shiite and Kurdish uprisings, although this has always been denied by the MEK.

The US designated the MEK as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) in 1997, on the basis that it kills civilians. Although civilians have died as a result of MEK operations, the mass indiscriminate killing associated with some terrorist groups does not appear to have ever been the MEK's objective or favoured tactic.

The MEK has now lost three appeals (1999, 2001 and 2003) to the US Government to be removed from the list of FTOs, and its terrorist status was reaffirmed each time. The MEK has continued to protest worldwide against its listing[2], with the overt support of some US political figures.[3]

In the lead-up to the 2003 war in Iraq, it was suggested the MEK's camps in Iraq were likely hiding places for components of the Iraqi illegal weapons programmes[4] and that the MEK/NLA might be used to defend Iraqi cities against a US-led at-



tack.[5]

Following initial US bombing of MEK bases in Iraq, the US apparently negotiated with the MEK forces to stop bombing MEK bases provided the MEK did not attack US troops.[6] Apart from the obvious short-term benefit of securing protection from an armed rebel group allied with the Iraqi regime, the long-term objective of the US Government is believed to have been an attempt to preserve the only major armed opposition to the Iranian regime.[7]

Activities and Tactics

The MEK's attacks have largely been conducted within Iran against the Iranian Government. Most of its activities overseas, including Australia, are limited to political demonstrations, publicity campaigns and fundraising, rather than acts of terrorism.[8]

The notable exception is the simultaneous attacks conducted by the MEK in April 1992 on Iranian embassies in eleven countries, in retaliation for the bombing of MEK bases in Iraq by the Iranian Air Force just days earlier. The Iranian Embassy in Canberra was over-run and some staff were seriously injured. The attacks abruptly highlighted the MEK's ability to coordinate a global campaign of violence in a short space of time, and once again thrust the MEK onto the world stage. The sudden violence of the 1992 attacks may have dented the MEK's image as 'freedom fighters', and possibly convinced people that the MEK was indeed a terrorist organisation.

Indeed, such activities clearly fall within the definition of 'politically motivated violence' as used by ASIO, and would now also constitute a terrorist act under the Criminal Code Act 1995.[9] Germany's Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) has noted that the MEK's publicity campaigns often include attempts to contact members of parliament (MPs) to inform them of the MEK's goals, encourage political support, and influence parliamentary debate about Iran.[10] Similar petitioning of Australian MPs has also been known to occur.

Whilst the MEK is not considered capable of overthrowing the Iranian Government on its own, and is believed to have lost much of its popular support within Iran since siding with Iraq,[11] it has continued to demonstrate its ability to conduct assassinations, sabotage and other attacks in Iran. As such, the MEK remains a serious threat to Iranian officials, the group's main targets.

Membership and Leadership

The MEK claims to have a 30 000 - 50 000 strong armed guerilla force, based in Iraq, but a membership of between 15 000 - 20 000 is considered more likely.[12] MEK supporters exist worldwide.

The principal leader of the MEK, and President-in-exile, is a woman called Maryam Rajavi (whose official website is located at <http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/president.html>). Another woman, Moshgan Parsaii, is Secretary-General of the organisation. Maryam's husband, Massoud, is said to be in charge of the military wing, a third of which are believed to be women.[13]

Political Representation

The MEK is the dominant member of the political coalition of Iranian opposition groups known as the National Council of Resistance of Iran[14] (NCRI), which considers itself to be a Government-in-exile, and is also led by Massoud Rajavi.

Formed in 1981, the NCRI has offices in Europe and Washington, where it enjoys limited US political support.[15] The NCRI's vision for Iran is a secularist Government which supports gender equality, political pluralism and the separation of church and State.[16]

It is currently illegal in Australia to fund or resource the NCRI.

Funding and Support

The MEK claims to be supported from both within Iran and overseas. Massoud Rajavi claimed in a 1994 interview that donations that year alone had amounted to US\$45 million.[17]

The MEK is also known to operate behind Iranian expatriate or



refugee organisations to collect funds for the MEK. Seven Iranians were arrested in 2001 in the US after US\$400 000 was found to have been transferred to a MEK front organisation in the United Arab Emirates, which the FBI claims was ultimately used to buy weapons.[18]

Current Status of the MEK

The MEK is a banned terrorist organisation in both the UK and the US. The European Union listed the MEK as a terrorist group in May 2002.

The MEK is currently not listed as a terrorist organisation in Australia or Canada. The MEK is also not on the UN's list of terrorist organisations, additions to which must have a demonstrated link with the Taliban and/or al-Qaeda in order to qualify. However, the MEK does appear on Australia's list of entities, the assets of which must be frozen. This means that since late 2001 it has been a criminal offence in Australia under the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations Act 1945 and the Charter of the United Nations (Terrorism and Dealings with Assets) Regulations 2002, to fund or resource the group. Together, this legislation ratifies Australia's obligation under UN Security Council Resolution 1373 to suppress the financing of terrorism.

The exact reasons for the recent AFP raids on MEK supporters have not been disclosed. Perhaps the fact that reports did not mention any involvement by ASIO in the raids, suggests the matter is of a criminal, rather than security-related nature.

As funding the MEK is illegal, the raids were presumably conducted on this basis, particularly as those raided said the police asked if they had sent money overseas.[19]

It has been suggested, however, that the sudden move against the MEK has more to do with a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding with Iran and a visit to Australia by an Iranian delegation in the weeks preceding the raids, than actually investigating possible terrorism. However, the Government has denied the raids were politically motivated.[20]

It is possible the Government is preparing to ban the MEK in Australia under the new Criminal Code Amendment (Terrorist Organisations) Bill 2003, which, if passed, will enable Australia to proscribe groups such as the MEK in the absence of any UN listing.

Despite the MEK's violent track record, it does not appear to pose a present or prospective threat to Australia, and it might therefore be difficult to obtain bipartisan support for its categorisation in Australia as a terrorist organisation.

1. Unless otherwise indicated, background sourced primarily from Jim Tinsley and Rob Fanney, 'Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)', Jane's Terrorism Intelligence Centre, at <http://jtic.janes.com> (21 May 2003) and Council on Foreign Relations, 'Mujahedeen-e-Khalq', Terrorism: Q&A, <http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/mujahedeen.html> (22 May 2003).

2. For example - see report in Iran Liberation, 9 December 2002, at <http://www.iran.mojahedin.org/Pages/english/IL/2000/pdf/IL160.pdf> (12 June 2003).

3. The Hill, 2 April 2003, at <http://www.hillnews.com/news/040203/terrorist.aspx> (4 June 2003).

4. Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), www.iwpr.net, (22 May 2003).

5. DEBKAFfile, 20 April 2003, at <http://www.debka.com/article.php?aid=468> (5 June 2003).

6. reason online, 9 May 2003, at <http://reason.com/links/links050903.shtml> (5 June 2003).

7. IWPR, op. cit.

8. For example - MEK Press Release, 31 May 2003 at http://mojahedin.org/Pages/news/f_ennews.html (6 June 2003).

9. See s4 of the ASIO Act 1979, at <http://scaletext.law.gov.au/html/pasteact/0/48/0/PA000080.htm> and Part 5.3, Division 100.1 of the Criminal Code Act 1995, at <http://scaleplus.law.gov.au/cgi-bin/download.pl?/scale/data/comact/8/4484>.

10. 'Iranischer Extremismus "Volksmodjahedin Iran" und ihre

Frontorganisation “Nationaler Widerstandsrat Iran” (Dezember 2000)’, <http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/publikationen/gesamt/page8.html#aWeltweite> (20 May 2003).

11. Jim Tinsley and Rob Fanney, op. cit.

12. *ibid.*

13. Council on Foreign Relations, op. cit.

14. Its website is at <http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/ncri.html>.

15. The Hill, op. cit.

16. NCRI at <http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/ncri.html#structure> (12 June 2003).

17. Jim Tinsley and Rob Fanney, op. cit.

18. Council on Foreign Relations, op. cit.

19. ‘Police Raids on Iranian “Rebels”’, [news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au), 4 June 2003, at http://www.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,4057,6541568%5E421,00.html (4 June 2003).

20. ABC 7.30 Report, 4 June 2003, at <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2003/s872271.htm> (5 June 2003).

Nigel Brew Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group Information and Research Services

Views expressed in this Research Note are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Information and Research Services and are not to be attributed to the Department of the Parliamentary Library. Research Notes provide concise analytical briefings on issues of interest to Senators and Members. As such they may not canvass all of the key issues. Advice on legislation or legal policy issues contained in this paper is provided for use in parliamentary debate and for related parliamentary purposes. This paper is not professional legal opinion.

© Commonwealth of Australia ISSN 1328-8016

The Washington Post

Iranian Dissident Group Labeled a Terrorist Cult

June 2003

Istanbul -- When French riot police stormed the suburban Paris headquarters of the People's Mujaheddin earlier this week, the Iranian dissident group put up little resistance. Officers seized satellite phones and \$1.3 million in cash, and detained 159 people, including the wife of the group's leader.

But in days following the arrest, members retaliated with self-immolations. One after the other, nine people set themselves on fire, often as TV cameras rolled, to protest the continued holding of Maryam Rajavi. One of them died, others were severely burned.

In its four-decade history, the People's Mujaheddin has had many identities -- mass political movement in Iran, tank-equipped army-in-exile in Iraq, U.S.-designated terror group. Now, former members and people who watch the group say it has become essentially a cult.

The group shrank during exile into an isolated band of a few thousand whose every behavior is governed by their charismatic leader, Massoud Rajavi, according to academics, fellow activists and former members.

"They use the term democracy," said Ervand Abrahamian, a City University of New York professor and author of "The Iranian Mojahedin." But "there's no shred of democracy in the Mujaheddin. Rajavi decides who you sleep with, who you marry, who he sleeps with -- everything."

MEK
Uncovered

57



“They stopped being a mass movement with Marxist roots and became basically a cult,” he said.

Over the years, the group has enjoyed substantial support on Capitol Hill, largely because of its opposition to the fundamentalist government of Iran. An affiliated umbrella organization, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, maintains an office in the National Press Building, from which spokesmen argue that the State Department added the People’s Mujaheddin to the terrorism list to appease Iran’s mullahs when the Clinton administration was looking to renew relations with Tehran.

French officials said their raid followed intelligence indicating that the Mujaheddin, with its Iraq contingent disarmed and no longer a threat to Iran, was plotting attacks on Iranian diplomatic posts in Europe. The State Department contends that is what the group did in 1992, when Iranian facilities in 13 European countries were hit almost simultaneously.

Pierre de Bousquet de Florian, the head of France’s counter-intelligence agency, called the group’s compound in suburban Paris “an operational center for terrorism.”

“That’s preposterous to begin with,” said Ali Safavi, a National Council spokesman in London. Saying the French sided with “the real terrorists, the ones in Tehran,” he disputed descriptions of the group as a cult.

The self-immolations, Safavi said, are the desperate actions of



“people who are willing to put everything on the line to liberate their countries.” Maryam Rajavi issued a statement from jail asking for an end to the immolations, but they continued.

Safavi said that former members critical of the group are “all of them paid agents of the Iranian intelligence ministry.”

The group emerged in Tehran in the 1960s, combining Marxism with Islam in a philosophy the Economist magazine called “more or less what liberation theology is to Christianity.” Its first target was the Western-leaning Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his U.S. supporters. In 1971 the group was blamed for the killing of seven American military advisers in Iran.

Eight years later, the Mujaheddin supported the Islamic revolution that swept aside the Pahlavi monarchy, but it soon ran afoul of the clerics who consolidated power under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Human rights researchers say the ruling clerics imprisoned and executed thousands of Mujaheddin supporters in the early 1980s. Rajavi, who escaped the sweeps, moved the headquarters to Paris and allied with Saddam Hussein in the war with Iran.

Historians said the decision to side with Iraq cost the group most of its support inside Iran. At the same time, former insiders said the group grew into a hermitic society controlled by its only surviving leader.

“The people, they didn’t have any contact with the world,” said Karim Haggi Moni, a resident of the Netherlands who said he was a member from 1980 to 1991. “They can’t listen to news, read the newspaper, the Internet. During two years in Paris, I left the base just two days.”

Human Rights Watch, the New York-based advocacy group, has collected testimony that Mujaheddin members were threatened or imprisoned if they tried to quit. Many who did leave were first “obliged to make a taped confession of being a spy” for Iran, according to researcher Elahe Hicks. Hicks wrote that some ex-members were handed to Iraqi security agents, who reportedly tortured them.





Rajavi even asserted control over the sex lives of members, according to analysts and former members. He married Maryam Abrishamchi in 1985 after ordering her husband, Rajavi's assistant, to divorce her, according to Abrahamian. "It looked like wife-swapping; he claimed it was an ideological revolution," he said. "If you had any objection to this, he'd say you're not revolutionary enough and don't believe in women's rights."

The number of female followers grew substantially, accounting for a third of the rank and file and two-thirds of officers, by some reports. But Rajavi, who members are instructed to call "brother," ordered married couples to live apart in the name of focusing on war.

"I was seeing my husband once a month, maybe once every two months," said Mahra Haji, a former member who now lives in Canada. Haji said she quit after the Rajavis moved the Mujaheddin to Iraq, "where we saw the whole system was killing and violence."

With tanks and other heavy weapons provided by Hussein, the group launched an offensive into Iran in 1988, and was beaten back. In 1991, according to Iraqi Kurds, the Mujaheddin helped Hussein's forces put down a rebellion in the north of Iraq following Iraq's defeat in Kuwait.

Mujaheddin positions in Iraq were battered by U.S. airstrikes during the war this year. A cease-fire followed, and an initial U.S. decision to let the group keep its heavy weapons infuriated Iran. It was later disarmed.

That tentative move toward a U.S. alliance with Rajavi betrayed a double standard toward terrorism, moderate Iranians have said. They contend it could complicate efforts to coax cooperation from the Iranian government, which U.S. officials say may be harboring al Qaeda operatives.

The New York Times

Iranian Terror Group Planned Attacks, French Report Says

June 2003

PARIS, June 24; An Iranian opposition group operating in France that was the target of a large police operation last week had plans to attack Iranian embassies and assassinate former members working with Iranian intelligence services in Europe, according to a classified report by France's counter-intelligence service prepared two weeks before the crackdown.

The report also said that the group, known as the Mujahedeen Khalq, had discussed having their members commit suicide by setting themselves on fire to draw attention to their cause.

The organization, whose aim is to overthrow Tehran's Islamic Republic by force, has operated in France for more than two decades and has its headquarters and military wing in Iraq. It pays for its operations through complex fund-raising that may be legal. Its main financier used to be Iraq, which over time gave the group several hundreds of millions of dollars, the report said. It added that since the fall of the government of Saddam Hussein, militants of both its political and military wing "have fled the country and a number of them have based themselves in Europe and in France."

In France, the organization "conducts many activities that have a clandestine, sect-like and unlawful character even criminal," the report said.

MEK
Uncovered

61



Lengthy excerpts from the report were first reported in today's editions of Le Figaro newspaper and independently verified with the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry is responsible for the counter-intelligence service, known as the D.S.T., or the Directorate for Territorial Surveillance.

A week ago, in one of the biggest domestic anti-terrorist operations in years, 1,300 French police arrested more than 150 members of the group, accusing them of organizing terrorist acts, and seized more than \$8 million in \$100 bills and sophisticated communications and transmission equipment. The organization is officially listed by both the United States and the European Union as a terrorist group.

Although the move against the group was designed to shut down its operations in France, in the absence of hard evidence against them, most of those detained were set free. A small group is still being held on suspicion of planning possible terrorist attacks.

One of those who is still in custody is Maryam Rajavi, who is known by the group as "the first lady of Iran" and is also the head of the group's political arm known as the National Council of Resistance. She is married to the Mujahedeen leader Massoud Rajavi, who runs the organization with an iron hand and has been based in Iraq since 1986 but has recently gone

into hiding.

It was Ms. Rajavi's detention that prompted Mujahedeen members and sympathizers to demonstrate every day since then, and several set themselves on fire in Paris, London, Rome and Berne. Two of those who set themselves ablaze — one woman in Paris and another in London — have since died of their burns.

A Paris appeals court today rejected requests to free Ms. Rajavi and the 10 other members of the group who are still being held.

Ms. Rajavi uses several aliases and holds permanent refugee status in France until 2006, the report said. According to senior intelligence officials, she returned from Iraq to France in April with other senior Mujahedeen operatives with the intention of making it a global headquarters to launch the group's activities, including possible terrorist operations. The group has denied such accusations.

The report, prepared by France's domestic intelligence agency, provides the fullest official description of the Iranian exile movement since last week's crackdown.

"According to recent information, in case of a British-American attack," the report said, Mujahedeen Khalq, planned to "organize operations against Iranian targets within Europe (embassies, consulates), and to physically eliminate former members of the movement collaborating with Iranian intelligence services."

It was not clear whether the reference to the British-American attack referred in general to the recent war against the regime of Saddam Hussein or to a potential attack against the Mujahedeen itself.

The report said that many members of the organization in France have traveled regularly to Iraq where they received military and political training. They often use false documents and vary their itineraries to get to Iraq to avoid surveillance of their travels.

Members of the organization’s “liberation army” based in Iraq regularly travel to the group’s French headquarters in the Paris suburb of Auvers-Sur-Oise, and some of their army veterans have become “established in France.”

The report stated that the organization in France consists of 200 to 300 militants and sympathizers and a much smaller “hard core” group. It listed its legal and illegal publications, adding that the illegal publication, “Mojahed,” constitutes “a risk to the public order because it incites its readers to murder the main leaders of Iran who are likely to make an official visit to France.”

The organization, according to the report, needs a “a substantial budget” to manage its real estate holdings, finance its communication networks, the trips of its militants and its army in Iraq, the report said, adding that the group uses a complex banking network in France, Europe, North America and the Middle East.



The New York Times

Iranian Opposition Movement's Many Faces

June 2003

To true believers, the ones who are waging a hunger strike to protest her detention in a French jail, Maryam Rajavi is the smiling face of Iran's future, the woman destined to overthrow its clerical leaders and become president of a free and democratic country.

To detractors, she is a dangerous cult figure who, with her husband, Massoud Rajavi, has led a terrorist movement that sold out to Iran's enemy, Iraq, and accepted Saddam Hussein's sponsorship. They say the Rajavis brainwash followers, forcing them to abandon spouses and children, and imprison or kill those who resist.

What is not in dispute is that the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Mujahedeen, the Iraq-based Iranian opposition group the Rajavis lead, has been designated a terrorist organization by both the United States State Department and the 15-country European Union. Now, in an unintended consequence of the American-led war against Iraq, the United States and France are struggling to figure out just who these people are and what to do with them.

The collapse of Mr. Hussein's government has left the fate of thousands of Iraq-based Mujahedeen followers, including heavily armed troops, in American hands. A major French crackdown nearly two weeks ago against the group's local headquarters in Auvers-sur-Oise and sites outside Paris was

MEK
Uncovered

65



aimed at preventing the organization from moving the center of its global operations from Iraq to France.

“We could no longer tolerate an organization that was expanding its terrorist operations, and we feared that it could start organizing and planning attacks from French soil,” said Pierre de Bousquet, the director of the Directorate for Territorial Surveillance, France’s counterintelligence service, in an interview. The French government has given political asylum, and even police protection, to the Mujahedeen for more than two decades. But since last fall, Mr. de Bousquet said, French intelligence noticed the arrival of an increasing number of Mujahedeen members and, after the Iraq war, of many of its soldiers. The group had rented a former paint factory in the town of Saint Ouen l’Aumone, which he said it was transforming into a communications center with a television studio and satellite dishes. French intelligence officials reported that the Mujahedeen planned to attack embassies and other Iranian interests in Europe and assassinate 25 former Mujahedeen members. There was a strong desire to crack down on the group at a time when some officials in the Bush administration were suggesting it might be a potential force to use against Iran.

“This is by no means a political movement, a democratic movement,” Mr. de Bousquet said. “It was not preparing the restoration of democracy in Iran. They are complete fanatics, a fanatical sect with a total absence of democracy, and a cult of

personality towards the leader.”

What makes the Mujahedeen difficult to decipher is that it has at least two aspects. One operates a highly regimented operation from inside Iraq with its own army, dress code, calendar, rituals, printing presses, military training camps, clinics and what it calls “re-education camps.”

The other has offices in capitals around the world under the group’s political arm, the National Council of Resistance, staffed by sophisticated, multilingual representatives in suits and ties. In a contradiction in American policy, the State Department lists the group’s political arm as part of the Mujahedeen’s terrorist network, but it is allowed to function openly in the United States and is even registered with the Justice Department as a lobbying organization. That designation gives it the right to lobby on Capitol Hill and gather lawmakers’ signatures on petitions of support.

Since the arrest in France last week of more than 150 Mujahedeen members, most of whom have since been released, the Auvers-sur-Oise headquarters has become a place of pilgrimage and public relations. In the town where Vincent van Gogh lived and is buried, hundreds of Mujahedeen followers, including dozens of men on hunger strike, have camped out. French riot police officers patrol the area with walkie-talkies. Huge banners bearing Mrs. Rajavi’s portrait have been hung. Danielle Mitterrand, the widow of the late French president François Mitterrand, has paid a visit in a show of support. The mayor of Auvers-sur-Oise has lent them a soccer field to use as a campsite.

Shahin Gobadi, a Mujahedeen spokesman based in Washington, distributed letters from around the world criticizing France’s decision to detain Mrs. Rajavi and 10 of her followers on suspicion of terrorism. Several were signed by American lawmakers.

“The arrests serve the interests of the terrorist dictatorship ruling Iran,” said a June 19 letter from Representative William



Lacy Clay, a Missouri Democrat, calling for the immediate release of Mrs. Rajavi. Representative Edolphus Towns, a New York Democrat, sent an almost identically worded letter the same day.

But for those who have studied the organization -- and to some former members -- it is far from being a political movement with popular support inside Iran. It has gone through several ideological shifts since its founding in opposition to the Iranian monarchy in the 1960's -- moving from anti-imperialism to a blend of Islam and Marxism to egalitarian socialism to a vague philosophy that talks of democracy, freedom and equal rights for women.

"It is a mystical cult," said Ervand Abrahamian, a history professor at Baruch College who has written the most authoritative history of the organization. "It's the stress on obedience to the leader that has kept it going, rather than any political program. If Massoud Rajavi got up tomorrow and said the world was flat, his members would accept it."

The organization has long been intent on showing the outside world its positive face. While its representatives around the world publicly condemned the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, inside Iraq there was rejoicing, former members say.

"There were celebrations at all the Mujahedeen camps on Sept. 11," said Ardeshir Parkizkari, 39, a former member of the group's central council who is now a political refugee in Europe, in a telephone interview. "I was in one of their prisons then, and we never were treated so well as we were that day -- given juices and sweets. They called the events of Sept. 11 God's revenge on America."

He explained his own rupture with the group: "You lose your identity and are not allowed to think freely. When I started having fights with them and pointed out their mistakes, they put me on trial and sent me to prison for not following the leader's orders." He said he was beaten so badly that he now walks with a limp.

It was devotion to Mrs. Rajavi, who is about 50 years old, that led several of her supporters throughout Europe to set themselves on fire to protest her arrest. Although Mrs. Rajavi sent a message from jail asking her supporters to stop, former Mujahedeen members said that in training camps in Iraq, self-immolation was praised as a fitting response to the possible persecution of the Rajavis.

In interviews, Mujahedeen defectors described a brutal side of the organization in Iraq, where it had been based since 1986. After the 1991 Persian Gulf war, they said, the Iraq government ordered Mujahedeen soldiers to help suppress revolts against Saddam Hussein by Kurds and Shiites.

“We were told that if the revolts succeeded in overthrowing Saddam Hussein it would be the end of our movement,” said Karim Haghi, 42, a former bodyguard of the Rajavis who is a political refugee in Europe, in a telephone interview. “Mrs. Rajavi told us to kill them with tanks and try to preserve our bullets for other operations. We were forced to kill both Kurds and Shiites, and I said I didn’t come here to kill other people.” Mr. Haghi said he was jailed, and eventually escaped.

Former members said they were forced to divorce and some had their children taken from them and sent to families in Europe for adoption. They said their passports were taken from them and they were given new identities, and they were forced at group meetings to confess their “sins,” sessions that were videotaped as evidence if members tried to defect.

Muhammad Hosein Sobhani, 42, also a former bodyguard of the Rajavis, said in a telephone interview that he was forced to divorce his wife. Their daughter was taken out of Iraq when she was 6 and adopted by an Iranian couple in Denmark.

“They told my daughter, ‘Your father died in a Mujahedeen operation,’ and I was forbidden to have any contact with her,” he said, adding that he has since tracked down his daughter, who is now 18.

Farid Soleimani, a Mujahedeen spokesman, denied the



charges of forced divorces and adoptions, saying fighters themselves often decided to send their children out of Iraq for their safety. He also denied that the group was plotting terrorist operations from Paris, noting that the French authorities had found no weapons in the 13 sites they raided.

Meanwhile, the fate of the Mujahedeen in France is uncertain. French authorities say those who are legal residents have a right to remain in France and they have no intention of deporting any of them to Iran, where they would certainly be tried for treason.

Mrs. Rajavi, for example, has political refugee status until 2006. As for Mr. Rajavi, who according to American intelligence was last known to be living in Iraq, there is no information of his current whereabouts or even if he is still alive.



The New York Times

■ The cult of Rajavi

July 2003

For more than 30 years, the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Mujahedeen, has survived and operated on the margins of history and the slivers of land that Saddam Hussein and French governments have proffered it. During the 1970's, while it was still an underground Iranian political movement, you could encounter some of its members on the streets of New York, waving pictures of torture victims of the shah's regime. In the 80's and 90's, after its leaders fled Iran, you could see them raising money and petitioning on university campuses around the United States, pumping photographs in the air of women mangled and tortured by the Islamic regime in Tehran. By then, they were also showing off other photographs, photographs that were in some ways more attention-grabbing: Iranian women in military uniforms who brandished guns, drove tanks and were ready to overthrow the Iranian government. Led by a charismatic husband-and-wife duo, Maryam and Massoud Rajavi, the Mujahedeen had transformed itself into the only army in the world with a commander corps composed mostly of women.

Until the United States invaded Iraq in March, the Mujahedeen survived for two decades under the patronage of Saddam Hussein. He gave the group money, weapons, jeeps and military bases along the Iran-Iraq border -- a convenient launching ground for its attacks against Iranian government figures. When U.S. forces toppled Saddam's regime, they were not sure how to handle the army of some 5,000 Mujahedeen fighters, many of them female and all of them fanatically loyal to the Rajavis.

MEK
Uncovered

71



The U.S soldiers' confusion reflected confusion back home. The Mujahedeen has a sophisticated lobbying apparatus, and it has exploited the notion of female soldiers fighting the Islamic clerical rulers in Tehran to garner the support of dozens in Congress. But the group is also on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations, placed there in 1997 as a goodwill gesture toward Iran's newly elected reform-minded president, Mohammad Khatami.

With the fall of Saddam and with a wave of antigovernment demonstrations across Iran last month, the Mujahedeen suddenly found itself thrown into the middle of Washington's foreign-policy battles over what to do about Iran. And now its fate hangs precariously between extinction and resurrection. A number of Pentagon hawks and policy makers are advocating that the Mujahedeen be removed from the terrorist list and recycled for future use against Iran. But the French have also stepped into the Persian fray on the side of the Iranian government -- who consider the Rajavis and their army a mortal enemy. In the early-morning hours of June 17, some 1,300 French police officers descended upon the town of Auvers-sur-Oise, where the Mujahedeen established its political headquarters. After offering the Iranian exiles sanctuary on and off for two decades and providing police protection to Maryam Rajavi, the French mysteriously arrested Rajavi along with 160 of her followers, claiming that the group was planning to move its mil-

itary base to France and launch terrorist attacks on Iranian targets in Europe. Immediately, zealous Mujahedeen members in Paris, London and Rome staged hunger strikes, demanding the release of Maryam, and several set themselves ablaze.

In Washington, Senator Sam Brownback, Republican of Kansas and chairman of the Foreign Relations subcommittee on South Asia, accused the French of doing the Iranian government's dirty work. Along with other members of Congress, Brownback wrote a letter of protest to President Jacques Chirac, while longtime Mujahedeen champions like Sheila Jackson-Lee, Democrat of Texas, expressed their distress over Maryam's arrest. But few, if any, of these supporters have visited the Mujahedeen's desert encampments in Iraq and know how truly bizarre this revolutionary group is.

Recently, I went to visit Camp Ashraf, the main Mujahedeen base, which lies some 65 miles north of Baghdad in Diala province, near the Iranian border. Ashraf is 14 square miles of ungenerous desert surrounded by aprons of barbed wire, gun towers and guards in trough-like bunkers, shaded by camouflage netting and dehydrated palm trees, their trunks thickened by dust. As you pass the checkpoints and dragons'-teeth tire crunchers into the tidy military town, you feel you've entered a fictional world of female worker bees. Of course, there are men around; about 50 percent of the soldiers are male. But everywhere I turned, I saw women dressed in khaki uniforms and mud-colored head scarves, driving back and forth along the avenues in white pickups or army-green trucks, staring ahead, slightly dazed, or walking purposefully, a slight march to their gaits as at a factory in Maoist China.

Pari Bahshai, a stocky Iranian woman in her mid-40's and the military commander of Ashraf, was my tour guide for the day. We drove through the grounds in her white Land Cruiser out to a dry, burning plain where dozens of young women were buried in the mouths of their tanks -- adjusting, winching, tinkering with the circuits and engines that keep their fighting machines





alive. There were neat rows of Brazilian Cascavel tanks, Russian BMP armored vehicles and British Chieftains, most of them captured from Iran at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

Some of the women smiled shyly; others were expressionless as Bahshai -- who was tough but indulgent and whom they clearly loved -- made her introductions. "When they first come here, it's hard for them to deal with these armored vehicles," she said. "They don't believe in themselves. They think only men can do it. But as they see the others, they overcome their insecurity. I went through this process myself." Hossein Madani, a Mujahedeen political spokesman who was my minder for the day, said, "These young women are all new from Iran or countries abroad."

One by one, the youngest Mujahedeen sprang to life to recite their stories. A dark-haired beauty blurted out fast and robotically in Farsi, with a comrade translating into English: "I came from Tehran six months ago. I'm 20 years old. I was in a very unstable psychological situation in the last days of my stay in Iran. I wanted to commit suicide. Why? Because we had no right to express dissent. There was no freedom. Even personal things young people wanted to do like go out to parties or wear makeup or just go out freely. Many of my friends were burning themselves to die or becoming addicted to drugs. On the Internet, I came across a saying of Maryam Rajavi, 'You're capable and you must,' and I felt after that, that I was also capable. I got my self-confidence. I always believed women were weak, but when I read Maryam Rajavi's words, I got the self-confidence to come here."

I asked her a question to slow her down, but she simply pushed the pause button in her mind, released it when my question ended, and the tape rolled on. "My two brothers were supporters of the Mujahedeen," she said, "and were executed by the Khomeini regime."

Several months ago, she e-mailed the Mujahedeen, who then facilitated her passage to Turkey, where she was met at the

border, put on a train to Ankara and then Iraq. "I was educated in courses of Mujahedeen history, Iranian history and the current political situation," she carried on. "Now I'm in artillery class." She explained what it was like to be in Iraq during the U.S. bombing. "I was scared, but I reminded myself that I came to struggle against fundamentalism, and the fact that I was a member of the Mujahedeen family gave me strength." And then she stopped, said thank you and went away.

There were three more just like her. "When I was in Iran, I didn't think I could drive a tank and shoot a gun, but when I saw sister Maryam Rajavi, I got hope that I can do everything," said Shiva, a 21-year-old tank driver. "Now that I know Maryam Rajavi, I want other people to know about her too, because the freedom of Iran depends on her."

After the parade of testimonials, I was whisked onto a tank for a spin around the training ring. The women were giddy, affectionate and proud of their vehicles. They all told me how much self-confidence they had gained through Maryam. I had heard that the Mujahedeen must take a vow of "eternal divorce," that the young ones can never marry or have children and that the older ones had to divorce their spouses sometime in the late 1980's. I asked Sima, a woman in her late 20's, whether she ever regretted making that celibacy commitment. "When I feel that I'm getting closer to my goal," she shouted in English against the wind, "it's a more beautiful feeling than anything else. It's love." And what was her goal? "I have to teach the women in Iran to feel like I feel inside and rebuild what Khomeini destroyed. He is killing the soul of every person." I noticed that everyone, young and old, at Camp Ashraf referred in the same programmed way to the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini as if the charismatic icon of the Iranian revolution hadn't died 14 years ago. Sima said that whenever she lapsed into the "normal girl dreams" of marriage and children, she looked around her and said she felt proud. "In the difficult situations, I see happiness in the faces of my sisters."



Nadereh, an Iranian woman who had grown up in Toronto, told me she had broken off her engagement to come to Iraq. "I was living the best life in Toronto," she said. "I was studying physiotherapy and body mechanics. I had friends and family. But I was lacking something." Then one day in 1998 she lay on her bed staring at the ceiling, and heard on Iranian TV that Assadollah Lajevardi, known as the butcher of Evin, the political prison in Tehran where thousands of Mujahedeen were tortured and executed, had been assassinated. The Mujahedeen claimed to have carried out the celebrated operation. "I couldn't stand it anymore. I thought, What are you doing for your people?" Now she drives a Katyusha rocket truck.

After we stopped and dismounted, I noticed my minder, Madani, asking the girls what words we had exchanged out there in the wind. And when he came back, Bahshai picked up her feminist cant about the "crimes of the misogynist regime" in Tehran and how Maryam paved the way for women to "qualify for a hegemonic role" in the army's general staff. As she would say later, "Women under Khomeini commit suicide; women here become responsible."

Though Maryam Rajavi spends most of her time in France or lobbying in the West, her smiling green eyes stalk Camp Ashraf almost as ubiquitously as the image of Saddam in Iraq or Khomeini in Iran. Her photographs in flowery blouses grace bedsides, dining tables, lecture halls and even tanks. Back in the 1960's, the founders of the Mujahedeen were students who melded revolutionary Islam with Marxism, and they were among the few to battle the shah with weapons. Like other radical students in the 60's, they rejected bourgeois values, spurned individualism and found respite in the militarized life of a cause. They were also vehemently against U.S. involvement in Iran and killed several Americans working in Tehran. Most of the student leaders -- except Massoud Rajavi and a few others who were in prison -- were executed in the 1970's. After the shah was overthrown in 1979, Rajavi, with his char-

ismatic style, gathered thousands of followers. He initially supported Khomeini, but quickly fell out with him and his ring of clerics. And in 1981, he plotted to bring down the Islamic regime. Rajavi dispatched his people into the streets of Tehran, and many were summarily executed. The Mujahedeen detonated a powerful bomb that killed more than 70 officials in the Iranian theocracy. (Today's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, lost the use of his right arm in one such explosion that year.) In retaliation, thousands of Mujahedeen members were arrested and then executed or tortured inside Evin Prison -- including many of today's Mujahedeen commanders in Iraq.

Rajavi fled to Paris in disguise. There, he established the National Council of Resistance in Iran, the political umbrella of the Mujahedeen. In 1986, the French began forging ties with Khomeini and kicked out Rajavi and his squads of assassins, who ran into the arms of Saddam Hussein. Hussein had been welcoming the Mujahedeen for several years. (Many Mujahedeen political supporters did stay on in France as political refugees.) Rajavi, in return, betrayed his own countrymen, identifying Iranian military targets for Iraq to bomb, a move most Iranians will never forgive. Then, right after the Iran-Iraq ceasefire in 1988, as if orchestrating the tragic turning point in his own Rajavi Opera, he launched thousands of his warriors on "Operation Eternal Light" across the border to capture Iranian territory. Two thousand Mujahedeen fighters -- many of them the parents, husbands and wives of those who are now in Iraq -- were killed by the Revolutionary Guard.

The coup de grace that metamorphosed the party into something more like a husband-and-wife-led cult was Massoud's spectacular theft of his colleague's wife, Maryam. Massoud fell in love with her and invented an entire political program to elevate her into a revolutionary queen and to justify her divorce from her husband. Women should be equal to men, Massoud claimed, and Maryam should be an equal leader by his side. But working together without being married would be a viola-

tion of Islamic law. So he maneuvered her divorce and called it a “cultural revolution.”

As Ervand Abrahamian, a historian and author of “The Iranian Mujahedeen,” told me: “Rajavi said he was emulating the prophet” -- Muhammad -- “who had married his adopted son’s wife to show he could overcome conventional morality. It smacked of blasphemy.”

Rajavi liked having women around him and overhauled the command structure to replace the men with women -- this time calling it a “constitutional revolution.” It was also politically astute and added alluring spice for their public-relations campaign in the West.

“Rajavi, Rajavi, Iran, Iran, Maryam, Maryam, Iran, Iran,” shouted a dozen young women commandos, trotting with their Kalashnikovs on a scrubby field, camouflage leaves and twigs bouncing on their helmets, their faces blurred by green paint. “Run, run, fire, fire.” They rolled, crouched, crept, fired and regrouped around their commander. One stepped forward: “We weren’t coordinated.” Another shouted, “The distance between us was too much.” Another shouted, “Our speed wasn’t adequate.” They were given a rest and then, spotting me, skipped up on cue, sweating and out of breath. Nineteen-year-old Sahar began: “My mother was pregnant with me when she was arrested, and I was born in Evin Prison in 1983. When I was 1 year old, my father was executed for supporting the Mujahedeen. Now I drive a Cascavel. My mother is at another base. It’s one of the reasons I decided to join the army.”

As the leaders like to boast, the Mujahedeen is a family affair. (“We have three generations of martyrs: grandmothers, mothers, daughters.”) Most of the girls I was meeting had grown up in Mujahedeen schools in Ashraf, where they lived separated from their parents. Family visits were allowed on Thursday nights and Fridays. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, many of these girls were transported to Jordan and then smuggled to various countries -- Germany, France, Canada, Denmark, England,

the United States -- where they were raised by guardians who were usually Mujahedeen supporters. When they were 18 or 19, many of them decided to come back to Iraq and fill the ranks of the youngest Mujahedeen generation. Though "decided" is probably not the right word, since from the day they were born, these girls and boys were not taught to think for themselves but to blindly follow their leaders. "Every morning and night, the kids, beginning as young as 1 and 2, had to stand before a poster of Massoud and Maryam, salute them and shout praises to them," Nadereh Afshari, a former Mujahedeen deep-believer, told me. Afshari, who was posted in Germany and was responsible for receiving Mujahedeen children during the gulf war, said that when the German government tried to absorb Mujahedeen children into their education system, the Mujahedeen refused. Many of the children were sent to Mujahedeen schools, particularly in France. The Rajavis, Afshari went on to say, "saw these kids as the next generation's soldiers. They wanted to brainwash them and control them." Which may explain the pattern to their stories: a journey to self-empowerment and the enlightenment of self-sacrifice inspired by the light and wisdom of Maryam and Massoud.

As we cruised around the grounds, Hossein Madani said: "Did you know that they built all this from scratch? That's why the combatants love their base so much." And it was true; the Mujahedeen had managed to cultivate out of the desert their own little paradise with vegetable gardens, rows of Eucalyptus and poplar trees, sports fields and Thursday night movies. When I asked about the fact that the land -- along with all clothing, ammunition, gas and the like -- had been donated by Saddam Hussein and that the Mujahedeen was, in effect, fighting one dictatorship under the wings of another, both Madani and Bahshai insisted that the Mujahedeen's precondition for setting up bases in Iraq was independence from Iraq's affairs. "All we've used is the soil," Bahshai insisted. Either she was an adept liar or in deep denial, since everyone I spoke to -- Iraqi



intelligence officers, Kurdish commanders and human rights groups -- said that in 1991 Hussein used the Mujahedeen and its tanks as advance forces to crush the Kurdish uprisings in the north and the Shia uprisings in the south. And former Mujahedeen members remember Maryam Rajavi's infamous command at the time: "Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards."

Though for years the Mujahedeen preached a Marxist-Islamic ideology, it has modernized with the times. Today, one of the standard lines of the Mujahedeen's National Council of Resistance to politicians in Europe and America is that it is advocating a secular, democratic government in Iran, and that when it overthrows the regime, it will set up a six-month interim government with Maryam as president and then hold free elections. But despite its rhetoric, the Mujahedeen operates like any other dictatorship. Mujahedeen members have no access to newspapers or radio or television, other than what is fed them. As the historian Abrahamian told me, "No one can criticize Rajavi." And everyone must go through routine self-criticism sessions. "It's all done on tape, so they have records of what you say. If there's sign of resistance, you're considered not revolutionary enough, and you need more ideological training. Either people break away or succumb."

Salahaddin Mukhtadi, an Iranian historian in exile who still maintains communications with the Mujahedeen because it is the strongest armed opposition to the Iranian regime, told me that Mujahedeen members "are locked up if they disagree with anything. And sometimes killed."

Afshari, who fled the group 10 years ago, told me how friendship was forbidden. No two people could sit alone and talk together, especially about their former lives. Informants were planted everywhere. It was Maryam's idea to kill emotional relationships. "She called it 'drying the base,'" Afshari said. "They kept telling us every one of your emotions should be channeled toward Massoud, and Massoud equals leadership, and

leadership equals Iran.” The segregation of the sexes began almost from toddlerhood. “Girls were not allowed to speak to boys. If they were caught mingling, they were severely punished.”

Though Maryam and Massoud finagled it so they could be together, they forced everyone else into celibacy. “They told us, ‘We are at war, and soldiers cannot have wives and husbands,’” Afshari said. “You had to report every single day and confess your thoughts and dreams. They made men say they got erections when they smelled the perfume of a woman.” Men and women had to participate in “weekly ideological cleansings,” in which they would publicly confess their sexual desires. It was not only a form of control but also a means to delete all remnants of individual thought.

One of the most disturbing encounters I had in Ashraf was with Mahnaz Bazazi, a commander who had been with the Mujahedeen for 25 years. I met her in the Ashraf hospital. Bazazi was probably on drugs, but that didn’t explain the natural intoxication she was radiating, despite -- or perhaps because -- she had just had her legs amputated after an American missile slammed into the warehouse she was guarding. The doctor told me he never heard her complain. “Even in this way, she’s confronting the Mullahs,” he said. Bazazi interrupted him. “This is not me personally,” she said in a soft high voice. “These are the ideas of the Mujahedeen. It’s true I lost my legs, but my struggle will continue because I have a wish -- the freedom of my country.” At the foot of her bed, surrounded by candles, stood a large framed photograph of Maryam in a white dress and blue flowered head scarf.

In the chaotic days after the fall of Baghdad, several Mujahedeen members managed to flee the military camps and were in Kurdish custody in northern Iraq. Kurdish officials told me they weren’t sure what to do with them. One was Mohammad, a gaunt 19-year-old Iranian from Tehran with sad chestnut eyes. He hadn’t heard of the Mujahedeen until one day last



year when he was in Istanbul desperately looking for work. A Mujahedeen recruiter spotted him and a friend sleeping on the streets, so hungry they couldn't think anymore. The recruiter gave them a bed and food for the night, and the next day showed them videos of the Mujahedeen struggle. He enticed them to join with an offer to earn money in Iraq while simultaneously fighting the cruel Iranian regime. What's more, he said, you can marry Mujahedeen girls and start your own family. The Mujahedeen seemed like salvation. Mohammad was told to inform his family that he was going to work in Germany and given an Iraqi passport.

The first month at Ashraf, he said, wasn't so bad. Then came the indoctrination in the reception department and the weird self-criticism sessions. He quickly realized there would be no wives, no pay, no communication with his parents, no friendships, no freedom. The place was a nightmare, and he wanted out. But there was no leaving. When he refused to pledge the oath to struggle forever, he was subjected to relentless psychological pressure. One night, he couldn't take it anymore. He swallowed 80 diazepam pills. His friend, he said, slit his wrists. The friend died, but to Mohammad's chagrin, he woke up in a solitary room. After days of intense prodding to embrace the Mujahedeen way, he finally relented to the oath. He trundled along numbly until the Americans invaded Iraq, when he and another friend managed to slip out into the desert. They were helped out by Arabs, and then turned themselves over to the Kurds, hoping for mercy. Mohammad fell ill, and the next thing he knew he was in prison. "The Mujahedeen has a good appearance to the outside world, but anyone who has lived among them knows how rotten and dirty they are," he said. Another Iranian whom I met at the Kurdish prison told me that he had been a zealous Mujahedeen supporter for years in Iran, and when he finally made it to the Iraqi camps, he was horrified to discover that his dream was a totalitarian mini-state. Before I left Camp Ashraf, Massoud Farschi, one of the Muja-

hedeem spokesmen who was educated in the United States, told me that he thought the Mujahedeen was in the best position it had ever been in. "We've said all along that the real threat in the world is fundamentalism, and now the world has finally seen that." The Mujahedeen, he said, is the barrier to that fundamentalism. Nevertheless, two days later, in early May, Gen. Ray Odierno of the Fourth Infantry Division was dispatched to the camp to negotiate the Mujahedeen's surrender. American tanks were posted outside Ashraf's gates, and two B-52's were circling the skies above. After a day of discussion, the Mujahedeen commanders reached a capitulation agreement in which they would consolidate their weapons and personnel into two separate camps. Lt. Col. John Miller, also with the Fourth, attended a ceremony in which the men and women bid farewell to their tanks. "We saw folks kissing their vehicles, hugging them," he said. One 50-year-old man broke down in front of them, wailing. The women, he said, were much more controlled. Not so the women in Europe, who until recently were crying on the streets for the release of their beloved Maryam. They got their wish; a court ordered her released on bail. As for Massoud Rajavi, he has not uttered a peep. In fact, he seems to have disappeared. Some Iraqis claim to have seen him a few days before Baghdad fell boarding a helicopter south of the capital.

After the negotiations with the Mujahedeen, it was reported that Odierno said he thought that the group's commitment to democracy in Iran meant its status as a terrorist organization should be reviewed. There are also Senate staff members, Pentagon officials and even some people in the State Department who have said that if all the Mujahedeen is doing is fighting the "evil regime" in Iran, it quite likely that it will be removed from the State Department's terrorist list. "There is a move afoot among Pentagon hard-liners," one administration official said, "to use them as an opposition in the future." Recently Brownback submitted an Iran Democracy Act modeled on the





Iraqi Liberation Act, which would set aside \$50 million to help opposition groups overthrow the regime. The Mujahedeen, their U.S. supporters say, has provided the United States with key intelligence on Iran's nuclear program. One Congressional staff member working close to the issue said that there was a national security directive circulating "that includes a proposal for limited surgical strikes against the Iranian regime's nuclear facilities. We would be remiss if we did not use the Mujahedeen to identify exactly what the Iranians have and in the longer term, to facilitate regime change."

Meanwhile, inside Iran, the street protesters risking their lives and disappearing inside the regime's prisons consider the Mujahedeen a plague -- as toxic, if not more so, than the ruling clerics. After all, the Rajavis sold out their fellow Iranians to Saddam Hussein, trading intelligence about their home country for a place to house their Marxist-Islamist Rajavi sect. While Mujahedeen press releases were pouring out last month, taking undue credit for the nightly demonstrations, many antigovernment Iranians were rejoicing over the arrest of Maryam Rajavi and wondering where Massoud was hiding and why he, too, hadn't been apprehended. This past winter in Iran, when such a popular outburst among students and others was still just a dream, if you mentioned the Mujahedeen, those who knew and remembered the group laughed at the notion of it spearheading a democracy movement. Instead, they said, the Rajavis, given the chance, would have been the Pol Pot of Iran. The Pentagon has seen the fatal flaw of hitching itself to volatile groups like the Islamists who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan and, more recently, the Iraqi exile groups who had no popular base at home. It seems dangerously myopic that the U.S. is even considering resurrecting the Rajavis and their army of Stepford wives.

Friends in high places

July 2003

Western governments classify the People's Mojahedin as a terrorist group, but it can still boast allies in the US and UK. Dan De Luce charts its history

Western governments describe the People's Mojahedin as a terrorist organisation, yet the group has allies in the House of Commons and the US Congress.

When one of its leaders was arrested by French police last month, her followers went on hunger strike. Several set themselves alight in front of television cameras, with two later dying. French security officials claim that the People's Mojahedin was planning to stage terrorist attacks throughout Europe, but the group says that it advocates secular democracy and women's rights in Iran.

So who are the People's Mojahedin, and where did the group come from?

Its origins lie in the 60s, when opponents of the Shah's regime in Iran looked to socialist ideals and new readings of Islamic texts for inspiration in their campaign against the US-backed monarchy.

Outraged by the Shah's brutal suppression of dissent, the People's Mojahedin, or Mojahedin Khalq Organisation (MKO), chose to take up arms.

Bombings and assassinations, including several attacks that claimed the lives of US military officers and contractors, took a serious toll and provoked further repression by the regime.

The MKO's blend of Marxism and Islam influenced other opposition figures, and made its mark on the clerics who came to

MEK
Uncovered

85



rule Iran after the fall of the Shah. However, divisions among the MKO's ranks became apparent, with some electing to part from an increasingly radical leadership.

As the only armed and organised opposition group during the final years of the Shah's rule, many historians say that the People's Mojahedin played an important role in his eventual overthrow in 1979.

During the chaotic days after the Shah had fled amid mass protests, the MKO seized the state television headquarters and other government buildings.

As Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his allies asserted control in what later became known as the "Islamic revolution", the MKO attracted a large following among students, who admired its record of fierce opposition to the Shah's regime.

Yet the group soon found itself marginalised as Islamic conservatives sought to defeat left-wingers. When the ayatollah demanded that the group disarm, it refused. Violent conflict eventually erupted between the Islamic clerical leadership and the MKO, which had done so much to weaken the Shah.

MKO members resumed the terror tactics practised during the Shah's era, assassinating senior figures and then speeding away on high-powered motorbikes.

Its underground war against the government reached a peak in June 1981, when a series of bombs exploded in Tehran's city centre during a major political meeting. The bombing killed

72 people, including chief justice Mohammad Beheshti, a senior figure close to the ayatollah, government ministers, numerous MPs and civil servants.

A month later, the president, Mohammad-Ali Rajei, and the prime minister, Javad Bahonar were killed in a bombing attack. The government waged a determined campaign against the People's Mojahedin, using Militant Revolutionary guards and arresting and executing numerous MKO suspects.

In recent years, some journalists have questioned whether all those arrested were proven MKO agents, or whether they were merely rounded up in a sweeping move against all opposition. Lethal attacks on the clerical leadership failed to bolster the MKO's position, and civilian casualties cost it support among ordinary Iranians.

"I remember my parents told us we couldn't go outside because they were afraid of more bombings by the MKO," Mustafa, a computer engineer, recalled.

With western governments backing Iraq in its war against Iran, the MKO decided to link its future with the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein. The group acted as infiltrators and a source of military intelligence for Baghdad, and Saddam later used the MKO to help crush Kurdish and Shia opponents.

By siding with a regime bombing Iranian cities and killing hundreds of thousands of young Iranians, the MKO became despised in Iran and lost what support it still retained.

"The one thing in which there is common agreement among all political parties here, reformist or conservative, is that the MKO is a black organisation," Amir Mohebian, a conservative academic, said in an interview.

The 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war ended in stalemate, forcing the MKO into permanent exile and subservience to Saddam's repressive rule. A group that had been born in opposition to one dictatorship became dependent on another.

The recent collapse of Saddam's government has rendered the MKO homeless. The US bombed MKO bases during its at-

tack on the Iraqi regime, but was slow to negotiate the group's surrender. Diplomats say that the US coveted intelligence about Iran held by the MKO.

More and more, analysts believe, the MKO may have become a pawn in a bigger contest between Washington and Iran. The George Bush administration sees the MKO as a possible lever in its campaign to restrict Iran's nuclear programme and force the extradition of al-Qaida suspects allegedly sheltering in the country.

Although it has staged occasional hit and run raids along the Iran-Iraq border, including mortar attacks, it is the MKO's skilful public relations effort that has kept it alive outside Iran.

Through its political wing, the National Council for Resistance, articulate spokesmen, fluent in foreign languages, explain the group's goals in clear terms, delivering user-friendly material to the media. Outsiders already hostile towards Iran's theocracy respond well to the group's message.

The MKO's ability to gain allies in parliaments, and publicity, infuriates Iran, which accuses Washington and other governments of adopting a hypocritical stance in their declared war on terrorism.

The MKO also has managed to raise serious sums of money from exiles and supporters. French police seized some \$8m (£4.5m) during a recent raid on the MKO headquarters.

Former members have told horror stories about life inside the organisation, which, they say, resembles a cult. They have accused their former masters of punishing disobedience with torture, or even murder, and allege that the leadership separated some children from their parents.

Ervand Abrahamian, a history professor at Baruch College, in the US, has written a comprehensive history of the MKO. He says that the group has been sustained less by ideology than by a cult of personality surrounding its leader, Massoud Rajavi, and his wife, Maryam.

"If Massoud Rajavi got up tomorrow and said that the world

was flat, his members would accept it,” he told the New York Times.

Spokesmen for the MKO deny allegations of brainwashing, insisting that the organisation is the target of propaganda by the Iranian government, which it has labelled a “clerical dictatorship”.

Whether the People’s Mojahedin is a fanatical cult set on violence or the democratic organisation described by its leaders, its days of influence in Iran faded long ago.

Deprived of a base for its armed resistance, unpopular in its homeland and targeted for investigation by French authorities, it appears to be in terminal decline.



Transformations may mark demise of Mujahideen

October 2003

The downfall of Saddam Hussein has been a misfortune for a number of non-Iraqi groups and organizations that benefitted from the former dictator's patronage. Arguably the greatest losers have been the Mujahideen-e-Khalq organization. The loss of their Iraqi base has been among a series of misfortunes that has recently beset the Mujahideen. These setbacks have now placed the organization at a crossroads. Yet the Mujahideen's eventual demise will owe less to external factors than to their own sect-like ideology.

To date, nobody has really fully explained the perplexing organization that is the Mujahideen-e-Khalq. The veteran Iranian journalist Amir Taheri entitled his recent article on the organization, carried by the Wall Street Journal, *Islamist, Marxist ... Terrorist*. This resembles the psychological war waged by the SAVAK against the Mujahideen. The shah's regime, in an attempt to discredit the young activist movement that had sprung up in the 1960s, labeled it Islamic-Marxist.

The Islamic Republic, in order to undercut the organization's populist appeal, referred to it by the derogatory name of *Monafeghin* – a Koranic term for hypocrites. The message was simple: The Mujahideen pretended to be Muslims to mask their Marxist ideology. Their ultimate aim, argued the propagandists of the new revolutionary regime, was to sabotage Islam from

MEK
Uncovered

90



within. Of course these propagandist terms do little to capture the complexity of an organization that has survived for nearly 40 years.

But even the distinguished researchers of academia have failed to fill the gap. The only authoritative work on the organization is Ervand Ebrahmanian's *The Iranian Mujahideen*, which is effectively a sociological study on the rise and fall of the organization. Ebrahmanian does well to capture the organization's transition from a mass movement to a cult in the early to mid-1980s, but he fails to adequately elucidate the mechanisms that were used to prompt the transition.

How did the Mujahideen become a cult? The principal lever for the transformation was Rajavi's "ideological revolution" in January 1985. This "revolution" basically involved Masoud Rajavi marrying Maryam Azdanlou, the wife of Mehdi Abrishamchi, Rajavi's most trusted lieutenant, and promoting her to the rank of joint leader of the organization.

Rajavi loyalists contend their ideological revolution was both a strategic and tactical maneuver designed to hasten the demise of the Islamic Republic. They argued that it was strategic at an ideological level as it facilitated the feminization of the organization by promoting female members to virtually all the top positions. This was supposed to present the Mujahideen as the very antithesis of the misogynist Islamic regime. It was



deemed to be a tactical ploy as it supposedly confused the understanding and planning of the Islamic Republic's intelligence services and minimized the risks of penetration and subversion.

In fact the whole thing was primarily a purge. Hundreds of veteran Mujahideen members immediately split from the organization for they saw the whole affair as an ugly and bizarre form of cuckoldry.

Yet the ideological revolution moved on from being a purge to becoming an all-consuming cultist ideology. The Mojahedin claimed the sudden empowering of female members was in line with their vision of a matriarchal utopia. In reality this bizarre form of feminism consolidated Rajavi's hold over the organization as the newly empowered female cadres owed everything to him.

The ideological revolution not only disconnected the Mujahideen from the outside world, but it took them to the depths of depravity. It moved beyond a pseudo-feminist revolution to a tool against the very idea of sexual identity.

The culmination was a series of lectures delivered by Masoud Rajavi to his flock in March 1991. The setting was in the immediate aftermath of the first Gulf War with Iraq engulfed by a Kurdish and Shiite rebellion. The Mujahideen were assisting the Iraqi regime in quelling both uprisings. This move had proved unpopular with some MKO cadres. Masoud Rajavi, fearing that his organization was in danger of dissolving, started the "second" ideological revolution. Rajavi's lectures were ominously entitled as "Salib" or the Cross. Rajavi contended that what threatened the organization more than anything else was the members' attachment to their families. The solution, according to Rajavi, was a full scale war on sex and sexual identity.

By de-sexualizing his flock Rajavi had finally secured the transition to full cult-like status. The Mujahideen now inhabited a bizarre de-sexed parallel universe. In practical terms Rajavi

had carried out a second thorough purge of his organization. The remaining members were now embodiments of Rajavi himself. The second ideological revolution had made the survival of the Mujahideen contingent on the survival of Rajavi. The only contemporary parallel to the bizarre organization headed by Rajavi is arguably Peru's insurgent Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in their heyday in the late 1980s. Like the Shining Path's "Presidente Gonzalo," the now imprisoned Abimael Guzman, Rajavi is the great pretender, the student turned master theoretician and terrorist leader. The Mujahideen resemble the Shining Path in mixing pseudo-Marxist abstractions with local mythologies and like them they inhabit a parallel matriarchal universe.

But the Shining Path were not mercenaries at the behest of the highest bidder. The Mujahideen's history, meanwhile, is a catalogue of treachery. The organization spied for Moscow. Vladimir Kuzishkin, the former head of the KGB station in Tehran, disclosed in his memoirs that the Mujahideen were a source of information for the KGB. For nearly 20 years the Mujahideen were Saddam Hussein's proxy army. And since the Iraqi dictator's ouster they have done everything in their power to endear themselves to the new American masters of Iraq.

But those elements in the Pentagon who favor using the Mujahideen as a tool both inside Iraq and against Iran should heed this warning: The Mujahideen invariably become a liability for their masters. It is not just that the information they provide is usually exaggerated nonsense. The problem with the Mujahideen is that they are a shadow of what they used to be during their peak in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 revolution. Any investment on the Mujahideen is bound to yield negative equity.

In the final analysis, if the 1991 Gulf War proved to be the beginning of the end of Saddam Hussein, it will perhaps prove to be the start of the Mujahideen's demise as well. There is currently some speculation on the Rajavi's whereabouts ... He



has not appeared in public since the Iraq war. Reliable sources maintain he was apprehended by the Americans in the immediate aftermath of the war and taken to a CIA facility in Qatar. Whether or not Rajavi is in US custody, there is no doubt he is the mastermind of recent attempts to present an alternative Mujahideen leadership. Maryam Rajavi is being groomed as the cult's central figure. For Masoud Rajavi this volte-face is merely a tactical retreat to recover from recent losses. In a way it is a desperate attempt to absolve himself of blame in the midst of catastrophes that have engulfed the organization. But this latest charade may yet prove to be his last. The Salib revolution of March 1991 conditioned the survival of the Mujahideen on Rajavi's continuous leadership. By de-centralizing himself Rajavi is fatally undermining the very fabric of his organization.



MEK
Uncovered

94



The Washington Post

Rice Clarifies Stand On Iranian Group

November 2003

National security adviser Condoleezza Rice, rebutting suggestions the Bush administration is being lenient with an Iranian opposition group operating out of Iraq, said yesterday that the Mujaheddin-e Khalq is “part of the global war on terrorism” and its members “are being screened for possible involvement in war crimes, terrorism and other criminal activities.”

Rice, in an interview with Washington Post reporters and editors, said she was responding to an article in The Post on Sunday that described an apparently easygoing relationship between U.S. forces and the 3,800 Mujaheddin-e Khalq (MEK) troops. One military official, Sgt. William Sutherland, told a reporter that MEK members are patriots. “The problem is they’re still labeled as terrorists, even though we both know they’re not,” Sutherland said.

Rice said, “The story and such stories have been causing some confusion about American policy. We just wanted to make sure the reference is clear, that everyone understands where we stand on the MEK.”

The MEK is a highly sensitive issue for Iran, which has privately suggested to the administration that it will turn over al Qaeda members in exchange for captured members of the MEK. Last month, Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage ruled out such a deal “because we can’t be sure of the way they’d be treated,” referring to the MEK members.

MEK
Uncovered

95



But the administration has also indicated that it is willing to re-start Iraq-related discussions with Iran, which were suspended six months ago. Rice's remarks appear to be part of an effort to signal to the Iranians that the administration is firm on dealing with the group.

"I just want to be very clear that the U.S. remains committed to preventing the MEK, which is now contained in Iraq, from engaging in terrorist activities, including activities against Iran, and its reconstitution inside Iraq as a terrorist organization," Rice said.

The State Department officially designated the MEK as a terrorist group in 1997. The MEK has been campaigning for several decades to overthrow the Iranian government, and since 1987 has been operating out of Iraq with the backing of Saddam Hussein.

But since the start of war in Iraq, the MEK has been the subject of a fierce tug-of-war within the administration. While the State Department pressed for MEK members to be treated as terrorists, some Pentagon officials appeared to view them as a possible vanguard against the Iranian government.

Six months ago, President Bush ordered U.S. military forces to surround the MEK's camps along the Iraq-Iran border and to force the group to give up its arms. But administration officials said the Pentagon for months allowed the group to retain its

weapons, to come and go at the camps at will and to use camp facilities to broadcast propaganda into Iran.

In September, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell wrote Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld about the issue. Powell's note cited reports that the MEK enjoyed broad freedom to continue its operations. The note also mentioned that intercepts of Iranian government communications indicated the MEK continued to pose problems for the government in Tehran.

The White House at the time acknowledged that, while the MEK was to be treated by the military as a terrorist organization, "recently, the Department of Defense has come to believe that guidance has not been fully implemented." Officials said a plan was carried out to fulfill the original guidance "in accordance with resources available."

In January, before the war against Iraq was launched, U.S. officials held a secret meeting with Iranian officials. They suggested that the United States would target the MEK as a way of gaining Iran's cooperation in sealing its border and providing assistance to search-and-rescue missions for downed U.S. pilots during the war.

In early April, U.S. forces bombed the MEK camps, killing about 50 people, according to the group, before a cease-fire was arranged on April 15. The cease-fire convinced the Iranian government that it had been double-crossed -- until Bush ordered in May that the group be disarmed.



The Washington Post

Iraq Council Votes to Throw Out Iranian Opposition Group

December 2003

Iraq's Governing Council voted yesterday to expel the leading Iranian opposition group and confiscate its assets, a surprise move that could alter the regional balance of power. The resolution calls for the eviction of the group's 3,800 members by the end of the month.

The move came as the American governor of Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, headed to Washington for talks at the White House about several unresolved and thorny issues in the U.S. exit strategy, particularly the transfer of power to a provisional Iraqi government to be concluded by July 1.

The Iraqi council's unanimous decision against the People's Mujaheddin, or MEK, is a significant political and security gain for Iran and could marginalize the group or even eliminate it as an effective opposition movement. The MEK, which was supported by former president Saddam Hussein, has launched hundreds of attacks against Iran over the past two decades.

The move also marks a turning point for U.S. policy. The future of the Iranian opposition group has been heatedly debated within the Bush administration. The MEK, which mixes Marxism and Islam, has been on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations since 1999, but some administration hawks had argued that the group could form the basis for an effort to pressure or

MEK
Uncovered

98



change the regime in Tehran.

The administration has been under mounting pressure for months from European and other allies to crack down on the MEK and treat it like a terrorist group, according to U.S. officials and European diplomats. The MEK, born in the 1960s to limit Western influence in Iran and now tied to anti-American attacks, is surrounded by U.S. troops, but it has continued anti-government broadcasts into Iran and other activities.

Washington is prepared to allow the Iraqis to act against the MEK, U.S. officials said yesterday.

The timing is interesting. The Iraqi council's decision comes as Jordan's King Abdullah has been quietly trying to mediate the hand-over of about 70 al Qaeda operatives held by Iran -- in exchange for action by the United States on the MEK.

The move may also be linked to the Iraqi council's efforts to improve relations with Iran, another predominantly Shiite Muslim country that shares Iraq's longest border.

Ahmed Chalabi, a leading council member with close ties to both the United States and Iran, proposed the resolution. A Shiite Muslim, he recently visited Iran, according to Iraqi sources. Most of the 24 Governing Council members have been to Iran in recent months.

The MEK has been spurned by Iraqi Shiites, even though many of its members are Shiites, because Hussein used the Iranian group to help put down the Shiite uprising in southern



Iraq after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, according to U.S. officials. Thousands of Iraqis were killed.

The move, which will assuage Iranian concerns, will deprive the MEK of its only direct access to Iran. There are now no major opposition groups operating on any of Iran's borders.

An unanswered question is what will happen to the MEK. The Iraqi council's resolution calls for the closure of the MEK headquarters in Baghdad and a prohibition on its members' engaging in any political activities until their departure. It also calls for the seizure of all MEK funds and weapons, both of which will be turned over to a fund to compensate victims of Hussein's regime.

But the council did not discuss where the group would go. "It's up to them," said Entifadh Qanbar, a senior official of Chalabi's party, the Iraqi National Congress. "They can seek refuge in other places. We don't care where they're going to go."

Qanbar said Iran had offered the MEK an amnesty. The United States, however, will not turn the MEK over to Iran, which is on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Several senior MEK officials fled to Europe shortly before the U.S. invasion. More than a dozen were arrested in France several months ago for plotting terrorist activities.

"It's the same problem as dealing with [former president] Charles Taylor in Liberia. These are really bad guys who have to be dealt with in a fair and transparent way that holds them to account for what they've done. But how that is carried out has yet to be worked out. . . . At the moment they're confined to camps and not doing anyone any harm," a senior State Department official said yesterday.

Iraqis denied that they were pressured by the United States to act. "The council based its decision on the black history of this terrorist organization and the crimes committed against our people and our neighbor," the council said in a statement yesterday.

Inside a group caught between three powers

December 2003

Mujahideen-e Khalq, an Iraq-based group founded to fight Iran's regime, may be expelled from its base this week.

TEHRAN, IRAN — The day Masumeh Roshan had been praying for finally came in late September, when the Iranian mother traveled to Iraq to visit her only son - a teenager she says was lured into ties with terrorism.

But the joyful reunion soon dissolved into tears at Ashraf Camp, where US troops are guarding some 3,800 militants of the Mujahideen-e Khalq Organization (MKO) - the only armed opposition to the ruling clerics of Iran.

Ms. Roshan's militant son, they said, could not leave.

The case of those holed up in Camp Ashraf, near Baghdad, remains a quirky piece of unfinished business left over from the American campaign to oust Saddam Hussein. It continues to leave a trail of broken lives.

Officially, both the US and Iran label the MKO a terrorist group. The US-appointed Iraq Governing Council concurs: Citing the "black history of this terrorist organization" and its years of working closely with Mr. Hussein, it has ordered the expulsion of the MKO from Iraq by the end of this year.

But the MKO's fate is unclear. While the Iraqis want it disbanded, the politically savvy group still has support among some congressmen and Pentagon officials, who see it as a potential tool against Iran, a country which President Bush calls part of

MEK
Uncovered

101



an “axis of evil.”

Some MKO tips have led to recent revelations about key aspects of Iran’s clandestine nuclear program, though many others have proven unreliable. Long a diplomatic hot potato - which Tehran has offered to solve, by exchanging MKO militants for Al Qaeda players now in Iran - the MKO continues to complicate US-Iran-Iraq relations.

Lives on the line

But for those rank-and-file members trying to escape MKO control, resolving the status issue is an urgent need. Ms. Roshan says she hardly recognized the gaunt visage of her 17-year-old boy, Majid Amini, at Ashraf Camp.

“He pulled my ear to his lips, and said: ‘Don’t cry; be sure that I will come with you. I can’t stay here; they are not human beings,’” Roshan recalls, trying to control her trembling voice.

But Mr. Amini - a Karate kid with an orange belt, who his parents say was recruited to join the MKO in Tehran with promises of completing two school grades in one year and gaining a place in college - was forced to remain behind.

“He took his uniform off, stamped on it, and shouted: ‘I can’t go back! My life will be in danger!’ “ Roshan recalls during an interview in Tehran. MKO officers and US troops insisted the young man stay, and Roshan climbed alone onto the bus home. “I was like a dead person,” she says.

The voices of former MKO militants give a rare glimpse inside a group they say demands a cult-like control over members, practices Mao-style self-denunciations, and requires worship of husband-and-wife leaders Massoud and Maryam Rajavi.

Recruited from the United States and Europe, or even drawn directly from Iranians held in Iraqi prisoner-of-war camps and jails, the former fighters describe a high level of fear, and speak of their own awakening - and freedom from the MKO's grip - as if it's an epiphany.

The US State Department lists the MKO as a terrorist group that conducted assassinations against American citizens in the 1970s - and was behind bombings and killings of hundreds of members of the Iranian regime starting in the early 1980s.

By one count, after the recent invasion of Iraq, the MKO surrendered to US troops 300 tanks, 250 armored personnel carriers, 250 artillery pieces, and 10,000 small arms. Still, the group is reported to be able to continue antiregime broadcasts into Iran.

The Pentagon - after bombing MKO camps in Iraq in the first stages of the invasion - quickly worked out a truce with the group some civilian hawks in the Pentagon believe should be supported and turned into a US tool of opposition against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Militants who were once ready to die for the MKO, however, now have some advice for those who may want to apply the Afghan model to Iran by using the Mujahideen in the same way the Northern Alliance was used against the Taliban.

"I don't think the US can take advantage of this group," says Arash Sametipour, a former MKO militant recruited in the US. He survived his own attempts to kill himself with cyanide capsules and a hand grenade that blew away his right hand after botching an assassination attempt in Tehran in early 2000.

"When we were on clean-up duty [at Ashraf Camp], at 7 a.m. they played songs with words like 'At the end of the street, the Mujahideen is waiting - Yankee get out!' " recalls Mr. Sa-





metipour, who speaks rapid-fire English with an American accent. He remains in prison in Iran, where he was made available at the request of the Monitor. “This organization does not like the US. It is a mixture of Mao and Marxism, and [leader Massoud] Rajavi acts like Stalin.”

Ostensibly under US guard, the MKO still keeps its small arms. US officials said in November they were being screened for war crimes and terrorism. The Pentagon denies reports that the militants are able to freely roam or conduct attacks.

Reacting to the expulsion order earlier this month, the MKO claimed that the “vast majority of the Iraqi people” support their presence, and that the decision to shut them down “merely reflects the fantasies and illusions of the mullah’s regime, which regards ... [us] as the biggest obstacle to its export of fundamentalism ... and theocratic dictatorship in Iraq.”

MKO representatives could not be contacted for further comment. Both office and cellphone lines in Washington have been disconnected. The MKO office in Paris was unable to provide contact details for two senior officials it said were traveling in Europe.

Western diplomats and analysts agree that the MKO has very little support inside Iran itself. Though many Iranians take issue with their clerical rulers, MKO members are widely seen to be traitors, as they fought alongside Iraqi troops against Iran in the 1980s.

Most Iraqis, too, have little time for the MKO, which helped Hussein’s security forces brutally put down the Kurdish uprising after the Gulf War in 1991, and helped Baghdad quell Shiite unrest in 1999. The group, however, said in a Dec. 11 statement that “throughout its 17 years in Iraq,” it had “never” interfered in Iraq’s internal affairs.

Last summer, the US State Department outlawed several MKO-affiliated groups in the US. In June, France arrested 150 activists, including self-declared “president-elect” Maryam Rajavi.

The crackdowns sparked some to publicly commit suicide by setting themselves alight - a type of protest that some suggest could be repeated if the MKO is forced out of Iraq.

Within days of the expulsion order, lawyers for the MKO - arguing that expulsion would violate the laws of war - are reported to have sent letters to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others, asking the Pentagon to overrule the move.

A senior Pentagon official told the Monitor Tuesday that the US was exploring the option of sending former MKO members to a country other than Iran.

“They ought to be vetted,” he said, “and anyone who is a criminal deserves to be punished somehow. [But] they don’t have to go back [to Iran]. If they are not guilty of crimes there are various places they could go.”

Bargaining chip

The MKO has already turned into a bargaining chip, Tehran has floated a hand over of the MKO leadership by the US to Iran, in exchange for senior Al Qaeda leaders now in Iran. And the interim government in Iraq is not alone in trying to disband the MKO. Former members now back in Iran run an agency called the Nejat “Freedom” Committee, which aims to reunite hundreds of Iranian families with MKO militants.

An amnesty offer from President Mohamed Khatami - coupled with relatively soft treatment of recently captured MKO operatives and the expulsion deadline - is sparking new hope. In Geneva earlier this month, Mr. Khatami said Iran was ready to accept MKO fighters who “are in Iraq and regret” past acts. “We will welcome them and judge them according to the law,” he said.

That’s a sweeping change from the early 1980s and 1988, when the hunt for MKO sympathizers and other dissidents resulted in thousands of executions. In the early 1990s, Iranian intelligence agents were implicated in a series of assassinations of MKO chiefs across Europe.

“The first thing we must do is tell them: ‘You are called terror-



ists all over the world, even by the US, and you can't go anywhere," says Hora Shalchi, a diminutive former operative who carried out two mortar attacks in Tehran and served prison time, before joining Nejat. "The only place you will be welcome is home, in Iran."

Nejat members and Camp Ashraf veterans - some still in prison in Iran - speak of a wish to "rescue" MKO members from the Iraq camps. Most activists, they contend, are "prisoners" of the organization with little access to news from the outside world, who are told they will be tortured and killed if they return to Iran.

But the message of a dozen former militants interviewed for this article - often for several hours each, half of them still imprisoned by Iran's Revolutionary Court - is that the MKO is no longer deemed a critical threat by the Iranian regime.

And so brutal treatment of the past has given way to a new strategy.

The path that led many away from the MKO is often similar to that of Ms. Shalchi, an unlikely woman attacker with brown eyes and carefully trimmed eyebrows.

She joined the MKO in 1996, because her parents were "loyal" supporters. She soon found herself at Camp Ashraf, as part of a special squad that she says trained in isolation for "terror operations."

Shalchi returned to Iran in the spring of 2001, crossing the border on foot "like a pregnant woman" with five 60mm mortar rounds, half a mortar launch tube, and a Colt .45 pistol tucked under her chador-and cyanide tablets ready under her tongue. Her female MKO teammate carried three more mortars, and the other half of the launch tube.

Their target was a sprawling military base in Tehran. In the get-away car, unaware of the operation, were Shalchi's parents, her young brother, and a girl.

"I was so brainwashed, I took my 6-year-old daughter with me," Shalchi recalls. "I didn't think that she could be the first person

to be hurt.”

With hands shaking nervously, Shalchi blasted the mortars, but missed the target. The young women were then chased down by a crowd. Shalchi fired her gun to scare off a young man, and found out later she had wounded him in the shoulder. Echoing the experience of several captured MKO fighters, her first doubts came in Tehran. “We were told [by the MKO]: ‘Any bullet you shoot, [Iranians] will applaud you. All of the people really support you,’ “ Shalchi says. “But we weren’t accepted by anybody. There was no support. They told us a lot of lies.” Then, back in Iraq, Shalchi says her eyes were opened further. She was admonished for not killing the boy. “I was really surprised. I thought there was no reason to kill an ordinary person,” Shalchi says. “Our objective was to fight the [Iranian] military forces.”

Life is not easy in Camp Ashraf for militants who raise questions, a trait of those recruited in the US. Arash Sametipour - the failed assassin who tried to kill himself - traveled from the Northern Virginia Community College to Iraq, and suffered from the daily self-criticism.

“They beat me down so much, after six months it worked - I became MKO in my mind,” says Sametipour, a baby-faced inmate wearing the baggy gray-blue garb of Iran’s prisons, imprinted with the scales of justice. “When you face such an organization, you think: ‘All the problems are myself; the organization is clean.’ If you have a question, it has an answer, and it’s only me who doesn’t understand.”

Sametipour expected to die in custody. But instead he was interrogated, and given prison time that he says includes newspapers, TV, and even a call home to his parents in the US.

“What I saw were very logical interrogations.... They did not look at us as enemies, but as people who need help,” Sametipour says. “They told us: ‘You are not a threat to our government.’”

From Boston to Iraq



Also arriving from America was Mohamed Akbarin, who had been hitchhiking around the US and studying mechanical engineering at Boston's Northeastern University, when he joined the MKO in the mid-1980s.

Because he spoke English, Mr. Akbarin was chosen as a helicopter pilot, helped orchestrate trips for foreign journalists, and later - after an unsuccessful escape attempt - spent time in Iraqi and MKO jails.

He will never forget one incident in the mid-1990s, that told him the reality of fear for some MKO cadres. "I know what happens when you say: 'I want to leave,' " Akbarin says. One man was accused of trying to escape, and Akbarin saw him that day. "They found him, beat him up, and poured gas on him, as though they were going to burn him."

As an organizer of "guest" visits to Ashraf Camp, Akbarin says he saw deception tactics firsthand. When the MKO mounted large military parades, for example, Iraqi helicopters were used.

"We painted our symbol across Iraqi ones, and when it was done, we would wash it off or repaint it," Akbarin says. To boost troop strength, fighters - including him - would parade past two or three times.

Akbarin was not the only MKO fighter to notice the gap between fact and fiction. Babak Amin crossed to Iran in 2001 and carried out nine attacks aimed at disrupting Iran's elections.

Today Mr. Amin is serving a 10-year sentence in Tehran's Evin prison. But as he sent reports of his 2001 attacks back to Iraq using a satellite phone, he was surprised to see how embellished his exploits became on MKO websites.

In one case, he says he fired three small rifle grenades, which landed innocuously in the yard of a quasi-government building.

On the Web, the attack was turned into a three-pronged attack with several groups of mujahideen, using RPGs and grenades.

In another case, Amin reported injuring one person during a shootout near the Defense Ministry. The MKO declared that 10

of Iran's security forces were killed.

"From the first day I came back to Iran after 15 years, we were facing exactly the opposite of what we were told by the [MKO]," says Amin, whose round face and moustache fit a European businessman more than a terrorist. "People are really brain-washed."

That was also the feeling of Mohsen Hashemi, even though he and his family had long supported the MKO and even produced three "martyrs" who died for the cause. Mr. Hashemi worked as an MKO agent in Iran for years.

But then he was brought to Iraq. As soon as he arrived, Hashemi was jailed for 2-1/2 months and doubts began to grow. Then he saw political videotapes in which, he says, MKO leader Rajavi "compared himself with Jesus and God, and claimed he was the 12th imam of Shiite Islam who had returned."

Hashemi says he finally had a breakdown after attending his first speech with Rajavi. He came out of the hall, "sat in the toilet and cried for 15 minutes," he says. "I realized I made such a mistake, to work so many years for this Dracula."

"The most important part of the organization has collapsed - all that is left is the fear," says Hashemi. "They are afraid to come back here."



2004

The Washington Post

Charity Event May Have Terrorist Link

January 2004

Pentagon adviser Richard N. Perle, a strong advocate of war against Iraq, spoke last weekend at a charity event that U.S. officials say may have had ties to an alleged terrorist group seeking to topple the Iranian government and backed by Saddam Hussein.

The event, attended by more than 3,000 people Saturday at the Washington Convention Center, generated enough concerns within the administration that officials debated whether they had the legal authority to block the event, U.S. officials said yesterday. FBI agents attended it and, as part of a continuing investigation, the Treasury Department on Monday froze the assets of the event's prime organizer, the Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia.

Perle, in an interview, said he was unaware of any involvement by the terrorist group, known as the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), and believed he was assisting the victims of the Bam earthquake when he delivered the paid speech.

"All of the proceeds will go to the Red Cross," Perle said. Informed that the Red Cross had announced before the event it would refuse any monies because of the event's "political nature," Perle said: "I was unaware of that." Perle declined to say how much he received.

The Web site for the \$35-a-person event, billed as "a night of solidarity with Iran," flashed between references to support for "the Iran earthquake victims" and "a referendum for regime

MEK
Uncovered

111



change in Iran.” One administration official said that the FBI determined that at least three of the sponsoring organizations were associated with the MEK, while a senior Treasury official said “there were general indications the MEK may have an interest in the event,” but it could not yet prove it.

The day before the function, Treasury sent a letter to the Convention Center warning that the “MEK may have an interest in this event or may attempt to use the event to raise funds.” But the Treasury official said officials moved cautiously because in general they did not want to chill possible charitable acts. “This is what makes terrorist financing so complex,” he said. “You often have a blending of purposes and interests.”

No one answered the phone at the Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia, and messages seeking comment were not returned.

The MEK, though listed on the State Department list of foreign terrorist organizations since 1997, in the past year has been the subject of an administration tug of war over its status. The group maintained for the past decade thousands of fighters armed with tanks, armored vehicles and artillery in three camps northeast of Baghdad along the Iraq-Iran border. U.S. analysts concluded its primary support came from Hussein’s government, despite some financial backing from Iranian expatriates.

Nevertheless, some Pentagon officials considered the MEK as a possible vanguard against the Iranian government, which they viewed as a threat in the region. But in May President Bush ordered the group surrounded and disarmed. Even then, reports persisted of an easy-going relationship between the military and the MEK forces, leading the White House to clarify late last year that the MEK is “part of the global war on terrorism” and its members “are being screened for possible involvement in war crimes, terrorism and other criminal activities.”

Jacki Flowers, a spokeswoman for the Red Cross, said the relief agency had been contacted by the sponsors about receiving funds raised at the event several weeks before it took place. But the Red Cross decided to reject the proceeds once it became aware that the event was “political in nature,” specifically the promotion of regime change. She said accepting the funds would “compromise our fundamental principles of neutrality and impartiality.”

Perle, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a member of the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board, said he was contacted by the Premiere Speakers Bureau in mid-January about giving the keynote speech. He asked for more information about the sponsoring organizations and received a letter saying aid would be coordinated through the Red Cross and describing the event as “solidarity with earthquake victims in Iran and an evening for Iranian Resistance.”

The Iranian Resistance is often an alias for the MEK. In August, the State Department shut down the U.S. offices of the political arm of the MEK, known as National Council of Resistance of Iran.

In his speech, Perle said he made the case that the current Iranian government supports terrorism and said the fall of the Soviet empire foreshadowed the fate of the mullahs who he said control Iran. He said the hall was full of families and children and “it did not have an aura of an event with terrorist sponsorship.”



Raymond Tanter, a University of Michigan professor who introduced Perle, has long maintained that the MEK does not belong on the list of foreign terrorist organizations. He said MEK was never mentioned in speeches, “but I did hear references to Camp Ashraf,” which is where U.S. troops are holding MEK fighters.



Why the US granted 'protected' status to Iranian terrorists

July 2004

The US State Department officially considers a group of 3,800 Marxist Iranian rebels - who once killed several Americans and was supported by Saddam Hussein - "terrorists."

But the same group, under American guard in an Iraqi camp, was just accorded a new status by the Pentagon: "protected persons" under the Geneva Convention.

This strange twist, analysts say, underscores the divisions in Washington over US strategy in the Middle East and the war against terrorism. It's also a function of the swiftly deteriorating US-Iran dynamic, and a victory for US hawks who favor using the Mujahideen-e Khalq Organization (MKO) or "People's Holy Warriors," as a tool against Iran's clerical regime.

"How is it that [the MKO] get the Geneva Convention, and the people in Guantánamo Bay don't get it? It's a huge contradiction," says Ali Ansari, a British expert on Iran. "This will be interpreted in Iran as another link in the chain of the US determination to move onto Iran next" in the US war on terror.

For months, Tehran has quietly signaled that it would turn over high-ranking Al Qaeda members in exchange for MKO members now in Iraq. The MKO's new status likely puts an end to any such deal.

The shift also comes as momentum builds in Washington to

MEK
Uncovered

115



take some action against the Islamic republic. Wednesday, it was reported that Tehran has broken United Nations inventory seals and may resume work on constructing centrifuges - the machines used for enriching uranium.

Senior European diplomats - who brokered a private deal with Iran last October that included halting suspected nuclear weapons programs, in exchange for Western nuclear power expertise - are expected to secretly meet Iranian counterparts Thursday in London or Paris to see what can be salvaged of their agreement.

“US-Iran relations are drifting into very dangerous waters at the moment,” says Mr. Ansari.

Indeed, the Pentagon decision comes amid a string of critical reports about Iran that are causing some US lawmakers to wonder whether the Bush administration’s action against Iraq should have been aimed instead at Iran.

But some analysts see the change as related to the US presidential election. “This whole dynamic is tied up with [US] domestic politics...and not about the MKO itself, which is not really a major threat to Iran anymore,” says Mohamed Hadi Semati, a political scientist from Tehran University now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington.

“The neocons were losing ground, and this new Iran bashing is seen by them as an opportunity to drum up the theme of terror and the possibility of a collision with Iran - therefore,

you need a very decisive leader in the White House,” says Mr. Semati. “At the same time, Iran is giving a lot of ammunition to [Bush administration hawks on Iran].”

The Mujahideen is a cultish Marxist group that was ordered to leave Iraq last December by the US-appointed Iraqi leadership, which decried the “black history of this terrorist organization.” The expulsion was never carried out.

A website of the National Council of Resistance of Iran - the MKO’s political wing - on Sunday quoted its exiled leader Maryam Rajavi as saying the US decision was a “triumph for the Iranian Resistance and the Iranian people.”

The MKO, which would like to topple the Islamic regime in Tehran, says they would establish a more democratic, secular government.

The MKO is not known to have conducted any anti-US attacks, according to the US State Department, since assassinating several Americans in the 1970s.

While hosted by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, MKO militants stood shoulder to shoulder with their hosts during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s - a choice that permanently damaged their standing among most Iranians.

In Iraq itself, the MKO played important roles in the violent suppression of Kurdish and Shiite uprisings in 1991 and 1999 - actions that still grate with Iraq’s new leadership.

US forces bombed MKO camps during the Iraq invasion, then made a cease-fire deal. Last August, the US forced the MKO to close its offices in Washington.

The State Department says it does not plan take the MKO off its terrorism list. But a July 21 memo from Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, the US deputy commander in Iraq, told the MKO the decision “sends a strong signal and is a powerful first step on the road to your final individual disposition,” according to a copy quoted by The New York Times.

Militants in the camp signed a statement renouncing violence and terrorism. In the memo, General Miller said he was “writ-



ing to congratulate each individual living in Camp Ashraf” of their status.

Tehran, which has demanded either the prosecution of MKO members or their handover to Iran, responded angrily.

“We already knew that America was not serious in fighting terrorism,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said on Tuesday, adding that the US had now created a new category of “good terrorists.” “The American resort to the Geneva Conventions to support the terrorist hypocrites [MKO] is naive and unacceptable.”

The changing status of the MKO is little surprise to some experts.

“The [terrorism] designation process is often hijacked for political purposes, and may shift with the wind,” says Magnus Ranstorp, head of the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at St. Andrews University in Scotland.

“Your enemy’s enemy is your friend,” says Mr. Ranstorp. “And certainly since the Iraq conflict, the MKO has gravitated toward a more serious category, because of political expediency.”

That expediency appears to be part of a growing cascade of anti-Iran sentiment in the US that some say could eventually lead to military action. Among the signals: The Sept. 11 Commission report found that perhaps half of the 9/11 hijackers passed through Iran without having their passports stamped, though they may have crossed without official knowledge.

Some US and Iraqi officials - facing continued bloodshed and chaos in Iraq - accuse Iran of intervening to undermine the US occupation and the new “sovereign” Iraqi leadership.

Questions remain about the true intentions of Iran’s nuclear power effort, which the US accuses of being a front for a weapons program. Several senior Al Qaeda members remain - in custody, according to Iranian officials - in Iran.

And Europeans - once supportive of constructive engagement with Iran - have been taken aback by Iranian waffling on nuclear inspections, the rejection of thousands of candidates from



elections last February, and the spectacle of British sailors arrested last month.

In Washington earlier this month, Republican senators introduced the “Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2004,” a \$10 million measure to support pro-democracy groups and broadcasting. Tehran responded that “those who draft such plans lag behind the times, they live in their daydreams.”

In a recent Council on Foreign Relations report, several Iran experts have called for a limited re-engagement with Iran. They say that lack of any official contact with Iran for 25 years has harmed US interests.

But British historian Ansari says, “At the moment, I would lay more blame on the Iranians, because they are in a position of strength...and should now seize the initiative and make bold and constructive suggestions.” He adds, “they’re not doing anything.... they are miscalculating.”

Meanwhile, the MKO may have its own model to follow, and use its “protected” status as a springboard. “They are trying desperately to set themselves up as Iran’s equivalent of the Iraqi National Congress,” says Ansari, referring to the Iraqi opposition group led by former Pentagon favorite Ahmed Chalabi. “The Iranians will be aware that the Americans are trying to keep them as a potential INC.”



The New York Times

THE REACH OF WAR: PEOPLE'S MUJAHEDDEEN; U.S. Sees No Basis to Prosecute Iranian Opposition 'Terror' Group Being Held in Iraq

MEK
Uncovered

120

July 2004

A 16-month review by the United States has found no basis to charge members of an Iranian opposition group in Iraq with violations of American law, though the group is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States government, according to senior American officials.

The case of the group, the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, or Mujahedeen Khalq, whose camp was bombed by the United States military in April 2003, has been watched closely as an important test of the Bush administration's policy toward terrorism and toward Iran.

About 3,800 members of the group are being held in de facto American custody in Camp Ashraf, about 60 miles northeast of Baghdad. The group remains on the United States terrorist list, though it is not known to have directed any terrorist acts toward the United States for 25 years. But it does stage attacks against Iran, which has demanded that the Iraqi government



either prosecute its members or deport them to Iran.

But senior American officials said extensive interviews by officials of the State Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation had not come up with any basis to bring charges against any members of the group. In a July 21 memorandum, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey D. Miller, the deputy commanding general in Iraq, said its members had been designated “protected persons” by the United States military, providing them new rights. The American approach appears to reflect the limits of the government’s counterterrorism policy. In the case of the People’s Mujahedeen, the United States does not appear to have evidence to charge individual members of the group with acts of terrorism, but it also appears unwilling to surrender its members to their enemy, Iran.

Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which governs treatment of civilians in wartime, “protected persons” are those who fall under the control of an occupying power or a country involved in the conflict. Among the most significant rights they are granted are protection against collective punishment and against expulsion.

The formal American determination came after members of the group signed an agreement rejecting violence and terrorism, General Miller said in his July 21 letter, addressed to the “people of Ashraf.” That agreement “sends a strong signal and



is a powerful first step on the road to your final individual disposition,” the general’s letter said, according to a copy that was made available to The New York Times.

The State Department said Monday that the determination of the status of the group in Iraq did not affect its designation as a terrorist organization. The 3,800 members at Camp Ashraf are still being vetted to determine whether any took part in terrorist activities, said Adam Ereli, the department’s deputy spokesman.

But in the memorandum, General Miller struck a warm tone, saying he was “writing to congratulate each individual living in Camp Ashraf” on their status. Senior American officials said it that was still possible that some members of the group might be charged with crimes in European countries, but that they did not expect any of them to be charged in American courts. “A member of a terrorist organization is not necessarily a terrorist,” a senior American official said. “To take action against somebody, you have to demonstrate that they have done something.”

Muhammad Mohaddessin, a senior official of the People’s Mujahedeen, said in a telephone interview from Paris on Monday that the absence of American charges against members of the group, after months in which they have been held, should raise questions about the organization’s terrorist designation.

“I think the fact of the matter is that there is no reason for keeping the Mujahedeen on the terrorism list at all,” Mr. Mohaddessin said, “because if these thousands of people who are in Iraq are not terrorists -- when they all have been screened, and no terrorism link has been found -- then really there is no basis whatsoever for accusing the Mujahedeen of being a terrorist organization.”

The American military has kept the members confined to their camp since April 2003, when the organization signed an agreement with United States commanders. Their designation as “protected persons” reflects a final determination that they

were not involved in acts of belligerence against the American military during the war, American officials said.

The designation would make it all but impossible for members of the group to be extradited to Iran, senior American officials said. In December, the interim Iraqi government ordered that members of the group be expelled, but the move was opposed by the United States, and the directive was never carried out. Some opponents of Iran, including dozens of members of Congress, have argued that the People's Mujahedeen serves as an effective source of pressure on the Iranian government and should be rewarded, not punished, by the United States. Nevertheless, Mr. Ereli, the State Department spokesman, said the group "continues to be a designated foreign terrorist organization," a status that was imposed by the Clinton administration.

He said that "we will continue to treat individuals who can be determined to have been involved in terrorist incidents consistent with the laws that apply." But privately, senior American officials noted that it has been more than 25 years since members of the People's Mujahedeen were last believed to have been involved in attacks against the United States, and that most of its recent violent acts were directed at Iran.

In Iran, a government spokesman, Abdollah Ramazanzadeh, said any American move to grant the People's Mujahedeen protected status would undermine the United States' claims to be fighting terrorist groups. "I hope those who claim they are combating terrorism prove the truth and confront the ones who have committed extensive crimes against the Iranian nation," he said.

A senior American official said the United States opposed Iran's request that members of the group be handed over for trial because "we have real questions about the fairness and transparency of justice" there.

Until the American invasion of Iraq last year, the People's Mujahedeen maintained armed camps near the Iranian border

that included tanks, artillery and other modern weapons. The group had operated inside Iraq since the late 1980's with the support of the Iraqi government.

The American bombing raids on the camps represented the most aggressive approach by the United States in the handling of the group. It was followed by a gentler approach, including prolonged cease-fire negotiations and a cordial relationship between the group and the American military police units that have guarded the camp, preventing members from leaving except under American military escort.



Terror Watch: Shades of Gray

October 2004

The Duelfer Report alleges that Saddam gave funds to a listed terror group. But the claim does little to advance the White House case for war.

The new report by chief U.S. weapons inspector Charles Duelfer contains evidence that Saddam Hussein allegedly used the United Nations-managed Oil-for-Food program to provide millions of dollars in subsidies to a group the U.S. State Department has branded a foreign terrorist organization.

But so far, the Bush administration has made little of Duelfer's surprise discovery which, on its face, would seem to strengthen White House claims that Saddam's regime had longstanding ties to terrorism.

In fact, U.S. officials concede, the Duelfer finding does little to advance the administration's case and could even be politically awkward. The State Department designated terrorist group in question, is the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK)--an Iranian opposition group that was long backed by Saddam's regime as a counterweight to the Tehran government. Not only does the MEK have no connection either to September 11 or Al Qaeda, in the past, it has had strong support from members of Congress--including leading Republicans in both chambers and a current Bush cabinet member, Attorney General John Ashcroft.

MEK
Uncovered

125



Duelfer's evidence linking the MEK to the burgeoning Oil-for-Food scandal comes from 13 secret lists that were maintained by Iraqi oil officials of favored recipients for vouchers for the sale of oil overseas. Duelfer's report says the Iraqi government maintained a rigorous high-level process for nominating foreign companies or individuals who were to be awarded the Oil-for-Food vouchers and that Saddam himself personally signed off on every name that was put (or struck off) the list. The Oil Allocation Recipient List published in Duelfer's report says that, among Saddam's many beneficiaries, was the MEK (spelled in the report as Mojahedie Khalq, based apparently on how it appeared in the Iraqi documents). The list indicates the MEK received a series of oil allocations totaling more than 38 million barrels over a four-year period prior to the U.S. invasion. That was large enough to theoretically enable the group to collect more than \$16 million in profits; it could receive those proceeds by doing little more than reselling Iraqi oil to middlemen (who could then resell it to real oil companies in Western countries like the United States). According to the list, people using the MEK's oil vouchers actually collected (or "lifted," in oil-industry jargon) around 27 million barrels of Iraqi oil during the four years before the U.S. invasion. By cashing in on the vouchers, the MEK could have generated profits of at least \$11.2 million, Duelfer's figures suggest. One U.S. official said the vouchers were most likely

Saddam's way of rewarding the MEK for the support it provided his regime. The list also says that the MEK apparently used two British companies or business entities to handle the oil deals. Initial efforts to trace the companies named in the report have so far proved unsuccessful.

In a telephone interview from Paris, Shahin Gobadi, chief press spokesman for the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the MEK's political arm, vehemently denied the charge that the group benefited under the Oil-for-Food program. "This is an absolute lie," he told NEWSWEEK, adding that he believed the list with the group's name was a "fabrication" by Iranian intelligence. "This is part of a smear campaign by the [Iranian] mullah's intelligence agents."

The new documents relating to the MEK underscore the awkward problems the group has long presented for U.S. officials. For the past seven years, the State Department has labeled the MEK a terrorist organization, depicting it as a cultlike organization that "mixes Marxism and Islam." The department's most recent annual "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report says the group has been implicated in repeated bombings, mortar attacks and political assassinations inside Iran. "This group has a long, bloody history of committing terrorist acts and retains the capability to do so," a U.S. counterterrorism official said today when asked about the MEK.

Saddam is known to have supported the group for years as a potential subversive force against the theocratic mullahs in Tehran. Just last year, the U.S. Treasury Department shut down the operations of an affiliated group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, on the grounds that it was serving as the political front--with an office at the National Press Building in Washington, D.C.--for the MEK.

But at the same time, the MEK has been championed for years by leading members of Congress who, like its spokesman, have described it as a legitimate resistance movement opposing a tyrannical government run by religious fanatics. As recently as



four years ago, more than 200 members of Congress signed statements endorsing the National Council's cause (including prominent Florida Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Missouri GOP Sen. Kit Bond.)

When Mahnaz Samadi, one of the group's spokeswomen, was detained by U.S. immigration authorities in early 2000 on grounds that she did not disclose her past "terrorist" ties, including her role as a "military commander" for the MEK, John Ashcroft, then a senator, wrote a letter of "concern" to Attorney General Janet Reno. As first reported by NEWSWEEK in September 2002, Ashcroft described Samadi as a "highly regarded human-rights activist" and a "powerful voice for democracy." (A spokeswoman for Ashcroft at the time said he was "supporting democracy and freedom in Iran" and that he did not "knowingly" intend to endorse a member of any terrorist organization.)

The question of how to view the MEK has intensified in the wake of the war in Iraq. After the invasion, U.S. troops rounded up thousands of MEK militants, viewing them at first as terrorists who had been aligned with Saddam. But the Bush administration was divided over what to do with them. Some Pentagon hard-liners and neoconservative political activists pushed last year to provide the group with secret U.S. backing as part of a broader covert campaign to destabilize the mullahs' regime in Tehran.

But Bush ultimately rejected that move on the grounds that it would send mixed messages in the war on terror, one administration official said. In the meantime, administration moderates, including officials at the State Department, argued, by contrast, that not only should MEK militants in Iraq be rounded up and disarmed, but that the US should consider some sort of deal with Tehran whereby MEK fighters in Iraq would be turned over to Iranian authorities. In exchange, State Department officials contended, Iranian authorities might be persuaded to deport or extradite Al Qaeda leaders like Osama

bin Laden's son Saad and Al Qaeda planner Saif Al-Adel, who are believed to be under house arrest in Iran. With U.S.-Iranian tensions running high at the moment, however, the possibility of such a bargain now seems unlikely.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration has been methodically reviewing the status of about 3,800 MEK militants at Camp Ashraf, about 60 miles northeast of Baghdad. Last summer, The New York Times reported that U.S. authorities in Iraq had found no basis to charge any of them with violations of American law, prompting MEK supporters say that that finding alone was ample evidence that the group should be stricken from the State Department terror list. "There is a contradiction here," Gobadi, the National Council spokesman in Paris, said today. "If none of its members have any connection to terrorism, how can it be described as a terrorist organization?"

But a U.S. official told NEWSWEEK that more recent reporting from Camp Ashraf indicates that about 40 MEK members have been identified as possible candidates for prosecution. Most likely, the official said, the prosecutions would take place in Iraq, where MEK members might be charged with crimes against humanity or war crimes associated with assistance they provided Saddam's regime--including acting as a paramilitary force to suppress uprisings by the Shia. Another handful, perhaps four to six, might be brought to the United States for prosecution for terrorist-related acts or other crimes, the official said.





2005

US government supports Iranian terrorists when it suits them

February 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) - One-time members of a terrorist organization are hiding in the United States - in plain sight.

The organization's former U.S. representative freely walks the streets and has a contract with Fox News as a foreign affairs analyst. Lawmakers write letters on the group's behalf. And former intelligence officials say the group maintains contacts in defense circles, although the Pentagon denies it.

A cult to some and freedom fighters to others, the National Council of Resistance of Iran and its affiliate groups typify the gray areas in the war on terror. While they've been designated foreign terrorist organizations by the State Department, the groups' one-time members still maneuver between the restrictions aimed at disabling them.

The former U.S. representative for the council, Alireza Jafarzadeh, says the U.S. government listed his organization as terrorists to appease moderate elements within the Iranian government. He's hoping the Bush administration will lift the terrorist designation.

"I see increasingly more voices being raised against this designation in different parts within the administration and outside the administration," said Jafarzadeh, who notes that his group no longer exists in the United States but his free-speech rights



allow him to discuss policies it once advocated.

“The more serious people get about Iran, the more they are against the designation,” he said.

The mission of the National Council and its military wing - the Mujahedin-e-Khalq or MEK - is to overthrow the Iranian regime, an aim increasingly in line with the Bush administration. Yet the administration has stopped short of calling for regime change.

In last month’s State of the Union speech, President Bush called Iran “the world’s primary state sponsor of terror.” In Europe this week, he maintained the pressure, calling suggestions that the United States is preparing to attack Iran “simply ridiculous,” but quickly adding, “having said that, all options are on the table.”

Yet the MEK is far from a U.S. ally.

As soon as the State Department created a list of terror organizations in 1997, it named the MEK, putting it in a club that includes al-Qaida and barring anyone in the United States from providing material support. By 1999, the department designated the MEK’s political arm, the National Council of Resistance, and related affiliates.

The State Department says the MEK groups were funded by Saddam Hussein, supported the seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979 and are responsible for the deaths of Americans in the 1970s.

Despite the listing, the council and a related offshoot continued to file foreign agent registration documents with the Justice Department, cataloging meetings with dozens of members of Congress, media interviews, rallies and speeches.

It saw successes. In 2002, 150 members of Congress wrote a letter to the State Department advocating the organization be removed from the terror list.

But 2003 was a rocky year. After Saddam was toppled, the administration struggled with how to handle MEK fighters detained at training camps in eastern Iraq. They were eventually

disarmed, but remain in limbo today at the camps.

In August of that year, the State and Treasury departments also froze the council's assets and shut down their Washington offices, blocks from the White House.

A State Department official said U.S. policy toward the MEK and its affiliates has not changed. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the group is still considered a threat because of its history of launching terrorist attacks.

Some, including Kenneth Katzman, a Middle East specialist at the Congressional Research Service, say they don't consider the group to be the most dangerous to U.S. interests. "I don't see evidence that they purposely target civilians," said Katzman, who provides analysis to lawmakers.

But others find the sometimes soft approach to the MEK alarming. Further complicating the issue, the report from the top U.S. weapons inspector in Iraq said the group received oil as part of the scandal-tainted oil-for-food program, earning it millions of dollars in profits.

The MEK calls the appearance of its name in seized documents a smear campaign.

As U.S. focus on Iran increases, some wonder whether the MEK will play a role. A former senior intelligence official said some in the Pentagon see the MEK as a potential ally in their efforts against the Iranian regime.

"One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

But a defense official denied contacts with the MEK are occurring. Michael Rubin, who used to handle Iran issues at the Pentagon, said those he knew there hated the group.

"Even if they are not terrorists, although I believe they are, any group that tells its members who to marry and when to divorce, the United States should not be doing business with. They are very cult-like," Rubin said.

Rubin notes that, while council officials revealed the existence of two secret Iranian nuclear sites in 2002, they nevertheless

have an inconsistent intelligence record, often getting information “dead wrong.”

Yet the council’s former U.S. representative, Jafarzadeh, highlights the intelligence successes as evidence that the United States should support the Iranian opposition and advocate a policy of regime change in Iran.

“There is a lot of serious searching, to find the best options in dealing with Iran,” he said. “I can sense it in different government agencies. I can sense it among the think tanks. I sense it among the U.S. Congress.”





Iran's 'terrorists' helped disclose nuke program

April 2005

TEHRAN, Iran — Tall and handsome, Arash Sametipour could be living a very different life in Northern Virginia if he hadn't joined the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK).

Sametipour, 29, of Burke, Va., says he became involved in the Iranian opposition group in the late 1990s when he developed a crush on one of its members. In love and convinced that the group was working for the good of Iran, he agreed to go to an MEK base in Iraq for military training. In 2000, he says, he was selected to go to Iran to assassinate a former police chief.

The murder attempt failed and Sametipour tried to commit suicide by swallowing cyanide. But the poison had lost its potency so he detonated a grenade, blowing off his right hand. Iranian authorities jailed him for four years. One of six former MEK members produced by the Iranian government to talk to a reporter here, he acknowledges that his criticism of the MEK serves the Islamic government but says his main motivation is

MEK
Uncovered

135



to stop others from joining the group.

“I had a green card, and in a few years I could have had my U.S. citizenship,” he says. “I ruined my life, but I don’t want others to do so.” Sametipour’s American brother, Asef, backed up the description of how he joined the MEK.

Iran’s government produced Sametipour to underscore its intense frustration with a group that has long been a major source of friction between the Bush administration and the ruling clerics here. The MEK is the largest known organization working to overthrow Iran’s theocratic regime, and Iranian officials have demanded the United States rein it in.

The U.S. posture has been ambiguous. The MEK’s violent habits — it has a history of bombings and assassinations, including the murder of six Americans — earned it a spot on the State Department list of terrorist groups in 1997. But the group gained publicity three years ago by exposing a secret Iranian nuclear program, alerting the public to the extent of Iran’s apparent efforts to build a bomb. President Bush alluded to this in a March 16 news conference, when he said that the nuclear program had been revealed by a “dissident” group.

Meanwhile, nearly 4,000 members of the group are in a military camp in Iraq, Camp Ashraf, 60 miles north of Baghdad. The regime of Saddam Hussein gave them refuge before the war. Since Saddam’s ouster, U.S. forces have prevented MEK members from attacking Iran but do not know what to do with them.

Iranian officials, including former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, want Camp Ashraf dismantled, the inhabitants sent to Iran and MEK leaders, some of whom are in Europe, tried there or in Iran. Nearly 300 MEK members have already returned to Iran from Iraq.

“I would expect that you forward a question to President Bush,” Rafsanjani said in an interview earlier this year. “Why terrorists who have committed crimes in Iran are not returned here? Worse yet, they are permitted to enter your Congress, the

U.N., and have lobbying and political activities.”

Supporters in the U.S.

The MEK wants its people in Iraq to regain their freedom of movement. “The Iranian regime is more afraid of the Mujahedin than before because the Iranian regime is in a very shaky situation,” says Mohammed Mohadessin, a senior official with the MEK’s political wing, the National Council of Resistance, based outside Paris.

Beyond Iraq, the group has an unknown number of adherents in Europe and the United States, and supporters on Capitol Hill and in Washington foreign policy circles. Several hundred sympathizers attended a convention in Washington on Thursday.

“The enemy of my enemy is my friend,” said terrorism expert Neil Livingstone at a news conference in Washington in February where he and several retired U.S. diplomats and military men unveiled a new organization, the Iran Policy Committee, whose goal is to overthrow the Iranian government by supporting Iranian opposition groups.

Another committee member, Ray Tanter, a Middle East expert on the National Security Council under President Reagan, said the United States should use the MEK to try to destabilize Iran’s government before it acquires nuclear weapons.

It seems highly unlikely that the group has the capability to bring down the Iranian government. The main indication that it still poses any threat is the amount of attention Iranian officials give to it.

Army Maj. Kreg Schnell, an intelligence officer in the Iraqi province that includes Camp Ashraf, said the CIA last year detained and questioned a man who appeared to be working for the Iranians and trying to apprehend MEK members. He was looking to see if it was possible “to snatch some of them (MEK) back as an example” to others, Schnell said. Last August, Schnell said, an Iraqi army patrol was approached by two Iraqis who said they were bounty hunting for members,



offering \$400 a head.

Founded in 1965, the MEK blended nationalism, Marxism and Islam in a potent mix that attracted thousands of students from traditional Shiite Muslim families. Aided by training from the Palestine Liberation Organization, the group began attacks on officials of the U.S.-backed shah. The group also killed six Americans in Iran during the 1970s — three military officers and three contractors involved in selling weapons to the shah. The MEK took part in the 1979 revolution that overthrew the shah and supported the seizure of U.S. Embassy hostages. But it broke with revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1980 when he barred the MEK's leader, Massoud Rajavi, from participating in presidential elections.

Rajavi escaped, first to Paris and later to Iraq. The group once had strong support in Iran, but lost much of it by siding with Iraq during the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran war, which killed or injured 750,000 Iranians. Of more than 50 people interviewed about the MEK during a recent visit to Iran, only one had anything positive to say about it.

Aspects of a cult

Former members and friends of members of the group describe the organization, which insists its members be celibate, as a cult. "They take your individuality and beliefs and tell you that all the love you have must go to the leadership," Sametipour says. "That's how they make terrorists."

Ronak Dashti, 20, who was also introduced to a reporter by the Iranian government, said she was abducted in Turkey by MEK members who took her to Iraq. There, she says, she had to sign documents saying she had no right to contact her family and should not think about marriage. She and three other defectors described communal living, hours of menial work and nightly self-criticism sessions.

Mohadessin denies that anyone is forced to join or remain in the MEK. He points to the group's success in revealing Iranian nuclear installations as evidence that it still has a large net-

work of supporters within the country.

“The message you (the United States) give is that you prefer the current (Iranian) regime” when you keep the MEK on the terrorism list, Mohadessin says.



Iran: Exiled Armed Group Abuses Dissident Members; Opposition Group Seeks Recognition and Support in Western Capitals

May 2005

An armed Iranian opposition group in exile, the Mojahedin Khalq Organization, has subjected dissident members to torture and prolonged solitary confinement, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The 28-page report, “No Exit: Human Rights Abuses Inside the MKO Camps,” details how dissident members of the shadowy Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) were tortured, beaten and held in solitary confinement for years at military camps in Iraq after they criticized the group’s policies and undemocratic practices, or indicated that they planned to leave the organization. The report is based on the direct testimonies of a dozen former MKO members, including five who were turned over to Iraqi security forces and held in Abu Ghraib prison under Saddam Hussein’s government.

“Members who try to leave the MKO pay a very heavy price,” said Joe Stork, Washington director of Human Rights Watch’s Middle East and North Africa division. “These testimonies paint a grim picture of what happened to members who criticized the group’s leaders.”

One former high-ranking MKO member, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, was held in solitary confinement for eight-and-a-half years, from September 1992 to January 2001. The MKO then turned him over to Iraqi authorities. He was held in Abu Ghraib

MEK
Uncovered

140



prison until 2002, when he was forcibly repatriated to Iran. The witnesses also reported two cases of deaths under interrogation by MKO operatives.

In 1997, the U.S. government classified the MKO as a “foreign terrorist organization.” The European Union included the MKO in its list of “terrorist and terrorist organizations” in 2002.

Meanwhile the MKO’s political wing, the National Council of Resistance, which is based in France, continues to lobby the U.S. government and EU countries to remove this designation and lift the restrictions that have ensued. From Washington to Brussels, the group is presenting itself as a “democratic alternative” to Iran’s government. The MKO’s political wing has presented itself as the Iranian “government in exile” and has called on the international community for recognition.

After the French government in 2003 arrested MKO co-leader Maryam Rajavi on suspicion of plotting terrorist activity on French soil, 10 MKO members and sympathizers protested by setting themselves on fire in Paris, London and other European cities. Two of them died. In January, 40 members of parliaments across Europe, as well as the European Parliament, publicly called for the removal of MKO’s terrorist designation.

On April 14, several members of the U.S. Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, attended the National Convention for a Democratic, Secular Republic in Iran, an event that an





MKO-backed organization held in Washington. Among other members of Congress, Rep. Tom Tancredo (R., Colo.) has called for removal of the MKO from the State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations. On February 10, a think-tank co-chaired by retired U.S. military officers, the Iran Policy Committee, called for the removal of the designation and for the U.S. government to actively support the group against the Iranian government.

“The Iranian government has a dreadful record on human rights,” said Stork. “But it would be a huge mistake to promote an opposition group that is responsible for serious human rights abuses.”

The MKO was founded in 1965 as an Islamic urban guerrilla group to challenge the shah’s government. In 1981, two years after the Iranian revolution, the anti-clerical group went underground after trying to incite an armed uprising against Ayatollah Khomeini. After exile in France, the group’s leaders relocated to Iraq in 1986.

During the Iran-Iraq war, MKO forces regularly attacked Iranian troops along the border and made several incursions into Iran. After the war ended in 1988, Iranian courts issued summary rulings to execute thousands of political prisoners, including many MKO members.

The fall of Saddam Hussein’s government in April 2003 put an end to Iraqi financial and logistical support for the MKO. After the U.S.-led invasion, the U.S. military disarmed MKO forces operating in Iraq. In July, the U.S. designated them as “protected persons” under the Geneva Conventions and confines more than 3,000 of them in their main military camp north of Baghdad.

No Exit

May 2005

The Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) is an armed Iranian opposition group that was formed in 1965. An urban guerrilla group fighting against the government of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, it was an active participant in the anti-monarchy struggle that resulted in the 1979 Iranian revolution.¹

After the revolution, the MKO expanded its organizational infrastructure and recruited many new members. However it was excluded from participating in power sharing arrangements, and the new revolutionary government under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini forced it underground after it instigated an armed uprising against the government in June 1981. The majority of its top cadres went into exile in France. In France, the MKO continued its active opposition to Iran's government. In 1986, under pressure from the French authorities, the MKO relocated to Iraq. There it established a number of military camps under the banner of the National Liberation Army and maintained an armed presence inside Iraq until the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003.

During the Iran-Iraq war, the MKO fighters made regular incursions into Iranian territory and fought against Iranian government forces. After the end of Iran-Iraq war, the group's armed activities decreased substantially as Saddam Hussein's government curtailed the MKO's ability to launch attacks inside

MEK
Uncovered

143



Iranian territory.

The fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003 put an end to Iraqi financial and logistical support of the MKO. The MKO fighters remained neutral during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. After the occupation of Iraq, the U.S. military disarmed the MKO fighters and confined them inside their main camp known as Camp Ashraf.² U.S. military sources told Human Rights Watch that as of March 10, 2005, there were 3,534 MKO members inside Camp Ashraf.³

Some MKO fighters took advantage of an amnesty offer by the Iranian government. Since October 2004, 273 MKO members have returned to Iran.⁴ The U.S. military has recognized the MKO fighters in Iraq as Protected Persons under the Geneva Conventions.⁵ Their fate remains uncertain; the Iraqi government and the U.S. military appear not to have reached a decision regarding their future.

During Saddam Hussein's last year in power, some Iranians held in Abu Ghraib prison were repatriated to Iran in exchange for Iraqi prisoners of war (POWs). These were dissident members of the MKO who had been sent by the organization for "safekeeping" in Abu Ghraib.⁶ The release of these prisoners in 2002-2003 provided a direct window into conditions inside the MKO camps that was previously inaccessible to the outside world.

Human Rights Watch interviewed five of these former MKO members who were held in Abu Ghraib prison. Their testimonies, together with testimonies collected from seven other former MKO members, paint a grim picture of how the organization treated its members, particularly those who held dissenting opinions or expressed an intent to leave the organization.

The former MKO members reported abuses ranging from detention and persecution of ordinary members wishing to leave the organization, to lengthy solitary confinements, severe beat-

ings, and torture of dissident members. The MKO held political dissidents in its internal prisons during the 1990s and later turned over many of them to Iraqi authorities, who held them in Abu Ghraib. In one case, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani was held in solitary confinement for eight-and-a-half years inside the MKO camps, from September 1992 to January 2001.

The witnesses reported two cases of deaths under interrogation. Three dissident members—Abbas Sadeghinejad, Ali Ghashghavi, and Alireza Mir Asgari—witnessed the death of a fellow dissident, Parviz Ahmadi, inside their prison cell in Camp Ashraf. Abbas Sadeghinejad told Human Rights Watch that he also witnessed the death of another prisoner, Ghorbanali Torabi, after Torabi was returned from an interrogation session to a prison cell that he shared with Sadeghinejad.

The MKO's leadership consists of the husband and wife team of Masoud and Maryam Rajavi. Their marriage in 1985 was hailed by the organization as the beginning of a permanent "ideological revolution."⁷ Various phases of this "revolution" include: divorce by decree of married couples, regular writings of self-criticism reports, renunciation of sexuality, and absolute mental and physical dedication to the leadership.⁸ The level of devotion expected of members was in stark display in 2003 when the French police arrested Maryam Rajavi in Paris. In protest, ten MKO members and sympathizers set themselves on fire in various European cities; two of them subsequently died.⁹ Former members cite the implementation of the "ideological revolution" as a major source of the psychological and physical abuses committed against the group's members.

At present, the MKO is listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department and several European governments. The MKO's leadership is engaged in an extensive campaign aimed at winning support from Western politicians in order to have the designation of a terrorist organization removed.¹⁰

Methodology





Human Rights Watch interviewed by telephone twelve former members of the MKO living in Europe. These witnesses provided credible claims that they were subjected to imprisonment as well as physical and psychological abuses because they had either expressed criticism of the MKO's policies or had requested to leave the organization's military camps.

Each witness was interviewed separately several times between February and May 2005. All witnesses are currently living in Europe. More than twelve hours of testimonies were collected. All interviews were conducted in Farsi. Each witness provided independent accounts of their experience inside the MKO camps, and their testimonies corroborated other evidence collected by Human Rights Watch. A number of witnesses who were detained and tortured inside the MKO camps named Hassan Ezati as one of their interrogators. Hassan Ezati's son, Yasser Ezati, also interviewed for this report, confirmed his father's identity as a MKO interrogator.

Of the twelve former MKO members interviewed for this report, eight witnesses¹¹ left Iraq between 2002 and 2004. The remaining four witnesses¹² left Iraq in the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1991. In addition to being held in internal MKO prisons, five of the witnesses¹³ were imprisoned in Abu Ghraib prison prior to their release.

[1] For a comprehensive history of the organization, see Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[2] Camp Ashraf is located near the city of al-Khalis, north of Baghdad.

[3] Human Rights Watch e-mail interview with U.S. military officials, March 10, 2005.

[4] According to U.S. military sources, twenty-eight members were repatriated in December 2004, thirteen in January 2005, 100 on March 3, 2005, and 132 on March 9, 2005.

[5] "US grants protection for anti-Tehran group in Iraq," Reu-

ters, 26 July, 2004.

[6] Former MKO members who were held in Abu Ghraib prison told Human Rights Watch that their cell doors bore a plaque with “Mojahedin Safekeeping” [Amanat-e Mojahedin] written on it.

[7] Mojahed, No. 241, April 4, 1985. Mojahed is the official publication of the MKO, and at the time it appeared weekly.

[8] See Masoud Banisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel* (London: Saqi Books, 2004). On self-criticism sessions, see pp. 210-230; on decreeing of divorce, see pgs. 307-311; on renunciation of sexuality, see pages 313-340. Immediately following Masoud and Maryam Rajavi’s marriage, the MKO military command issued a directive stating: “In order to carry out your organizational duties under the present circumstances there is an urgent need to strengthen and deepen this ideological revolution. You must pay the necessary price by allocating sufficient time and resources for absorbing related teachings...” Mojahed, No. 242, April 12, 1985. The Social Division of MKO also issued a directive to the members stating: “To understand this great revolution ...is to understand and gain a deep insight into the greatness of our new leadership, meaning leadership of Masoud and Maryam. It is to believe in them as well as to show ideological and revolutionary obedience of them.” Mojahed, No. 242, April 12, 1985.

[9] Arifa Akbar, “Human torches mark protest; 10 Iranian exiles become fireballs, two die martyrs,” *The Independent*, July 2, 2003.

[10] Maryam Rajavi, “Empower Iran’s opposition forces checking the Mullahs,” *International Herald Tribune*, January 28, 2005. Katherine Shrader, “Iranian Group Seeks Legitimacy in U.S.,” *Associated Press*, February 24, 2005.

[11] Farhad Javaheri-Yar, Ali Ghashghavi, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, and Akbar Akbari were repatriated by Iraqi officials to Iran on January 21, 2002. Amir Mowaseghi was repa-



triated on March 18, 2003. Alireza Mir Asgari was abandoned along the Iran-Iraq border in February 2003. Yasser Ezati left Iraq in June 2004. Abbas Sadeghinejad escaped the MKO military camp on June 20, 2002.

[12] Mohammad Reza Eskandari, Tahereh Eskandari, Habib Khorrami, and Karim Haqi.

[13] Farhad Javaheri-Yar, Ali Ghashghavi, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, Akbar Akbari, and Amir Mowaseghi were imprisoned in Abu Ghraib.





FINANCIAL
TIMES

Iran opposition group seeks US legitimacy

October 2005

Even by the standards of Washington politics it was an unusual spectacle - the veiled leader of a Middle East group banned in the US as a terrorist organisation delivering a speech by live video-link to applauding members of Congress inside the Capitol itself.

But since the organisation is dedicated to the overthrow of Iran's theocracy, the People's Mujahideen Organisation and its political co-leader, Maryam Rajavi, are given leeway in the US as they campaign to have the "terrorist" tag removed and to become eligible for US funding of Iranian opposition groups. In suit and matching headscarf, Mrs Rajavi spoke from France. She thanked six congressmen by name for their support, praised President George W. Bush and called for an end to western "appeasement" of the "engine of Islamic fundamentalism".

The audience - a mix of Iranian-Americans, politicians and staffers filling a conference room in the Capitol last Thursday - gave her a standing ovation. Sheila Jackson Lee, a Democrat congresswoman from Texas, spoke warmly of "sister Maryam". Known by its acronyms MKO and MEK, the group led by Mrs Rajavi and her husband Massoud, was outlawed by the US for its killing of Americans before the 1979 Iranian revolution; alleged collaboration with Saddam Hussein's genocidal campaigns against Iraqi Kurds; and attacks on civilians inside Iran.

MEK
Uncovered

149



The MKO denies the charges of terrorism, saying it was banned by then-president Bill Clinton in an attempt to engage the Iranian government.

Despite its attraction to the US - and particularly to some Pentagon planners - as an armed force inside Iraq ready in opposition, analysts in Washington doubt the group will regain legitimacy.

Nonetheless, its lobbying reflects the ferment inside the Bush administration as it grapples with producing a coherent policy towards Iran, working out - in the words of one European diplomat - whether to “engage, isolate or disrupt”.

Stephen Hadley, national security adviser, commissioned 10 briefing papers exploring various options. A National Security Council meeting was cancelled this month after one of the papers, which proposed expanding diplomatic contacts with Iran, was leaked to the Wall Street Journal. Some officials suspect that someone senior wanted to sabotage the idea.

Diplomats and two US officials said the latest review was prompted by the conclusion reached by Condoleezza Rice, secretary of state, and others that an effective sanctions option did not exist, and that they had been misled by the predictions of neoconservatives who saw the Iranian regime ripe for overthrow by a restless populace.

Recent statements by Ms Rice point to an effort to broaden diplomatic contacts with Iran.

Diplomats also say there is a new effort to find a settlement, negotiated through European allies, to the standoff over Iran's nuclear programme. But officials say any such pragmatic tendencies would be tempered by the conviction that the Bush administration should do nothing that would be seen to confer legitimacy on the regime while actively supporting the democratic aspirations of Iranians.

Iranian-American sympathisers of the MKO, who are active donors to US politicians, remain hopeful their group will be de-listed.



With Friends Like These

November 2005

An Iranian group has killed American civilians, allied itself with Saddam Hussein, and holds a spot on the State Department's terrorist watch list. So why might it become America's newest friend in the Middle East? Hint: Tehran.

In August 2002, intelligence reports revealed secret nuclear facilities in the Iranian cities of Natanz and Arak. The revelation left officials in Tehran speechless, in large part because the evidence was not gathered by the United States or any of its allies. Rather, the courier of such sensitive intelligence was the Mujahideen e-Khalq (MEK), a decades-old Iranian dissident group. In most cases, dissident groups who could work so effectively within rogue states would be natural friends with Washington. But in the MEK's case, it's more complicated: The U.S. State Department lists the MEK as a terrorist organization.

There is no doubt the group has a dark and violent past. The MEK opposed Iran's shah in the 1970s, and during its militant opposition, killed U.S. military and civilian personnel in Iran and backed the 1979 U.S. Embassy takeover in Tehran. Though the MEK initially was supportive of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, it eventually opposed the clerical regime that came to power. In two 1981 attacks, the MEK killed the Iranian president, premier, chief justice, and 70 other Iranian officials. And with the support of Saddam Hussein, the MEK launched attacks on Iran beginning in 1987, during the brutal endgame

MEK
Uncovered

152



of the Iran-Iraq war, later claiming that they killed 40,000 of their countrymen during these campaigns.

Decades later, Iran is still a rogue state. But some say that its time to rethink the MEK. I say the enemy of my enemy is my friend, says Raymond Tanter, a former Middle East analyst on Reagans National Security Council, now Washingtons leading MEK booster. They have eyes and ears on the ground. And they can provide us with human intelligence that we just dont have.

That presence on the ground, and its clear opposition to Iran, is winning the MEK support in Washington. President Bush recently called the MEK a dissident group, a clear hat tip. Several U.S. legislators want the MEK removed from the terrorist list, which would allow it to raise money in the United States. MEK lawyers have challenged the groups terrorist status in court, so far without success. The Iran Freedom Support Act, a House bill clearly intended to help the group, was introduced in April by longtime MEK backer Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL). It remains tied up in committee. MEK supporters on Capitol Hill are likely waiting on the State Departments official revocation (or reaffirmation) of the groups terrorist status, expected in early October.

Retro Radicals

With a curious ideology somehow melding Marxism and Shiite





Islamism, the MEK is a relic of a different time a group of aging student activists who cling to their 1970s radicalism. Comparable American and European groups such as the Weather Underground and the Red Brigades faded away long ago, but the MEK has lived on in isolation. Despite its claims to be democratic, the group is actually a strict authoritarian commune, with frequent reports of beatings and torture of members who try to leave. Critics of the MEK don't hesitate to call it a cult, and even some supporters concede that the group is rather unusual. The group's leadership is a gynocracy, with women making up 30 percent of the fighting force and holding a disproportionately large share of military and political leadership positions. All members are subordinate to the president-elect, Maryam Rajavi and her husband Massoud. Maryam's face appears on T-shirts, signs, and pamphlets, and her slogans are repeated by followers with an eerie mantra-like insistence.

But the group's bizarre nature isn't the problem for gaining American backing. Rather, it's a more important question: Has the MEK really given up terrorism? The group has foresworn violence, outwardly at least, as it desperately tries to scrub off the terrorist label. The centerpiece of the MEK's new program is a peaceful Third Way to regime change, calling for a highly implausible referendum on a new Iranian government. Now that the group is angling for U.S. patronage, it has dropped the anti-American and overtly Marxist rhetoric from the group's early days, and instead talks of free markets, liberty, freedom, and democracy. The law says if they haven't engaged in terrorist activity for two years, and they don't have the means or intent to perform terrorist acts, they get off the list, argues Tanter, I say, follow the law.

For now, the Bush administration seems to be trying to have it both ways. At a 2004 House International Relations subcommittee hearing, John Bolton, now U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said that while the MEK is a terrorist organiza-

tion, he didnt think that it prohibited us from getting information from them.

During the MEKs long cooperation with Saddam Hussein, it assisted in the brutal suppression of the Kurds and Shiites, earning the enmity of both groups. So it came as no surprise when Iraqs new Shiite-dominated interim Governing Council issued a decree in 2003 (never enforced, by dint of U.S. inaction) saying that the MEK would be expelled from the country. The group got a temporary reprieve from the Iraqis, but it is under enormous pressure from official and unofficial groups, including the Shiite Badr Brigade, to leave Iraq as soon as possible, a large-scale relocation that will require American support and diplomatic muscle.

Meanwhile, the MEKs transformation into a tool of U.S. intelligence is fast becoming a fait accompli. U.S. forces have disarmed its military wing in Iraq and news reports suggest demoralized fighters are deserting their base at Camp Ashraf. According to Massoud Khodabandeh, a former MEK security officer who left the group in 1996 and recently testified against its leadership on trial on charges of terrorism in France, more than 300 members have fled[and] 1,000 disaffected members approached the U.S. Army and requested to be separated from the organization. Both the mujahideen who have sought protection in U.S. custody and the hard-line supporters still with the group clearly need something to do and the Pentagon is holding all the cards.

I'm not saying I always approve of the tactics that the group used in the past, cautioned Shirin Nariman, an anti-Tehran activist based in Virginia and a longtime MEK supporter. The whole world has changed, so of course it requires different strategies. And they dont require an army.*Former member Khodabandeh is blunter: They have this dilemma. On one hand they have [used] violence for 30 years. On the other hand they have to get some support from someone (in America or other

places) to survive after Saddam. He dismissed the peaceful rhetoric as tactical posturing by the group, masking its terrorist character.

Friends in Need

When the Iran-Iraq war ended, an MEK commander asked about the future of the group said, We have always adjusted tactics in our fighting. The form of fighting is secondary. Predictably, the group is retooling itself again, and according to some sources, moving its operations to a new frontier.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has granted permission for the MEK to operate from the Baluchistan province of Pakistan, which borders Iran. This decision suggests to some that there is a possibility that the CIA may be deploying the MEK in western Afghanistan as well, to the provinces of Herat and Farah, thus doubling the length of Iranian border open to infiltration. As with Pakistan, the MEK is familiar with that terrain, having infiltrated western Afghanistan in the early 1980s.

Asked what the MEK might be doing, Lt. Col. (Ret.) Rick Francona, a former Air Force intelligence specialist with experience in the Middle East, says: The primary focus will be the collection of intelligence, possibly even setting up infiltration and exfiltration routes and identifying agents in place inside Iran. Francona explains that MEK teams could work in conjunction with any of these activities: While U.S. technical intelligence sensor/electronic and visual are useful, it is always better to have a human source that can penetrate the facility, tell us what is going on inside the buildings, who is doing what, intentions, progress, and so on. A good spy is hard to beat.

But is MEK intelligence any good? Current and former U.S. officials have told Newsweek that they knew of the major revelations about Iran's nuclear program before the MEK made them public, and the group has a record of exaggerating intelligence or sometimes simply making things up. U.S. officials have learned to take MEK claims with very large grains of salt.

David Kay, the former intelligence official who spent years investigating Iraq's nuclear weapons program, expressed a balanced view: They're often wrong, but occasionally they give you something.

More alarming, however, is Khodabandeh's warning that the MEK has been heavily infiltrated by Iranian intelligence, and is of limited utility. However, he concedes, Having said that, I think it is the job of CIA officers to use the available forces on the ground. Khodabandeh also notes that the CIA might be able to clean the organization of Iranian infiltrators, restoring some of its usefulness as a covert ops force. An alternative method, suggests Francona, would involve culling small operating groups of trustworthy individuals from the MEK's ranks, employing them in isolated cells to limit the damage if any one of them is discovered. There is precedent for this, he says, although he refuses to elaborate.

Meanwhile, the latest U.S. intelligence assessment released recently now projects that Iran is a decade away from being able to produce a nuclear bomb. But MEK supporters say the assessment is both naive and out of date, because of the subsequent election of ultraconservative hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iran's president in June. Tanter warns, What the elections did was consolidate power under supreme leader Khamenei in such a fashion that there's now very little need to conciliate the moderates in the Iranian government. I anticipate that Iran will take a tougher line on negotiations on Europe. Iran's recent rejection of a seemingly generous European grand bargain as insulting would appear to confirm Tanter's prediction.

Despite the political changes on the ground, it is still hard to imagine the MEK playing a large role in any future regime change in Iran. With no more than 3,800 aging members, the group could hardly destabilize the Iranian government itself, but it may prove useful as an intelligence asset. With its allies



currently frustrating U.S. efforts to refer the Iran nuclear issue to the U.N. Security Council, Washington may be in need of friends and any help may be appreciated. The question is whether the MEK are the kind of friends you can count on.

*Correction: This piece originally identified Shirin Nariman as a MEK member and fundraiser. Nariman denies being a member of the group or a fundraiser for it, though acknowledges her longtime support of the group and her role in organizing a Washington conference in support of the Maryam Rajavi and the MEK in April 2005.





2006



Monsters of the Left: The Mujahedin al-Khalq

January 2006

Few terrorists groups garner the bipartisan endorsement and support that Iran's Mujahedin al-Khalq Organization [MKO] has. On October 20, 2005, several congressmen and many aides attended a briefing in Congress. Maryam Rajavi, co-leader of the group and self-styled president-elect of Iran, addressed the gathering by video from France. [1] She received a warm reception. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) thanked "Sister Maryam." [2] A bipartisan group of U.S. Congressmen have signed petitions calling for the U.S. Department of State to lift its 1997 classification of the group as a terrorist organization. [3] In an April 8, 2003 interview, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), chairwoman of the House International Relations Committee's Central Asia and Middle East Subcommittee said, "This group loves the United States. They're assisting us in the war on terrorism; they're pro-U.S. This group has not been fighting against the U.S. It's simply not true." [4] Ros-Lehtinen is wrong. Unfortunately, hers is a mistake common to some on the left and the right who care deeply about Iranian freedom but fail to understand the nature of a group which, in public, says the right things about freedom and democracy but, in reality is dedicated to the opposite. Maryam Rajavi and her husband Masud are adept at public relations and adroit at reinvention, but the organization over which they preside

MEK
Uncovered

160



eschews democracy and embraces terrorism, autocracy, and Marxism.

Origins

The roots of the MKO lie in the early 1960s. For years, clerical and feudal interests had blocked real reform in Iran. Society was paralyzed. In 1961, under pressure from the Kennedy administration, the Shah appointed as prime minister 'Ali Amini, an Iranian aristocrat and former ambassador to the United States, whom Washington respected as a reformer. Amini began to challenge the traditional classes and interest groups who had long hampered reform. In January 1962, the Shah decreed Iran's first real land reform. The Shah assumed the mantle of reforming crusader. He launched "the Shah-People Revolution," better known as the "White Revolution." Its six points were: land reform, nationalization of forests, sale of government-owned factories to finance land reform, women's suffrage, a Literacy Corps in which conscripts could serve as an alternative to the army, and distribution to workers of part of factories' profits. Such reform cut deep into the fabric of Iranian society, angering social conservatives, clerics, and xenophobic nationalists.

Against this backdrop and angered by both the growing secularization of Iranian politics and the influx of foreigners, engineer and Islamic activist Mehdi Bazargan formed the Lib-





eration Movement of Iran. His goal was to combine Iranian nationalism with Islamism. “We refuse to divorce religion from politics... because Shi’i Islam is an integral part of our popular culture,” [5] the group stated in its inaugural declaration. Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, a free-thinking and modernizing cleric introduced to Marxist thought while imprisoned in the 1930s, became a mentor to Bazargan who, in turn, would become provisional prime minister during the first days of the 1979 revolution.

In July 1962, Amini resigned in anger over both the Shah’s military spending and anger at what he considered the stinginess of other U.S. aid. Chaos reigned supreme. The ayatollahs seized the initiative. Islamic groups marched against social reforms and the new laws which restricted the clergy’s traditional privileges. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini rose to prominence as the head of the clerical opposition.

By 1963, what little tolerance the Shah had for the opposition evaporated. On June 5, 1963, he ordered Khomeini’s arrest. Rioting erupted and ended only after the police killed several hundred students and demonstrators.

Ironically, even as the Shah’s crackdown sent oppositionists underground, his reforms catalyzed their growth. State scholarships enabled a far greater range of Iranians to receive higher education than at any previous time in history. University campuses became incubators of opposition. Young radicals looked abroad and drew inspiration from revolutionary movements in Algeria, Vietnam, Cuba, and elsewhere.

The Birth of the Mujahedin-i Khalq

Following the 1963 crackdown, Bazargan’s Liberation Movement splintered. While older members drew inspiration from the left-leaning nationalist and ousted Prime Minister Muhammad Musaddiq who flirted with mob violence but did not sanction terrorism, many younger members argued political reform impossible and embraced armed struggle. These younger members, including a University of Tehran political science

student named Masud Rajavi, coalesced into a discussion group which, in 1965, would form the Mujahedin al-Khalq. It would be another seven years before the MKO would emerge from its self-imposed veil of secrecy and declare itself to the wider world.

The MKO preached a combination of Marxism and Islamism. They argued that not only did God create the world, but he also set forth a historical evolution in which a classless society would supplant capitalist inequity. Such a radical re-interpretation of Islam bred division, not only with the secular and capitalist state, but also with the traditional, conservative clergy which resented the MKO argument that “Shi’i ‘ulama [religious scholars], just like the Sunnis, have failed to grasp the real essence of Qur’anic dynamism.” [6] Rajavi and other MKO ideologues reinterpreted religion to justify terrorism. Death during armed struggle, they said, was consistent with traditional Shi’i glorification of martyrdom. They created a precedent from which they and later terrorist groups like Lebanese Hizbullah could and did justify suicide bombing, a plague which afflicts the region to the present.

In order to prepare itself for armed struggle, the MKO reached out to the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In 1970, several leading MKO, including Rajavi received terrorist training in PLO camps in Jordan and Lebanon. The group subsequently cemented links to the Libyan regime of Mu’ammar Qadhafi and to the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, the Soviet Union’s Arabian Peninsula satellite.

The MKO’s first attempt to create a terrorist spectacle failed. A prison informant betrayed their plans to blow up a power station to disrupt the 1971 celebrations surrounding the 2500th anniversary of the Persian monarchy. An attempt to kidnap the Shah’s nephew also failed. However, the subsequent trial and execution of those involved bolstered the prestige of the organization. At his trial, Rajavi gave a rousing anti-imperialist speech in which he accused the United States, western





banks, and multinational corporations of most of Iran and the developing world's ills. "The main goal now," Rajavi declared, "is to free Iran of U.S. imperialism." [7] The military tribunal was harsh: They condemned 11 MKO leaders, including Rajavi, to death. The Iranian government commuted the sentences of one co-conspirator and Rajavi to life imprisonment after Rajavi's brother launched an international clemency campaign. The execution of the MKO's founders and so many early members positioned Rajavi well to consolidate organization control upon his January 1979 release.

While dealt a mighty blow, the MKO rebounded. It recruited new members in Iranian high schools, universities, prisons, and among the thousands of Iranian university students studying in Western Europe and the United States. The group also established a radio station in Baghdad from which to broadcast anti-regime propaganda into Iran. The MKO latched onto the teachings of the left-leaning Ayatollah 'Ali Shariati, who openly preached a similar but less radical message. They used Shariati's preaching as a launching point for underground discussion and indoctrination.

The imprisonment and execution of its leadership did not eviscerate the organization. It soon struck again. In May 30 and 31, 1972, shortly before President Richard Nixon's state visit to Iran, the MKO launched a wave of bomb attacks which targeted the Iran-American Society, the U.S. Information Office, the Hotel International, Pepsi Cola, General Motors, and the Marine Oil Company. They failed to assassinate General Harold Price, head of the U.S. Military Mission in Iran. Less than three months later, they bombed the Jordanian embassy to revenge King Hussein's September 1970 crackdown on their PLO patrons. In 1973, the MKO bombed the Pan-American Airlines building, Shell Oil, and Radio City Cinema in Tehran, and assassinated Colonel Lewis Hawkins, the deputy chief of the U.S. military mission. They did not only target foreigners. In a wave of bombings that continued into 1975, the MKO

group attacked clubs, stores, police facilities, minority-owned businesses, factories it accused of having “Israeli connections,” and symbols of state and capitalism.

Not all was well within the MKO leadership. In 1975, the group divided into a Marxist faction that eschewed Islam, and a Muslim faction which did not. Baruch College historian Ervand Abrahamian, whose dispassionate and academic study of the MKO is the most thorough, argued that the shift of many MKO leaders to Marxism stemmed had three causes: Disillusionment with Ayatollah Khomeini, inability to win over the secular intelligentsia, and the influence of other radical groups like the Fedaiyan. [8] Rajavi headed the Muslim Mujahedin branch in Qasr prison. Both groups continued their attacks on government and Western targets, all the while striking at each other. While the Marxist MKO was unsuccessful in an attempt to assassinate a senior U.S. diplomat, it killed three American employees of Rockwell International.

The Islamic Revolution

While both MKO factions participated in the Islamic Revolution, the Muslim MKO found shelter under the banner of Taleqani and rode the Revolution to prominence. They claimed some credit for the seizure of the U.S. embassy and subsequent hostage taking, and later demonstrated against their release. The Muslim faction did not eschew Marxism. Rajavi and the MKO supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and opposed the Afghan mujahedin struggling against it.

In the wake of the Islamic Revolution, Rajavi consolidated his control over the organization. [9] Rajavi divided the leadership into a Politburo and a Central Committee, and created a number of organizations to recruit and train new members. This proliferation of front organization, all serving an ideological and disciplined leadership, remains characteristic of the group today.

It was not long before Rajavi and the MKO came into conflict with the clerical circles surrounding Khomeini. Relations be-



tween the MKO and Khomeini had been long strained. While Khomeini's theological justification of clerical rule was a radical reworking of traditional Shi'i jurisprudence, he was otherwise conservative. He considered the MKO's blending of Islam with Marxism, as well as the group's denial of past jurisprudence, to be anathema. When an MKO delegation had visited Khomeini in Najaf in 1972, rather than offer the support they sought, he lectured them on true Islam.

Within a year of Khomeini's return to Iran, his followers began to label Rajavi and the MKO "unbelievers" and "hypocrites." The MKO, in return, accused Khomeini of hijacking the revolution and imposing dictatorship. Prior to the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini promised the masses Islamic democracy, even as he consolidated dictatorship. The MKO sought to replicate his strategy, for practical, not idealistic, aims.

Khomeini had the upper hand, though. He closed the group's offices, banned its papers, and forced the MKO underground. The MKO was not his only target, though. As he consolidated power, he moved against President Abulhasan Bani Sadr [10] whose independence and moderation undercut Khomeini's theocratic ambitions. While Bani Sadr did not join the MKO, he formed a tacit alliance with the group which, in turn, benefited from the President's prestige.

Both Bani Sadr and the MKO called for national protests on June 20, 1980, and demonstrators heeded their call. Perhaps a half million poured into the streets in Tehran; many more turned out in cities across Iran. But Khomeini and his supporters in the Islamic Republic Party were ready. They labeled anyone marching in support of the MKO to be enemies of God, subject to summary execution. They kept their word. Khomeini's followers killed hundreds. The warden of Evin Prison, Tehran's main political prison, bragged of his execution of teenage girls.

Khomeini's opponents responded. Terrorists—their affiliation unclear—blew up the Islamic Republic Party headquar-

ters, killing hardline Ayatollah Mohammed Hosseini Beheshti, founder of the Islamic Republic's judiciary, and 72 party members. Khomeini used the attack as reason to accelerate his purge. A reign of terror began. Thousands perished before Islamic Republic firing squads and upon its gallows. As Khomeini consolidated control, Iranians' willingness to support for the MKO evaporated.

The MKO did not surrender, though. It drove its terrorist campaign to a fever pitch, assassinating several hundred regime officials and Revolutionary Guards, and bombing the homes and offices of clerics. The group also targeted judges who passed sentence against their members. The MKO used suicide bombers with deadly effect, killing in separate incidents the Friday prayer leaders of Tehran and Shiraz. At its peak in July 1982, the group assassinated, on average, three regime officials per day; publicly, the MKO has claimed responsibility for the murders of over 10,000 people in Iran since 1981. But while the terrorist campaign shook the Islamic Republic to its core, it also claimed many innocent victims.

Rajavi and Bani Sadr both fled to Paris during Khomeini's crackdown. While Bani Sadr and others had joined with the MKO under the banner of the National Council, such formal ties were short-lived. By 1984 the former president and many other groups left the umbrella, upset with the MKO's ideology and Rajavi's dictatorial tendencies.

Still more MKO supporters fled to Iraq, where they accepted the protection of President Saddam Hussein. What little support the group had once enjoyed in Iran evaporated, as Iranians saw the MKO rally in support of a dictator who launched a war that, by its conclusion in 1988, killed several hundred thousand Iranians. Ordinary Iranians are quite vocal in their hatred of the Islamic Republic and ridicule its current Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamene'i. Many ask about Reza Pahlavi, the U.S.-based son of the late Shah. Others speak of other opposition groups, and many more rally to the names of the Islamic



Republic's own dissidents. But, without exception, all spew venom toward the MKO. The group violence and its betrayal of Iranian nationalism lost it all popular support in Iran.

Nor did the MKO win Iraqi support. Iraqi intelligence coordinated MKO activities. [11] Iraqi Kurds and Shi'a accuse the group of participating in reprisals against Iraqi civilians following the March 1991 uprising. According to Qubad Talabani, son of Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, "Up until the fall of the regime, they were part and parcel of the Iraqi military. And they were heavily involved in suppressing the Kurdish uprising of 1991." [12]

Reinvention

While the MKO lost both its revolutionary power struggle and the battle for Iranian hearts and minds, Rajavi has worked tirelessly to reinvent the MKO's image. Again, he sought power in and sympathy from so many members' martyrdom. At first, the group reached out to its old leftist and Arab nationalist patrons in Algeria, Lebanon, and among the PLO. It also sent delegations to the Italian and Greek Communist Parties, the Indian Socialist Party, and the British Labour Party. It found a sympathetic audience among left-leaning human rights organization and academics. The group targeted European parliamentarians. More than 3,000 parliamentarians signed a 1986 petition of support. [13]

The admission of Ayatollah Hossein 'Ali Montazeri, long-time Khomeini deputy, that Khomeini ordered the executions of 3,000 incarcerated MKO allowed the organization to further play the martyr card. [14] The National Council of Resistance's website describes an international organization with "official contacts with most European countries... [and] amicable relations with Middle Eastern nations." The group has continued its petition drives. Congressional aides describe how the group sends pretty young women into the halls of Congress and various parliaments with innocuous petitions. Most lawmakers have little idea of the baggage the group carries.

The MKO devotees get results. The group brags, “In 1992, in a joint global initiative, 1,500 parliamentarians declared their support for the NCR as the democratic alternative to the Khomeini regime. This included a majority in the US House of Representatives.” [15] Abrahamian speculated that the MKO sought to replicate the PLO’s strategy of winning recognition as the representatives of the Palestinian people through the international community. It continues to post endorsements, many taken out of context, on its website. [16]

Within the United States, MKO members tell Congressmen, their staffs, and other policymakers what they want to hear: That the MKO is the only opposition movement capable of ousting the unpopular and repressive Islamic Republic. They are slick. Friendly lawmakers and commentators get Christmas baskets full of nuts and sweets. Well-dressed and well-spoken representatives of MKO front organizations approach American writers, politicians, and pundits who are critical of the regime.

The enemy of an adversary is not necessarily a friend, though. Such is the logic that caused State Department realists in the Reagan administration to support a dictator like Saddam Hussein. The MKO have little in their record to suggest democracy to be a goal. While they opposed the Islamic Republic only after Khomeini purged them from power, the group sought to replace Khomeini’s dictatorship with its own. They omit and often deny their past anti-U.S. and anti-Western terrorism.

Today, Masud Rajavi—and his second wife Maryam—work to impose totalitarian control over its membership. Portraits of Masud and Maryam loom large in MKO demonstrations and facilities. In the West, the group forbids its members from reading anything but MKO newspapers and publications. Many MKO live in communal households and participate in mandatory study groups. In Camp Ashraf, Iraq, where many members sit in limbo following Saddam’s fall, MKO minders enforce celibacy, employ cult methods to break down individ-



ual will, and shield members from unsupervised exposure to outsiders. [17]

How the Left Empowers the MKO Today

Prior to Iraq's liberation, there was rare interagency agreement about the MKO within the U.S. government. From Foggy Bottom to the Pentagon to the Old Executive Office Building, there was rare unanimity. As a terrorist organization closely allied with Saddam's regime, the MKO should be considered combatants if they raised arms, and prisoners if they did not. The Islamic Republic might want the group for crimes both real and imagined, but the fate of MKO stranded in Iraq would ultimately rest with the new Iraqi judiciary, which might want to try individual members for atrocities committed in 1991.

During Iraq's liberation, U.S. troops surrounded Camp Ashraf, the main MKO base in Iraq. Those MKO who did not flee during the war stood down. The U.S. military confined 3,800 MKO "security detainees" in the Camp. [18] The Iranian government demanded forced repatriation and, through intermediaries, offered to trade al-Qaeda members sheltering in Iran for MKO members captured in Iraq. This offer was refused for three reasons: The priority of the Iraqi judiciary in the matter, Iran's own lack of due process, and the fact that belief that Iran should turn over al-Qaeda terrorists in the interest of justice, not for a quid pro quo.

How did the Left subsequently bolster Rajavi and empower the MKO? On May 10, 2003 Agence France Presse quoted General Ray Odierno, commander of the 4th Infantry Division, as saying, "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." Odierno's statement was unwise. He had no authorization to make such a comment nor did it reflect anything but his own opinion. The MKO are masters of propaganda; he was unaware of the group's history. Complacency in the face of an opponent's overwhelming

firepower makes an adversary smart, not democratic.

The gaffe made, the Pentagon fumbled its response. Its policy hierarchy and public affairs machinery were more effective at editing each others' grammar than at damage control. Despite subsequent interagency clarifications, left-wing pundits and academic conspiracy theorists went into overdrive. They knowingly conflated a single general's off-hand remark into a statement of policy, and then they conflated the uniformed services with civilian staff. "...The Neocons in the Pentagon have some sort of weird alliance with the MEK [MKO] mad bombers," University of Michigan Professor Juan Cole wrote. [19] Cole's anti-Semitic and partisan-driven conspiracy theories played into Rajavi's hands by enabling the group to project a false image of support where none existed. Partisan bloggers like Laura Rozen, off-kilter academics like Cole and Brown University anthropologist William O. Beeman, Knight-Ridder and Washington Post correspondents, and New York Times' columnists, repeated the story, substituting hypothesis for fact, citing each other and justifying their beliefs with anonymous sources. None can produce an iota of evidence. While the MKO has the support of a handful of congressmen and a small number pundits, Rajavi has no support in the power centers of Washington. Nevertheless, he bolsters his supporters' morale and basks in the claim of support, however false.

Even in the era of resurgent realism, some issues should remain absolute. Terrorism, the deliberate targeting of civilians for political gain, should never be acceptable. Mitigating factors do not exist. True, in August 2003 the MKO exposed Iran's covert nuclear enrichment program. It continues to penetrate Iran's defenses and assassinate its opponents. This, though, is more a result of corruption and the Islamic Republic's crumbling control over its periphery. The MKO—and any other group—can bribe officials and penetrate defenses. This should not give reason, on the hundredth anniversary of Iran's Constitutional Revolution, to advance or reward Rajavi's life-



long megalomaniacal quest for power and his backward blend of Marxism and Islamism. Many “monsters of the left” use the rhetoric of democracy to realize their ambition. Masud and Maryam Rajavi, and the organization over which they exert dictatorial control, are no exception. The Islamic Republic of Iran victimizes its people and threatens U.S. and regional security. The solution to the problem rests, not with empowering a group or individuals just as bad, but rather in supporting the Iranian people in their quest for liberty, freedom, and democracy.



UPI

Opposition a stick against Tehran?

February 2006

PARIS, Feb. 7 (UPI) -- It has been variously described as a cult and the only significant Iranian resistance movement. The People's Mujahedeen is listed as a terrorist organization in Europe and the United States, yet the group continues to stage rallies and court lawmakers on both sides of the Atlantic.

The U.S. military that bombed its Iraq-based armed wing two years ago now protects its camp north of Baghdad, where its members have been granted Geneva Convention refugee status. And in France, where the People's Mujahedeen established its political headquarters in the 1980s, it regularly hosts press conferences in Paris to level fresh charges about Tehran's alleged nuclear weapons program.

Now, as the standoff continues over Iran's nuclear enrichment activities, some suggest the People's Mujahedeen could play another role: As one of the few sticks available to Western governments -- short of U.N. sanctions -- to prod Tehran into compliance.

"I think the way we have treated the Mujahedeen has not been very intelligent," said Yves Bonnet, a former head of France's internal DST intelligence service, and author of a book on Iranian politics. "Instead of making the Tehran regime worried by supporting an opposition movement they fear, we're trying to sterilize the Mujahedeen. And in doing so, we're playing into the arms of their adversaries -- the Iranian government."

MEK
Uncovered

173



Such a view is hardly universal. Critics argue that supporting the People's Mujahedeen grants legitimacy to a disreputable organization, dogged by allegations of human rights abuses and undemocratic behavior.

Other analysts point to a bad precedent: Bogus information on Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons program provided by Iraqi opposition groups. "I think we need to view what the Mujahedeen is saying with some very healthy skepticism," said Bob Ayers, a terrorism expert at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. Still others suggest that using the Mujahedeen to pressure Tehran would have only limited effect. For its part, the Mujahedeen has spared no effort to clean up its reputation. It organizes periodic rallies -- including one in front of the White House Thursday -- to get off the U.S. and European terrorist lists, and to promote itself as a democratic alternative to the Mullah's regime.

Based in the picturesque Paris suburb of Auvers-sur-Oise, the Mujahedeen's political wing -- known formally as the National Council of Resistance of Iran -- has a formidable public relations machine. It publishes a slick magazine peppered with articles about the Western lawmakers and Iranians who support it.

"The Iranian community abroad is a microcosm of the Iranian community in Iran," said 53-year-old Ali Safavi, a member of

the Mujahedeen's foreign affairs committee, in an interview in Paris. He claims the vast majority of those politically active in the Iranian diaspora support the group.

"If there were an election held tomorrow in Iran under U.N. auspices -- free of rigging and fraud and all parties could participate -- I think our movement would by far gain the most number of votes," Safavi added.

Many scoff at such claims.

"They've managed to convince more than a few unsuspecting members of the European parliament and U.S. congressmen and women that they are a legitimate democratic opposition group," said Karim Sadjadpour, an expert on Iran at the International Crisis Group in Washington, DC, echoing the view of a number of experts. "But in reality, anybody who has been to Iran in the last 10 years would tell you they have little, if any, support on the streets."

There was a time, however, when the Mujahedeen enjoyed considerable support on the Iranian streets. Founded in 1965 by Iranian students bent on toppling Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the group briefly allied itself with the 1979 Islamic Revolution. But the Mujahedeen, which mixed Islam with Marxist philosophy, soon fell afoul of Iran's new theocratic government. In 1981, after several of its leaders were executed, the group moved to an unsettled exile in France. When Paris began forging diplomatic ties with Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini in 1986, it expelled the Mujahedeen's charismatic leader, Massoud Rajavi. Rajavi moved to Iraq, where Saddam gave him shelter and millions of dollars in funding. He established the group's military wing there, launching terrorist attacks across the border in Iran, and targeting Iranian interests overseas.

In 2003 -- as French authorities again appeared to be seeking closer ties with Tehran -- police raided the Mujahedeen's sprawling compound in Auvers-sur-Oise, arresting 160 people on allegations of funding terrorist activities. Among those detained were Rajavi's wife Maryam, who heads the group's

political wing.

But today, Maryam Rajavi meets freely with French and other European politicians, and reportedly enjoys police protection whenever she leaves her home. A French judicial investigation putters on -- to save face, Mujahedeen members say, for lack of incriminating evidence.

Treatment of the Mujahedeen by other Western governments also appears pegged to shifting diplomatic relations with Tehran. In 1997, the Clinton administration classified the Mujahedeen's armed and political factions as terrorist organizations -- reportedly to score points with former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami. In 2002, the European Union put the group's armed branch on its terrorist list.

Today, however, some U.S. and European lawmakers are lobbying for the Mujahedeen to be treated as a credible weapon against Tehran. "We should use them for information on what's going on inside Iran," said Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-Colorado), who supports lifting the group's terrorist designation. "They're willing to do what's necessary to bring the regime down, and we could take advantage of that."

Supporters say the Mujahedeen could be used in providing intelligence information on Iran's nuclear program. That may be one reason, according to reports, why the U.S. military shifted from bombing to guarding the Mujahedeen's camp in Iraq. Indeed, the group's allegations three years ago about an Iranian enrichment facility in Nantanz were "on the mark," said a diplomat close to the International Atomic Energy Agency, in Vienna.

But the group's subsequent nuclear disclosures have been of dubious value, the diplomat added, speaking on background. "The IAEA certainly doesn't rely on them as a credible or regular source of information," she said, "even though it does read and check them out."

More worrying, perhaps, is the organization's reputation. The Mujahedeen has long been described as a personality cult re-

volving around its leaders, the Rajavis. Men and women at the Iraq camp sleep separately and are barred from marrying. Last year, Human Rights Watch published a report accusing the Mujahedeen of torturing and preventing some of its dissenting members from leaving the camp, during Saddam's time. Some U.S. soldiers and European lawmakers say they have found no evidence of past abuse there. And the group argues former members interviewed by Human Rights Watch are on the payroll of Iran's intelligence service. But critics like Ervand Abrahamian, author of a 1989 book on the Mujahedeen, says that is its standard response to damaging allegations. "It would be a sign of desperation if Washington resorted to the Mujahedeen as an instrument against the Iranian regime," added Abrahamian, a Middle East history professor at Baruch College, in New York. "I can't imagine anyone more discredited in Iran than the Mujahedeen."



Statement on Responses to Human Rights Watch Report on Abuses by the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO)

MEK
Uncovered

178

February 2006

In May 2005, Human Rights Watch issued a report on alleged human rights abuses committed by an Iranian opposition group, the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO/MEK), inside its military camps in Iraq from 1991 to February 2003, prior to the fall of Saddam Hussein's government.

Following publication of this Human Rights Watch report, individuals associated with the MKO and others, in communications to Human Rights Watch as well as publicly on Web sites connected with the MKO, raised objections to the findings of the report. We have investigated with care the criticisms we received concerning the substance and methodology of the report, and find those criticisms to be unwarranted.

A number of critics of the report claimed that Human Rights Watch was calling on the United States, Canada, and the European Union not to remove the MKO from their respective lists of groups identified as perpetrating or advocating acts of terrorism, in the face of a campaign by the MKO to have itself removed from such lists. Human Rights Watch in fact at no



point, either in the report or in responses to media and other queries, took any position whatsoever on whether the MKO should be on such lists or removed from them. Rather, we did no more than report what we believed to be credible testimonies alleging serious abuses perpetrated by MKO officials against dissident members of the group, including prolonged deprivation of liberty and torture.

A group known as Friends of a Free Iran (FOFI), comprising four Members of the European Parliament – Alejo Vidal Quadras, Paulo Casaca, Andre Brie, and Struan Stevenson – presented the most extensive of the critiques of the No Exit report on September 21, 2005.⁴ The FOFI document disputed the testimonies and challenged the credibility of the witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, saying, among other things, that their allegations were “widely believed to be orchestrated by Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence.”⁵ The MKO has similarly alleged that Human Rights Watch’s witnesses, and dissident former members generally, are in fact agents of Iranian intelligence. Neither FOFI nor any of the other critics of the Human Rights Watch report have provided any credible evidence to support this charge.

The FOFI document followed a five-day visit by a delegation of FOFI members to the MKO’s main base in Iraq, Camp Ashraf, in July 2005. The FOFI delegation reportedly interviewed 19 MKO members inside Camp Ashraf. According to the FOFI





document, these present MKO members disputed testimonies given by the former MKO members to Human Rights Watch. The FOI delegation did not interview any of the individuals who gave testimonies to Human Rights Watch.

Because Human Rights Watch places a high premium on the accuracy of our reporting and public statements, the organization took these allegations seriously. We went back to our sources to review and reevaluate the credibility of their allegations. In October 2005 Human Rights Watch researchers met in person with all twelve witnesses quoted in the No Exit report. The researchers conducted interviews lasting several hours with each witness, individually and privately. All interviews were conducted in Germany and the Netherlands, where the witnesses now live.

All of the witnesses recounted in extensive detail their experiences inside the MKO camps from the 1991-2003 period, and how MKO officials subjected them to various forms of physical and psychological abuses once they made known their wishes to leave the organization. Human Rights Watch researchers questioned the witnesses at great length about the circumstances under which these abuses allegedly took place. The researchers also asked the witnesses to respond to the specific issues raised in the FOI document with regard to their testimonies. The witnesses provided detailed and credible responses to these challenges that were consistent with their earlier testimony as recounted in No Exit and are detailed in the appendix to this statement.

The only piece of information that emerged during these detailed face-to-face interviews that differed from the account in No Exit concerned the period of Mohammad Hussein Sobhani's detention by the MKO. In No Exit, Human Rights Watch reported that MKO officials had held Sobhani in solitary confinement for eight-and-a-half years, from September 1992 to January 2001. The FOI document stated that "upon his own request, he [Sobhani] lived in an apartment furnished with

all living commodities of a comfortable life. Despite PMOI's insistence that he must leave the organization, he was not willing to do so..."⁶

In his testimony in October 2005, Sobhani told Human Rights Watch that MKO officials held him continuously in solitary confinement from September 1992 until February 1998 inside Camp Ashraf, a period of five-and-a-half years. He said that in February 1998 the MKO leadership offered to transfer him to a better location and then to facilitate his transfer to Europe, where his daughter was living. Subsequently, the MKO moved Sobhani to another MKO camp near Baghdad, called Camp Parsian. He said he stayed there until June 1999, under circumstances that he described as "house arrest." He said he was free to leave his apartment in Camp Parsian but could not leave the camp unless accompanied by MKO guards, and could not leave for Europe. In June 1999, during a visit to Baghdad, he escaped and attempted to reach the United Nations office there. He was captured by the Iraqi police and turned over to MKO officials. From June 1999 until January 2001, Sobhani said, the MKO again held him in a prison inside Camp Ashraf, once again in solitary confinement. In January 2001, the MKO transferred Sobhani to Iraqi custody. The Iraqi authorities imprisoned him in Abu Ghraib until January 21, 2002.⁷

As reported by the witnesses interviewed for No Exit, the MKO transferred scores of dissident members from MKO detention into Iraqi custody. Iraqi authorities then incarcerated the men in Abu Ghraib prison. Five of the twelve individuals interviewed by Human Rights Watch for No Exit said they ended up in Abu Ghraib as a result of such transfers, and they told Human Rights Watch that former MKO members were being held there when they arrived. The FOFI document fails to address the MKO's transfer of the dissidents to Iraqi custody or their subsequent detention in Abu Ghraib.



The FOI document also raised two other objections to the Human Rights Watch report. Firstly, the FOI document questioned Human Rights Watch’s methodology of conducting interviews with witnesses by phone. Human Rights Watch, like other organizations that conduct research and report on current affairs, sometimes relies on telephone interviews to gather information. Telephone interviews are a recognized and appropriate method of information gathering. Human Rights Watch has no reason to believe that any of the witnesses misidentified or misrepresented themselves in any way whatsoever. They reaffirmed their credibility in face to face interviews in October 2005.

Secondly, the FOI document challenged Human Rights Watch’s report by stating that, during their visit to Camp Ashraf, the FOI delegation did not find any indications of abuse or ill-treatment of MKO members. The Human Rights Watch report, as was made clear in that text, covered allegations of abuse inside the MKO camps prior to the overthrow of the government of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. The testimonies by witnesses who recounted allegations of detention and physical abuse cover the period from 1991 to February 2003. After the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, U.S. forces interviewed MKO members inside the MKO camps. The U.S. military set up a separate camp for those members who indicated that they wished to leave the organization. At least 300 members (out of a total of nearly 4000) chose to leave the organization. The Human Rights Watch report did not include any testimonies or allegations of witnesses as to whether there were ongoing abuses inside Camp Ashraf after the invasion of Iraq. Thus, the findings of FOI with respect to current conditions in the MKO camp have no relevance to the Human Rights Watch report of testimonies about conditions in the camp from 1991 to February 2003.

Appendix

MKO members inside Camp Ashraf who the FOI delega-

tion interviewed disputed certain statements by the witnesses whose accounts appeared in the Human Rights Watch report. Human Rights Watch researchers questioned the witnesses at length concerning the allegations contained in the FOFI document.

Their responses, in the view of Human Rights Watch, confirm the credibility and reliability of their original testimonies in No Exit. The Human Rights Watch report contained allegations by witnesses that two MKO members, Ghorbanali Torabi and Parviz Ahmadi, died as a result of abuse suffered in MKO detention. The FOFI document challenged these testimonies.

- With regard to Ghorbanali Torabi's death, the FOFI delegation interviewed two MKO members in Camp Ashraf who disputed these testimonies. These two MKO members, Zahra Seraj, Torabi's wife, and Masoume Torabi, Torabi's sister, told the FOFI delegation that he had died of a heart attack, and not as a result of beatings at the hands of MKO officials. Neither of them claimed to have been present when he died. According to a communication to Human Rights Watch from Lord Avebury, who said he had interviewed Masouma Torabi by telephone on June 13, 2005, "Masouma saw Ghorbanali a week before he died."⁸

- Human Rights Watch again questioned Abbas Sedeghinejad, one of Human Right Watch's original sources on these events, about Torabi's death. Abbas Sadeghinejad confirmed his earlier testimony, based on his experience of sharing a prison cell with Torabi.⁹ He again told Human Rights Watch that late one night, after Torabi had been taken out of the cell for two days, two men carried Torabi back to the cell, threw him inside, and locked the cell again. Torabi, Sadeghinejad said, was not breathing and his face showed signs of severe beating. He said that other cellmates examined Torabi more closely and believed that he had suffered broken bones. Sadeghinejad acknowledged that Torabi may have died of a heart attack, but maintained that the MKO had severely beaten Torabi, ap-





parently during interrogation.

Alireza Mir Asgari corroborated the fact of Torabi's detention and ill-treatment at the hands of the MKO, based on his own direct experience. Mir Asgari told Human Rights Watch that the MKO also detained him at the time Torabi was detained. He said that he knew Torabi well as a child in Iran, and that Torabi had recruited him in Tehran at the age of seventeen to join the MKO ranks in Iraq. Mir Asgari told Human Rights Watch that during his detention in 1995, he encountered Torabi face-to-face during an interrogation session. He said that the interrogators questioned them both about Torabi's motivation for recruiting Mir Asgari to the MKO camps in Iraq and accused them of working for the Iranian government. Mir Asgari said that when he met Torabi during this interrogation, Torabi's body showed signs of beatings and physical abuse.¹⁰

Mir Asgari told Human Rights Watch that when he raised the subject of Torabi's death with MKO leader Massoud Rajavi, Rajavi alternately responded that Torabi had committed suicide and that Mir Asgari and other prisoners had themselves killed Torabi because they suspected him of being an informant. He said Rajavi at no point claimed that Torabi had died from a heart attack.

- Concerning the death of Parviz Ahmadi, the FOFI delegation reported that Hossein Roboubi, an MKO member, told them that Ahmadi died during a military operation inside Iran.¹¹ In its report, Human Rights Watch cited the MKO's claim that Ahmadi was killed by Iranian agents.¹² Human Rights Watch also presented the testimony of three witnesses, Abbas Sadeghinejad, Ali Ghashghavi, and Alireza Mir Asgari, who said that they had shared a prison cell with Ahmadi and saw him die inside the prison after prison guards returned him from an interrogation session. During Human Rights Watch's face-to-face interviews in October 2005, each of these witnesses gave separate, detailed, and consistent accounts of their recollection regarding Ahmadi's death. These testimonies were

consistent with their earlier statements as published in the No Exit report.¹³

- The FOFI document contains an interview with Hassan Ezati in Camp Ashraf. Hassan Ezati is the father of Yasser Ezati one of the witnesses quoted in the Human Rights Watch report. Hassan Ezati reportedly told the FOFI delegation that “Yasser having left Camp Ashraf went directly to the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad.”¹⁴ When asked about this statement, Yasser Ezati strongly denied it. He said that he first went to the German Embassy in Baghdad because he had lived in Germany before moving to Iraq. He told Human Rights Watch that because the German Embassy was closed at the time, his only options were either to return to Camp Ashraf or to go to Iran. He said he was desperate not to return to Camp Ashraf because he had waited for so many years to find the opportunity to leave. He decided to risk returning to Iran for lack of any alternative. He told Human Rights

Watch that he went to the Iranian border on his own. Yasser Ezati said that during his stay in Iran, the Iranian local police arrested him three times for “moral offenses.” Yasser decided that because he had never lived in Iran previously he could not stay there and left for Germany.¹⁵

- The FOFI document contains an interview with Leila Ghanbari, an MKO member in Camp Ashraf who disputed the testimonies of Habib Khorrami, Tahereh Eskandari, and Mohammad Reza Eskandari in Human Rights Watch’s report. Tahereh Eskandari and Habib Khorrami are sister and brother. Tahereh and Mohammad Reza Eskandari are married. Leila Ghanbari is the former wife of Habib Khorrami and had left Iran for Iraq with Khorrami and Tahereh Eskandari in 1988. The Human Rights Watch report quoted the Eskandaris as saying: “The organization had taken our passports and identification documents upon our arrival in the [MKO] camp [in Iraq]. When we expressed our intention to leave, they never returned our documents. We were held in detention centers in Iskan as well as



other locations.” Leila Ghanbari disputed this statement, telling the FOFI delegation: “In one place they say my passport was taken from me. Let me tell you that I laughed at this claim... What passport? They were escapees!”¹⁶ The FOFI authors state that MKO officials “said both Mohammad Reza Eskandari and Tahereh Eskandari crossed the border from Iran to Iraq and they never had passports to begin with.”¹⁷

Human Rights Watch questioned Mohammad Reza Eskandari, Tahereh Eskandari, and Habib Khorrami separately regarding these allegations by Leila Ghanbari and the unnamed MKO officials. The Eskandaris and Khorrami separately told Human Rights Watch that Tahereh Eskandari, Habib Khorrami, and Leila Ghanbari left Iran together in March 1988 to go to Iraq, crossing the Turkish border and using their passports to do so. They said the MKO confiscated their passports and never returned them. Mohammad Reza Eskandari was the only member of this family who escaped Iran without a passport across the Iraqi border. All three also noted in separate individual interviews that Leila Ghanbari was pregnant when she left Iran for Turkey, and that her and Habib Khorrami’s son was born in Turkey. Habib Khorrami, Ghanbari’s former husband and the boy’s father, showed Human Rights Watch a copy of their son’s birth certificate issued in Istanbul in April 1994 and stating the date of birth as June 13, 1988.

Leila Ghanbari also disputed the statements by these witnesses that the MKO had confined them in various MKO detention centers. Mohammad Reza Eskandari, Tahereh Eskandari, and Habib Khorrami, in separate face-to-face interviews again provided Human Rights Watch with detailed and consistent accounts of their confinement in various MKO detention centers.¹⁸

[1] Also known as People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran

(PMOI).

[2] [http://Human RightsWatch.org/backgrounder/mena/iran0505/index.htm](http://HumanRightsWatch.org/backgrounder/mena/iran0505/index.htm)

[3] MasoudBanisadr, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel* (London: Saqi Books, 2004).

[4] Thereport was presented on September 21 at a meeting in Brussels sponsored by theFOFI, according to a September 23 press release on the website of the NationalCouncil of Resistance of Iran, an MKO-related group The text of the FOFI-document later became available on the same website: <http://ncr-iran.org/images/stories/advertising/ep%20report-with%20cover.pdf> Many of the points raised in the FOFI document also were raised separately incorrespondence addressed to Human Rights Watch by Lars Rise, a member of theNorwegian Parliament, and two members of the U.K. House of Lords, Lord EricAvebury and Lord Gordon Slynn.

[5] FOFI document, pg. 6.

[6] FOFI document, pg. 65.

[7] HumanRights Watch interview with Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, Germany, October 4, 2005.

[8] LordAvebury email to Human Rights Watch, June 15, 2005.

[9] HumanRights Watch interview with Abbas Sedeghinejad, Germany, October 2, 2005.

[10] HumanRights Watch interview with Alireza Mir Asgari, Germany, October 2, 2005.

[11] FOFI document, pgs. 60-62.

[12] http://hrw.org/backgrounder/mena/iran0505/4.htm#_Toc103593132:: "... the MKO's publication Mojahed of March 2, 1998, lists Parviz Ahmadias an MKO 'martyr' killed by Iranian intelligence agents."

[13] HumanRights Watch interview with Abbas Sedeghinejad, Germany, October 2, 2005. HumanRights Watch interview with Alireza Mir Asgari, Germany, October 2, 2005. HumanRights Watch interview with Ali Ghashghavi, Germany, October 3, 2005. Theirtestimonies regarding Ahmadi's death appeared in

No Exit, Pgs. 16-17.

[14] FOFI document, p. 69.

[15] HumanRights Watch interview with Yasser Ezati, Germany, October 3, 2005.

[16] FOFI document, p. 78.

[17] FOFI document, p. 78.

[18] HumanRights Watch interview with Tahereh Eskandari, The Netherlands, October 6, 2005. Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammad Reza eskandari, The Netherlands, October 6, 2005. Human Rights Watch interview with Habib Khorrami, The Netherlands, October 6, 2005.



RAWSTORY

On Cheney, Rumsfeld order, US outsourcing special ops, intelligence to Iraq terror group, intelligence officials say

April 2006

The Pentagon is bypassing official US intelligence channels and turning to a dangerous and unruly cast of characters in order to create strife in Iran in preparation for any possible attack, former and current intelligence officials say.

One of the operational assets being used by the Defense Department is a right-wing terrorist organization known as Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK), which is being “run” in two southern regional areas of Iran. They are Baluchistan, a Sunni stronghold, and Khuzestan, a Shia region where a series of recent attacks has left many dead and hundreds injured in the last three months.

One former counterintelligence official, who wished to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the information, describes the Pentagon as pushing MEK shortly after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The drive to use the insurgent group was said to have been advanced by the Pentagon under the influence of the Vice President’s office and opposed by the State Department, National Security Council and then-National Security Advisor,

MEK
Uncovered

189



Condoleezza Rice.

“The MEK is run by a husband and wife team who were given bases in northern Baghdad by Saddam,” the intelligence official told RAW STORY. “The US army secured a key MEK facility 60 miles northwest of Baghdad shortly after the 2003 invasion, but they did not secure the MEK and let them basically be because [then Deputy Defense Secretary Paul] Wolfowitz was thinking ahead to Iran.”

Another former intelligence official added that the US military had detained as many as 3,500 members of MEK at Iraq’s Camp Ashraf since the start of the war, including the highest level ranking MEK leaders. Ashraf is about 60 miles west of the Iranian border.

This intelligence official, wishing to remain anonymous, confirmed the policy tensions and also described them as most departments on one side and the Pentagon on the other.

“We disarmed [the MEK] of major weapons but not small arms. [Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld was pushing to use them as a military special ops team, but policy infighting between their camp and Condi, but she was able to fight them off for a while,” said the intelligence official. According to still another intelligence source, the policy infighting ended last year when Donald Rumsfeld, under pressure from Vice President Cheney, came up with a plan to “convert” the MEK by having

MEK
Uncovered

190

them simply quit their organization.

“These guys are nuts,” this intelligence source said. “Cambone and those guys made MEK members swear an oath to Democracy and resign from the MEK and then our guys incorporated them into their unit and trained them.”

Stephen Cambone is the Undersecretary of Defense Intelligence. His office did not return calls for comment.

According to all three intelligence sources, military and intelligence officials alike were alarmed that instead of securing a known terrorist organization, which has been responsible for acts of terror against Iranian targets and individuals all over the world – including US civilian and military casualties – Rumsfeld under instructions from Cheney, began using the group on special ops missions into Iran to pave the way for a potential Iran strike.

“They are doing whatever they want, no oversight at all,” one intelligence source said.

Indeed, Saddam Hussein himself had used the MEK for acts of terror against non-Sunni Muslims and had assigned domestic security detail to the MEK as a way of policing dissent among his own people. It was under the guidance of MEK ‘policing’ that Iraqi citizens who were not Sunni were routinely tortured, attacked and arrested.

Although the specifics of what the MEK is being used for remain unclear, a UN official close to the Security Council explained that the newly renamed MEK soldiers are being run instead of military advance teams, committing acts of violence in hopes of staging an insurgency of the Iranian Sunni population.

Asked how long the MEK agents have been active in the region under the guidance of the US military civilian leadership, the UN official explained that the clandestine war had been going on for roughly a year and included unmanned drones run jointly by several agencies.

In a stunning repeat of pre-war Iraq activities, the Bush admin-

istration continues to publicly call for action and pursue diplomatic solutions to allegations that Iran is bomb-ready. Behind the scenes, however, the administration is already well underway and engaged in ground operations in Iran.

The British, however, are less enthused about a strike in Iran. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has called an American strike on Iran “inconceivable,” while Prime Minister Tony Blair has said he’s keeping all his options open. Asked about the MEK, a senior British intelligence official said that the Brits are not yet sure of what the situation on Iran’s southern border is, but vehemently condemned any joint activity with the terrorist organization.

“We don’t know who precisely is carrying out those attacks in the south but we believe it is MEK,” the British official said.

When asked if the US military is running the MEK, the source was careful to indicate that while there is a US unit in Iran gathering information, it’s difficult to say if they are in any way involved with MEK.

“The people who are inside Iran are from a US Special mission unit,” the source explained. “They are called by codenames, but would not be involved in the bomb blasts. They want to get in, get the intelligence and go out with anyone knowing they have been there. But the bomb blasts might be diversions away from the operations by this US special mission unit. The British are definitely not involved in any of this.”

Moreover, the British official expressed that any operations with MEK would violate their own military code and would absolutely not be tolerated.

“We have very strict rules and can’t go consorting with terrorists,” the official added. “We did it in Northern Ireland. No more.”



Children of ‘the resistance’

October 2006

A National Post investigation has found the banned terrorist group Mujahedin-e Khalq recruited teens in Canada and sent them abroad to overthrow the Iranian government by force. Today, we begin a five-part series about a Canadian family that got deeply involved with the guerrillas -- and now regrets it.

RICHMOND HILL - The video playing on the 36-inch Hitachi television in Mustafa Mohammady's living room in the suburbs north of Toronto shows his daughter Somayeh in a paramilitary uniform, her hair tucked under a khaki scarf that's knotted at the neck.

The home video has come to the Mohammadys from the plains north of Baghdad, where their daughter lives in a guerrilla compound called Camp Ashraf, the headquarters of the Organization of the Freedom Fighters of the Iranian People.

A student at Etobicoke Collegiate Institute, Somayeh dropped out of Grade 10 to join the rebels, and for the past several years her parents have done little else except try to get her back to Canada. They have written pleading letters to guerrilla commanders and the Canadian government. They travelled to Iraq four times.

But she is there still.

“Her brain's been washed,” her younger brother Morteza said. “The Canadian government needs to take her out of there. We know my sister is not a terrorist.”

The Mohammadys are nervous and sleepless with worry, but as much as the parents are torn up that their daughter is a

MEK
Uncovered

193



member of what the Canadian government calls a terrorist organization, in arguably the most dangerous country in the world, they also know they are partly to blame because she went to the camp with their consent.

“I trusted them,” Mustafa, himself a former activist in the group, said of the guerrillas, better known as the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK. “At the time I sent my daughter, I trusted them.... I thought this organization respect the human rights. I never thought they would do the same thing [Ayatollah] Khomeini did to his people.”

An investigation by the National Post has found that the MEK sent recruiters to Canada to enlist teenagers and send them to Camp Ashraf, where they were armed and trained to overthrow the Iranian government by force.

One Iranian group in Toronto, the Centre for Thought, Dialogue and Human Rights in Iran, says three boys and seven girls under the age of 18 were sent to Ashraf.

The teens were sent from Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. Dozens of others older than 18 have attended the camp.

To date, only one Canadian is known to have returned to Canada from Ashraf. The rest remain at the camp to this day, either unable or unwilling to leave, and Somayeh is among them.

The Mohammady family fled Tehran after it degenerated into a rigid dictatorship of mullahs. Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1979 Islamic revolution had broad support at first, but disenchantment

soon set in.

The MEK, led by Massoud Rajavi, had been one of the strongest supporters of the revolt to depose the Shah, who preceded Khomeini's rule. But when Khomeini began a crackdown on opposition groups, the MEK turned against the new regime and began assassinating key government officials and hijacking Iranian airplanes. In some cases, it used suicide bombers. In Tehran, Mustafa was active in the MEK, although he said he was never a member, only a supporter who distributed literature and tried to convince others to join. But his family was deeply involved.

His brother-in-law, Hadi Hamzeh Dolabi, joined the MEK but was arrested in 1981 and executed by Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards three years later. A sister-in-law, Hourieh Hamzieh, joined the MEK as well, but was killed in 1988.

Under surveillance and fearing for his life, Mustafa fled with his wife and children to Turkey in 1992. Eighteen months later, Ottawa recognized the Mohammadays as refugees, and in September, 1994, they flew to Amsterdam and then Toronto. For the first two months, they lived in a refugee shelter in Scarborough, but as their first Canadian winter set in, they found their own apartment in Etobicoke.

In the spring, Mustafa went to a community event to celebrate Noruz, the Iranian New Year. Some activists who ran a support network for the MEK in Canada were there and they invited Mustafa to their office in Toronto.

From the outside, it looked like just an ordinary home in a residential neighbourhood. But inside, everyone wore MEK uniforms, and the walls were decorated with MEK flags and portraits of Rajavi and his wife, Maryam.

The house served as the Canadian headquarters of the Mujahedin's international support network. From this unassuming house, the MEK organized protests and raised money. But it was also recruiting for Camp Ashraf, the 36-square-kilometre military encampment that Saddam Hussein had set aside for



the MEK in Iraq to stage cross-border attacks against Iran. Mustafa watched propaganda films at the centre with his wife and children and attended group discussions.

Eager to see the overthrow of the Iranian regime he blamed for the deaths of his family members, he began to spend a few hours a day collecting money for the cause.

He went door to door, or stood on a street corner near Dundas and Spadina. He would show photos of crying children, and tell stories about how their parents had been executed by the Iranian regime. On Saturdays and Sundays, his daughter Somayeh would accompany him on his rounds. She was 13, maybe 14 at the time.

In 1997, the MEK began a major recruiting drive. The fighting ranks were ageing, and young blood was needed to rejuvenate the People's Army. During the 1991 Gulf War, MEK members at Camp Ashraf had sent their children abroad for their safety. Some of them came to Canada to stay with aunts and uncles. The recruiters were tasked with bringing them back, along with as many other young Iranian expatriates as they could get.

The recruiter who came to Canada was a petite woman with glasses and a headscarf who went by the name Mazia. She began to pay a lot of attention to Somayeh. They talked about Somayeh's favourite aunt, the one who had died fighting with the Mujahedin almost a decade earlier. Mazia showed Somayeh photographs of Camp Ashraf and described it as a "very nice place."

Mazia convinced Somayeh to attend a demonstration in Washington, D.C., and on June 30, 1997, she crossed the border and travelled to the Pirayesh, the MEK's secret base in Sleepy Hollow, Va. Somayeh watched videos of Ashraf and met the head of the U.S. Mujahedin recruiting network, Sima, who offered to send her to Iraq to visit her aunt's grave.

Somayeh returned to Toronto and started Grade 10, but she dropped out to join the MEK. She was only 17 years old, but Sima told the Mohammadys their daughter would be safely

returned to them after a month.

Mustafa had a favourable opinion of the MEK back then. The security era ushered in by 9/11 was still three years away, and the Mujahedin had not yet been outlawed as a terrorist group. “We thought they were a nationalist group that wanted to topple the Iranian government,” he said. As for Ashraf, he thought it was “like other camps that were run by nice people. So I consented for my daughter to go there.”

Somayeh said her parents paid for her airfare. Mustafa denied that.

“I didn’t have the money,” he said. The MEK’s U.S. office bought the ticket, he insisted.

“I think the purpose was just to deceive some young people and get them there,” he said. “At that time, I did not know.” He said he thought she would be like an exchange student.

“I thought it was just another program.”

In February, 1998, Somayeh flew from New York to Amsterdam, then transferred to a flight to Amman, Jordan. From there, she went by road to Baghdad and then travelled north on a highway for 65 kilometres to a gate where palm trees and Iranian flags marked the entrance to the rebel base.

For the next decade, Camp Ashraf would be her home.

sbell@nationalpost.com

DECODING THE MUJAHEDIN-E KHALQ ORGANIZATION

Mujahedin-e Khalq: “The Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) is an Iranian terrorist organization that was based in Iraq until recently. It subscribes to an eclectic ideology that combines its own interpretation of Shiite Islamism with Marxist principles. The group aspires to overthrow the current regime in Iran and establish a democratic, socialist Islamic republic. This Islamic socialism can only be attained through the destruction of the existing regime and the elimination of Western influence, described as ‘Westoxication.’ To achieve this Islamic ideology, the use of physical force, armed struggle or jihad is necessary. Besides having had an alliance with Saddam Hussein, the organization

has or had ties with Amal [from which Hezbollah originated], the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Al Fatah and other Palestinian factions. The MEK is even suspected of past collusion with the regime of the Taliban in Afghanistan.” Source: “Currently listed entities,” Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, (www.psepc-sppcc.gc.ca/prg/ns/le/cle-en.asp).





2008

Foreign Policy Maverick

February 2008

Irving Kristol, a founder of neoconservatism, once said that a neoconservative is a liberal who's been mugged by reality. At Georgetown, we have Raymond Tanter, a conservative who's had his bike stolen. After the theft, he got a new chain intended for motorcycles, which looks more appropriate in the hand of a wrathful Hell's Angel than a dapper Georgetown professor.

"That's a heavy bike. The lock is over here, you're not even reaching the lock," he said before leaving campus to bike to Capitol Hill to talk with members of Congress (he wouldn't reveal their names) about his plan for solving America's problems in Iran and Iraq: relying on a group the State Department calls terrorists.

As the president of the Iran Policy Committee, a non-profit organization that promotes using Iranian oppositionists against Iran, Tanter is a tireless booster for the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an armed group of Iranian exiles that seeks to overthrow the Iranian government. Its efforts are hampered by its placement on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations, a classification Tanter says should be reversed so the MEK can counter Iran. Still, dressed in a matching plaid blazer, pants and bow tie, Tanter doesn't look like a Washington lobbyist. Only the phone clipped to his belt suggests that he is tied to a worldwide effort to change U.S. policy on a controversial army that the Council on Foreign Relations estimates has 10,000 members. Tanter does not consider himself a lobbyist—because the MEK is considered a terrorist group,

MEK
Uncovered

200



advocacy on their behalf is illegal.

The Thinker Professor Raymond Tanter says the Iranian rebel group Mujahedin-e-Khalq can reduce Sunni terrorism in Iraq and counter Iran's ayatollah regime.

EMILY VOIGTLANDER

"I'm not an advocacy group either, I'm a 501(c)(3)," he said, referring to the tax provision for non-profit groups. "The Iran Policy Committee is a 501(c)(3). We educate the public, we don't advocate."

Tanter has been busy educating people on both sides of the Atlantic in the past year. In addition to meeting with Congress, Tanter spoke in the British Houses of Lords and Commons last year and met with members of the European Parliament in Belgium. At the beginning of February, he held a press conference in France calling for the delisting of the MEK-linked National Council.

"I'm on a roll, don't you think?" he said of his recent activities abroad.

The MEK has been on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations since 1997 and has been blamed for killing civilians and American military personnel before the 1979 Iranian Revolution. A one-time ally of Iran's religious government, the MEK was exiled and fought on the Iraqi side in the Iran-Iraq War. The group, which has a largely female

MEK
Uncovered

201



officer corps, has been tied to numerous violent incidents; a 1981 bombing attack of the Iranian government killed 70 high-ranking officials. The MEK also allegedly helped Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in the bloody suppression of Kurdish and Shia rebellions in 1991, though the group denies involvement. Recently, the MEK has provided the United States with information about sites suspected to be involved in an Iranian nuclear program.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the American military bombed the MEK camp until a ceasefire was reached with the group that allowed it to keep its camp in exchange for not fighting Coalition forces. The MEK was not disbanded after the war, avoiding the fate of much of the Iraqi military, and Human Rights Watch reported in 2005 that the MEK's base was used to hold prisoners for the U.S. government.

While the United States and the MEK coexist in Iraq, their relationship is different in this country. In 2002, the State Department shut down the Washington offices of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, an umbrella group to which the MEK belongs. According to Tanter, treating the MEK like terrorists is counterproductive to American interests. In his evocatively-titled books *Baghdad Ablaze* and *Appeasing the Ayatollahs and Suppressing Democracy*, he promises a plethora of benefits to come from removing the MEK from the terrorist list: it would "wean Sunnis from the insurgency and break the cycle of sectarian violence" in Iraq and "help democratic forces establish liberty" in Iran.

Alireza Jafarzadeh at the National Press Club. Next to him (l to r) are Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney (ret.), Bruce McColm and Professor Tanter.

Courtesy ALIREZA JAFARZADEH

When he taught at the University of Michigan, Tanter helped convince prospective athletic recruits to choose the Wolverines. Now that he's at Georgetown, he insists he's not trying to recruit his students to his school of thought.

“I’m not a preacher, I’m a scholar,” he said.

In his class, Terrorism and Proliferation, Tanter uses an aggressive cold calling technique, imploring some students to “be Googling!”, others to challenge their classmates and one girl to smile. Tanter uses his connections with special guests to surprise his students, he once made them present threat assessments to Iranian dissident Alireza Jafarzadeh and former Spanish president José María Aznar.

During another class, former Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski discussed threats from Iran and Russia, and complimented the class on their presentations (he offered to send one student’s analysis to the Polish foreign minister).

“I’m probably in over my head,” Devon Cohen (SFS ‘10), one of Tanter’s students this semester, said, “But I love the class.” Tanter is aggressive about his views in class, according to Cohen. “It’s kind of his way or the highway in his perspective,” she said.

Tanter runs his class imperiously, telling students and presidents alike to speak louder or stand up when they talk.

“I do sound like a general, don’t I? Maybe a colonel,” he said, adding that despite his work on Iran he remains dedicated to teaching.

Tanter and his students frequently refer to his books about Iran and the MEK in class, though some question his estimate of the MEK’s power to change Iraq and Iran. Russ Greene (SFS ‘09) critiqued Tanter’s optimistic assessment of the group’s abilities in class, noting that “It kind of sounds like [Tanter is] a lobbyist for the MEK.”

“I forgive you for calling me a lobbyist,” he replied.

Once, while Tanter was a professor at Michigan, pro-Palestinian activists disrupted a speech he was giving.

“The protesters laid down on the ground and forced the security people to pick them up,” he said. “They put on YouTube that this was violence against students.”

While nothing similar has happened at Georgetown, some on

campus, like Daniel Byman, the director of Georgetown's Center for Peace and Security Studies, oppose Tanter's positive view of the MEK.

50,000 Strong for the MEK Last June, 50,000 Iranians rallied in Paris for Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the MEK.

Courtesy THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF RESISTANCE OF IRAN

"I generally agree with the U.S. government's view that it is a terrorist organization," he said, adding that he did not think the MEK should be taken off the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list. "It would anger some Shia groups we're having trouble with."

Byman did not discount Tanter himself, though, saying that despite their different views, he considers Tanter "serious."

"I work in hot topics," Tanter said, trying to explain the breadth of issues he has covered in his government and teaching jobs. Tanter's career plays like a highlight reel of American foreign policy crises: he has written books about Lebanon, Vietnam and rogue states, and was the personal representative for Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger at multiple arms control meetings. Tanter came to Washington after 9/11 because he "wanted to be closer to the action."

Here in D.C., besides teaching and running the Iran Policy Committee, Tanter has worked with the Department of Justice on terrorism issues.

"I think Professor Tanter has played an important role in igniting a debate in Washington about a policy option that was before him limited to Congress," Alireza Jafarzadeh, a former spokesman for the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the umbrella group that includes the MEK which had its Washington office closed, said. In 2002, Jafarzadeh gave the United States information which he said demonstrated a budding Iranian nuclear program.

"There was a lot of talk in the U.S. Congress supporting the

idea of regime change through relying on the Iranian opposition,” Jafarzadeh said. “But Professor Tanter made that an academic debate, a debate among the think tanks, the experts doing research on it, giving it much more depth than it was before.”

Tanter can’t remember when he started wearing bow ties, which have become, like the MEK, linked to his public persona. “I’ve been bow-tieing forever,” he said. The bow ties have contributed to Tanter’s reputation as a snappy dresser—in an article on the MEK, MSNBC called him “nattily dressed.”

After working for the Department of Defense and teaching at several American universities, Tanter was appointed to Ronald Reagan’s National Security Council in 1981 (he also worked on Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign). Asked if he knows anything about rumored negotiations between Ronald Reagan’s campaign staff and the Iranian government to hurt Jimmy Carter’s chances in the election, Tanter laughed and said he didn’t work in that part of the campaign—then pointed out that he didn’t deny or confirm the rumor.

Journalist Yvonne Ridley thinks Tanter’s claims about the MEK are ridiculous.

Courtesy YVONNE RIDLEY

During the campaign, Tanter worked with Zalmay Khalilzad, the current U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Tanter called Khalilzad his friend, then backtracked, saying “When someone is a friend who goes higher [professionally], you can’t really call them a friend anymore.”

Watching Khalilzad deliver a speech about the Middle East in Gaston Hall in November, Tanter knit his fingers under his chin, pointing out when the Ambassador echoed a point Tanter made in Baghdad Ablaze. When Khalilzad mentioned “internal elements in Iran,” Tanter leaned over excitedly and whispered “Did you hear that? Internal elements in Iran.” Despite this possible nod to the MEK, Tanter said he does not think his opinions have been adopted by the Washington foreign policy

establishment.

Working in the Reagan administration gave Tanter access not only to Khalilzad, but also other influential Republicans who continue to influence foreign policy. In the acknowledgments chapter of his book *Who's At the Helm?: Lessons of Lebanon*, he thanks Ronald Reagan, Donald Rumsfeld, and George Bush for being “supportive of [his] professional development.” Still, Tanter’s connections and history with Republicans haven’t been able to get him a meeting with the woman who could most help him get the MEK delisted: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

“I’m trying to get a ‘date’ with her,” he said, “But her staff is keeping me away.” Since the State Department decides what groups are designated as foreign terrorist organizations, one good meeting with Secretary Rice could mean new resources and status for the MEK and vindication for Tanter.

Tanter last visited Iran in 1975 when it was still ruled by the pro-Western Shah. After the Shah’s repressive regime was overthrown by a coalition of bourgeois intellectuals and fundamentalist Shia ayatollahs, the ayatollahs gained the upper hand and turned against the Shah’s foreign backers, including the United States.

“I’ve gotten invitations from the Iranian regime to come, which I consider to be—gick!” Tanter said, drawing his hand across his neck and making a noise like his throat was being cut. “They ask me to come on Iranian television all the time. No, I don’t want to give them the legitimacy.”

At least some in Iranian television aren’t eager to give him legitimacy, either.

“You’d have more chance of seeing the Pope’s b**ls [sic] than seeing this lot being taken seriously by anyone,” journalist Yvonne Ridley wrote in an e-mail. Ridley hosts a show on Press TV, an international television channel funded by the Iranian government.

Ridley also questioned Tanter’s claim that the MEK can bring

change to Iran.

“The Iranian Government hates them, the pro-Shah/return-the-Peacock-Throne lobby hate them. Saddam loved them and they were part of the famous ‘Saddam’s Tank Girls,’” she wrote, referring to the large number of women in the MEK army. Tanter’s personal conversation continually echoes his professional interest; he lists *Lawrence of Arabia*, a film whose hero gains his government’s support for a rebel movement in the Middle East, as one of his favorite movies, and he can turn anything into a metaphor about Iran. He plays tennis twice a week, and is quick to draw an analogy between this hobby and his passion.

“In tennis, stroke the ball leaning forward, not on your back-foot,” he wrote in an e-mail, “Similarly, the Iranian regime is leaning forward by building the Bomb, destabilizing Iraq and threatening its neighbors.” Even the air he breathes is fodder for a metaphor—Iranian meddling in Iraq “is like oxygen fanning the flames of conflict in Iraq.”

Despite his relentless focus on Iran and the MEK, Tanter says he will not let his work as an educator suffer. “I’m still committed to my teaching, even though I’m involved in all this transformational business,” Tanter said. Whether in the classroom, Congress, or Europe, Tanter’s work is teaching. Speaking about his research on Iran, Tanter said, “You don’t have to buy mine, just do yours.”

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Iran's Troubling Opposition

June 2008

On Monday the British parliament removed the People's Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK) from the U.K.'s list of banned terrorist organizations. The decision upholds a Court of Appeals' ruling in May that there is no evidence linking the Iranian opposition group to terrorism, and that it should be free to recruit, organize and raise money in Britain.

Western and Arab intelligence services have long appreciated the MEK for its sources deep inside Iran. The group was the first to provide evidence of Tehran's secret nuclear project. But the U.S. and Continental Europe shouldn't rush to follow London's move. Although the People's Mujahedeen has won the support of many Western politicians, it is not the force for democratic change it claims to be.

The MEK was founded in 1965 after a split in a Marxist-Leninist movement that had waged a guerrilla war in northern Iran. Its ideology emerged as a mix of Islam and Marxism, with ingredients from the Islamist pamphleteer Ali Shariati, who advocated an "Islam without a clergy."

With help from the KGB, the group engaged in a campaign against the former shah of Iran and sent cadres to Cuba, East Germany and Palestinian camps in Lebanon to train as guerrillas. Its hit men assassinated a dozen people, including an Iranian general and five American military and civilian technicians in the 1970s. An operation in 1971 to kidnap the U.S.

MEK
Uncovered

208



ambassador to Tehran, Douglas MacArthur III, failed. But it helped the group heighten its profile among anti-shah terrorist outfits.

Later, the MEK would play a key role in the events that swept Ayatollah Khomeini to power. The break with the mullahs came when the People's Mujahedeen, under its "Supreme Guide" Massoud Rajavi, attempted an armed uprising against the new regime in 1981. Not allowed to field candidates in presidential and parliamentary elections, the MEK sent hit squads to assassinate prominent mullahs and raided several military bases.

Khomeini's reaction was savage. More than 15,000 MEK militants and sympathizers were jailed and some 3,000 executed. Mr. Rajavi fled to Paris aboard a jetliner his supporters had hijacked, taking with him Abol-Hassan Banisadr, the first president of the Khomeinist republic. In a second wave of executions in 1988, Khomeini put more than 4,000 MEK members and sympathizers to death.

In Paris, meanwhile, France's Socialist government negotiated a deal in 1982 between the MEK and the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, which was then engaged in a war against Iran. Mr. Rajavi frequently visited Baghdad and formed a close relationship with Saddam, who set up camps in Iraq to train MEK militants for sabotage operations against Iran. Even after



the 1988 cease-fire between Tehran and Baghdad, Mr. Rajavi, with Saddam's approval, continued a low-intensity war against Iran from Iraqi territory.

Mr. Rajavi's relationship with Saddam would get the MEK involved even in genocide. In 1991, the MEK's 10,000-strong force in Iraq helped Saddam in his brutal campaign against the Kurds and Iraqi Shiites, a campaign that left over 100,000 dead. The MEK saw Iraqi Shiites as allies of Iran and thus enemies of itself. This is why the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has opened proceedings against the MEK for "crimes against humanity." In 2003, the U.S.-led coalition extended prisoner-of-war protection to MEK members in Iraq, including some 4,000 combatants, now disarmed, in Camp Ashraf northeast of Baghdad. Mr. Rajavi is under "restricted residence" in Baghdad.

Over the years, the MEK has suffered waves of defections, each producing fresh testimonies depicting it as a sect dedicated to the cult of Mr. Rajavi and his estranged wife, Maryam Azedanloo-Qajar. Mr. Rajavi declared her the "President of the Republic of Iran" almost two decades ago.

Does all of this mean that the British decision is morally wrong and perhaps politically counterproductive? Four years ago, my answer would have been an unequivocal yes. Today, I am not so sure.

To start with, the group, which has never practiced terrorism on British soil, has not committed any terrorist act since January 2003, when it attacked an Iranian village close to the border with Iraq.

Besides, being blacklisted has not forced the MEK to mend its ways. Instead, the leadership has used the fact that it was put on a terror list to portray itself as a wrongly prosecuted community that required secretive modus operandi and Stalinist discipline from its members.

It also is somewhat hypocritical for Europeans to put the MEK on a terrorist list but deal with the Khomeinist regime, the lead-

ing sponsor of terror in the world, as if it were a respectable government. What's more, Tehran exploits the MEK's terrorist label to brand all Iranian opposition groups as "terrorists and traitors."

Finally, blacklisting the MEK makes it harder for other Iranian opposition groups to establish contact with it, and to isolate its terrorist elements and integrate its rank-and-file into a broader popular movement for a democratic Iran.

Despite its bloody history, the MEK continues to enjoy much support inside Iran and among Iranian exiles. Some sympathize with the sufferings of its members: No other political group has sustained so many losses at the hands of the mullahs. Others see the MEK as a valuable asset in the fight against Tehran because it is the only group considered to be as ruthless as the mullahs themselves. These pragmatists like to cite a Persian proverb: "Only a hound from Mazandaran could catch the fox of the Mazandaran forest."

But before Continental Europe and the U.S. take the MEK off their terrorist lists, it needs to reform itself as some other violent groups have. Northern Ireland's Sinn Fein is an example. To start with, the MEK has to recognize and accept responsibility for its murderous past. A sincere mea culpa could help it out of its moral and political ghetto.

Next, the MEK should publicly renounce terror and commit itself to working for a new Iranian system based on pluralism, the rule of law and democratic elections.

It is also important that the MEK cooperate with Iraqi justice to shed light on the group's role in the repression of Shiites and Kurds under Saddam. Such cooperation would include handing over MEK figures sought by Iraqi prosecutors. The MEK also has to develop a new leadership for itself through open, transparent and multicandidate elections.

Some Iranians may feel that, given its past crimes, the MEK doesn't deserve a second chance. Nevertheless, there has been a change of generations in the MEK. Many of those



who murdered innocent people or betrayed Iran by working for Saddam have died or retired; the rest have dwindled to a small minority. The MEK now faces a stark choice: Reform and become a pluralistic group working for Iranian democracy, or remain an obscure sect undeserving of Western support.



2009





Seven Plead Guilty to Providing Material Support to Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization

MEK
Uncovered

214

April 2009

SANTA ANA, CA—Seven people who were engaged in fundraising activities on behalf of a foreign terrorist organization pleaded guilty today to federal charges of providing material support to the group.

With jury selection in the case underway, the seven defendants each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization and one count of actually providing material support to the group. The terrorist organization at the center of this case is the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), which was designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States Secretary of State in October 1997. The designation has been renewed on multiple occasions and remains in effect today.

Appearing this afternoon before United States District Judge David O. Carter, the seven defendants admitted that they knowingly raised funds to support the activities of the MEK by

collecting money from MEK supporters and soliciting money from unwitting donors at public locations, such as Los Angeles International Airport. The unwitting donors were told that they were supporting a charity called the Committee for Human Rights (CHR), which was sometimes referred to as the Committee for Human Rights in Iran. However, CHR was simply a “front organization” for MEK fund-raising operations in the United States, and CHR was being used by the MEK as a front to raise money to support MEK operations and activities, including its terrorist activities.

“These defendants raised money at locations like LAX on behalf of the MEK, which is a terrorist organization,” said United States Attorney Thomas P. O’Brien. “We cannot allow any terrorist organization to fundraise on our shores or to steal money from our own citizens so that they can finance their own terrorism operations. Terrorism anywhere poses a significant security risk to the United States.”

“Part of the mission of the Joint Terrorism Task Force is to investigate fund-raising activities of terrorist groups, some that are disguised as charitable organizations,” said Salvador Hernandez, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI in Los Angeles. “Today’s guilty pleas are the result of hard work and perseverance by investigators and prosecutors, and should send a message that monetary support of a designated terrorist group is more than a financial transaction, but a tangible link to terrorist organizations.”

This case began in March 2001, when a federal grand jury in Los Angeles indicted the seven defendants. A District Court in Los Angeles dismissed the indictment, but the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the lower court’s ruling in 2006, and the United States Supreme Court declined to review the matter. In February 2007, the case returned to Los Angeles and was eventually assigned to Judge Carter in Santa Ana.

The seven defendants who pleaded guilty today are:

- Roya Rahmani, of Vienna, Virginia, 48;

- Alireza Mohammadmoradi, of Los Angeles, 38;
- Moustafa Ahmady, of Los Angeles, 54;
- Hossein Kalani Afshari, of Mission Viejo, 52;
- Hassan Rezaie, of Los Angeles, 54;
- Navid Taj, of Santa Monica, 58; and
- Mohammad Omidvar, of Corona, 54.

As a result of the guilty pleas, each defendant faces a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison. Judge Carter is scheduled to sentence the defendants on August 10. The investigation in this case was conducted by the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, which includes agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, IRS-Criminal Investigation and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.



U.S. Handling of Mujahedin-E-Khalq Since U.S. Invasion of Iraq Is Examined

August 2009

At the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Coalition forces classified the Mujahedin-e Khalq, a militant organization from Iran with cult-like elements that advocates the overthrow of Iran's current government, as an enemy force.

The MEK had provided security services to Saddam Hussein from camps established in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War to fight Iran in collaboration with Saddam's forces and resources. A new study from the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit research organization, looks at how coalition forces handled this group following the invasion.

Although the MEK is a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States, coalition forces never had a clear mission on how to deal with it.

After a ceasefire was signed between Coalition forces and the MEK, the U.S. Secretary of Defense designated this group's members as civilian "protected persons" rather than combatant prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. The coalition's treatment of the MEK leaves it – and the United States in particular – open to charges of hypocrisy, offering security to a terrorist group rather than breaking it up.



Research suggests that most of the MEK rank-and-file are neither terrorists nor freedom fighters, but trapped and brain-washed people who would be willing to return to Iran if they were separated from the MEK leadership. Many members were lured to Iraq from other countries with false promises, only to have their passports confiscated by the MEK leadership, which uses physical abuse, imprisonment, and other methods to keep them from leaving.

Iraq wants to expel the group, but no country other than Iran will accept it. The RAND study suggests the best course of action would have been to repatriate MEK rank-and-file members back to Iran, where they have been granted amnesty since 2003. To date, Iran appears to have upheld its commitment to MEK members in Iran. The study also concludes better guidelines be established for the possible detention of members of designated terrorist organizations.

The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq; A Policy Conundrum

August 2009

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, coalition forces classified the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian dissident group dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Iranian government, as an enemy force. The MEK had provided security services to Saddam Hussein from its camps in Iraq and had been listed as a foreign terrorist organization by the Secretary of State. After a cease-fire was signed, the U.S. Secretary of Defense designated this group's members as civilian "protected persons" rather than combatant prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions. A RAND study examined the evolution of this controversial decision, which has left the United States open to charges of hypocrisy in the war on terrorism. An examination of MEK activities establishes its cultic practices and its deceptive recruitment and public relations strategies. A series of coalition decisions served to facilitate the MEK leadership's control over its members. The government of Iraq wants to expel the group, but no country other than Iran will accept it. Thus, the RAND study concludes that the best course of action would be to repatriate the majority of its members to Iran, which in 2003 granted amnesty to the MEK rank and file and appears to have upheld its commitment. The coalition's experience with the MEK also offers lessons for dealing with unusual militias in future military actions and for providing better training for field commanders and enlisted personnel.


 MEK
Uncovered

219

2010



Congressional backers look to exiled Iranian group for regime change

September 2010

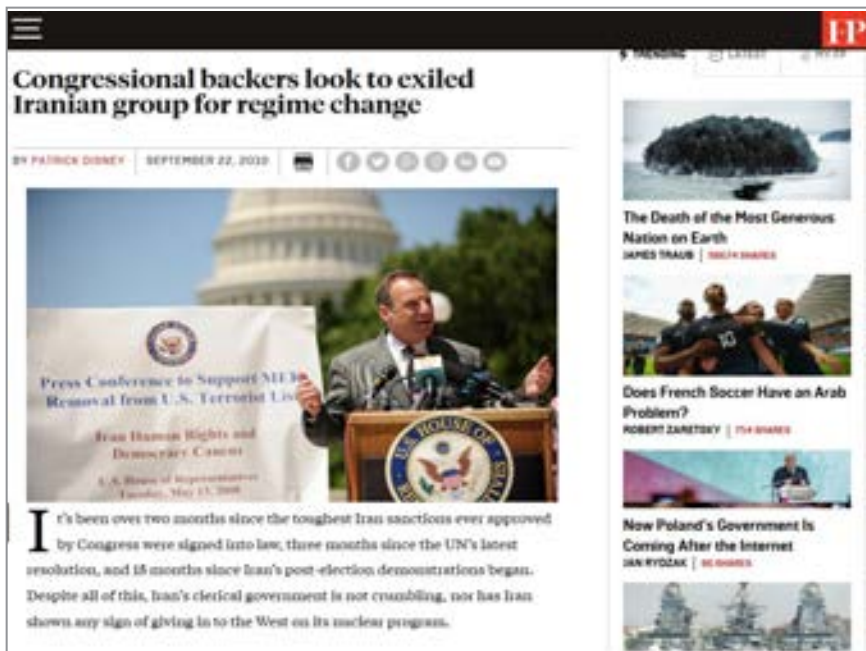
It's been over two months since the toughest Iran sanctions ever approved by Congress were signed into law, three months since the UN's latest resolution, and 15 months since Iran's post-election demonstrations began. Despite all of this, Iran's clerical government is not crumbling, nor has Iran shown any sign of giving in to the West on its nuclear program.

Recent weeks have seen a renewed discussion of military options for stopping Iran's nuclear program – kicked off by Jeffrey Goldberg's cover article in the Atlantic. But there is also a campaign underway to promote a different option on Iran: regime change, via Iranian dissidents in exile.

Members of Congress led by Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA) have introduced a resolution calling on the Secretary of State and the President to throw the support of the United States behind an exiled Iranian terrorist group seeking to overthrow the Iranian regime and install themselves in power. Calling the exiled organization "Iran's main opposition," Filner is urging the State Department to end the blacklisting of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) — a group listed by the State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). The resolution currently has 83 cosponsors and is gaining significant ground.

MEK
Uncovered

221



According to a letter from Filner to his House colleagues: Neither war nor appeasement is a solution to Iran’s threats. Change can only be sought through reliance on the opposition which pursues a democratic, secular, and nuclear-free republic. Accordingly, American should empower the Iranian people by eliminating obstacles that impede the opposition. The MEK — a sort of Ahmed Chalabi for Iran — calls itself a government-in-exile, with a huge public base of support and a powerful megaphone both in the US and Europe to promote its anti-mullah agenda. Counted among the groups supporters are former Ambassador John Bolton, former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, and countless others in positions of prominence. Capitol Hill staffers have long known (and for many, come to dread) the familiar faces of MEK activists pounding the pavement in the House and Senate office buildings. One House staffer told me that the MEK is “the most mobilized grassroots advocacy effort in the country — AIPAC included.” And though it’s impossible to keep up with the various names and aliases the group or its

supporters go by, the agenda is clear: to be removed from the terrorist list and to gain US backing in their fight against Iran's clerical government.

According to former members, though, the MEK is a cult-like organization where members are required to divorce their spouses and hand over their children to be raised by others — a powerful disincentive to potential defectors. Its ideology blends elements of Islamism with Marxism, though its public face has evolved over time to become much more appealing to Western backers. The group now places a strong emphasis on its vision for a secular, democratic, and nuclear-free Iran. According to the group's supporters, the MEK abandoned terrorism in 2003.

The designation of the MEK as a terrorist organization stems from its activities inside Iran aimed at overthrowing both the Shah's government and, later, the Islamic Republic. According to the State Department's description included in the FTO listing, "[d]uring the 1970s the MEK staged terrorist attacks inside Iran and killed several US military personnel and civilians working on defense projects in Tehran," and their activities continued through the 1990's and after.

For Americans, perhaps nothing about the group is more offensive than its support of the takeover of the US Embassy in 1979, during which its members strongly denounced the hostages' ultimate release in January 1981. But for Iranians, the MEK's betrayal came during the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980's, when the group sided with Saddam Hussein in the fight against their home country. The group bombed Iran's parliament in 1981, killing both the president and the Prime Minister, and regularly assassinated and bombed Iranian governmental officials up until the 2000's.

Thus, the MEK organization has literally zero support among the Iranian people. The closest thing to how Iranians feel about the MEK is how Americans feel about al-Qaeda. It's not even a subject of debate.





Which is why it's bizarre that members of Congress would want to lend US credibility to such an organization. Iran's hardliners already justify repression and executions by accusing their opponents of siding with the MEK; and another favorite refrain from the clerics has to do with a foreign conspiracy to carry out regime change. So wouldn't de-listing the MEK hand Iran's hardliners precisely the pretext to crack down on dissidents that Rep. Filner ostensibly seeks to deny them?

The fact is Congress fundamentally misunderstands the nature of Iran's opposition. Although the Green Movement has largely subsided, it held a lot of political weight in the aftermath of the election last year — but at no time was the MEK a part of the Green Movement. Zara Rahnavard, the wife of Mir Hossein Mousavi, sought to put an end to the confusion by saying:

The MEK can't be part of the Green Movement. This bankrupt political group now makes some laughable claims, but the Green Movement and the MEK have a wall between them and all of us, including myself, Mr. Mousavi, Mr. Khatami, and Mr. Karroubi and all of us within the Green Movement do not consider the MEK a part of the Green Movement.

Rep. Filner and his congressional colleagues are wrong to support this group. Regardless of whether the MEK has abandoned terrorism, they continue to call for American bombing, invasion, and occupation of Iran. De-listing the MEK would signal US backing for the group's agenda, including regime change operations, and would confuse some of the most hated Iranians in the world with the millions of true Iranian democrats who supported the Green Movement.

Nor should the US be in the business of actively pursuing regime change in Iran. It was to President Obama's credit when he entered office signaling a willingness to live with the current regime in exchange for a change in its behavior. For the first time, a US president learned from our past mistakes and intended to back up America's promise not to interfere in Iran's internal politics. To suggest that the US should back an exiled

terrorist organization as our last best hope would not only endanger the lives of scores of innocent Iranians; it would wreck any chance President Obama has in dealing credibly with Tehran.

If the US has learned anything from its recent history in the Middle East, particularly Iraq and Afghanistan, it's that there is a right way and a wrong way to promote democracy. It should go without saying that Rep. Filner's proposal is the wrong way for Iran.





Rudy Giuliani Proudly Supports Iranian Terrorist Group

December 2010

What are Rudy Giuliani and several major Bush administration officials doing in Paris this week? Addressing a militant Iranian exile group that the U.S. government has designated a terrorist organization, of course.

This Wednesday, a group of prominent Bush-era Republicans, including former NYC Mayor Rudy Guiliani, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former White House adviser Frances Townsend and former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, flew to Paris to speak in support of an Iranian exile group there — one that's been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S.

"The United States should not just be on your side," Giuliani told the group, the Washington Post reported. "It should be enthusiastically on your side. You want the same things we want." The group, known as Mujaheddin-e Khalq or MEK, is a militant group that's been violently fighting the Iranian government since the 1960s. It has ties to the regime of Saddam Hussein, which trained and outfitted the MEK and for whom the MEK fought in the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. According to the State Department, which declared the group a terrorist organization in 1997, the group's philosophy is a combination of "Marxism, Islam, and feminism."

MEK
Uncovered

226



Giuliani and the others told the cheering crowd that the Obama administration should take a stronger hand against Iranian leaders. Townsend scoffed at the use of negotiations and sanctions, without suggesting a tactic that she believes could work.

“Appeasement of dictators leads to war, destruction and the loss of human lives,” Giuliani said. “For your organization to be described as a terrorist organization is just really a disgrace.” The four are not lone wolves in their support for MEK. Last Friday, at a symposium organized by a group called ExecutiveAction and moderated by erstwhile Colorado gubernatorial candidate Tom Tancredo (R), a group of current and former officials called for the U.S. to lift MEK’s terrorist designation and get tougher on Iran.

“The problem is not that a tough approach has failed,” Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), the incoming Foreign Affairs Committee chair, said at the forum, “but that it has yet to be fully tried.”

Likewise, a resolution surfaced in the House this year to urge the administration to drop MEK from the terror list. It garnered 112 sponsors, including some Democrats, but died in the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Britain and the European Union have dropped terrorist designations for the group, and a U.S. federal court in July ordered Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to review the designation.



2011





Rudy Giuliani and John Bolton Are Terrorists Now

January 2011

Did Rudy Giuliani, Tom Ridge, John Bolton, and a bunch of other neocons really attend a rally in support of a communist Saddam Hussein-loving terrorist organization last month? Yes! Is that really a crime? Yes!

In today's New York Times, attorney David Cole points out that the Patriot Act makes it a (thought) crime to help, want to help, or in any way nod approvingly toward a group that has been designated a terrorist entity by the State Department. For instance: The U.S. has decided that the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which conducts attacks against our NATO ally Turkey, is a terrorist group. So anyone who, say, wants to train PKK members on how to petition the U.N. for redress of grievances against Turkey, is guilty of the crime of providing material support to a terrorist organization. Cole represented a group called the Humanitarian Law Project in a case before the Supreme Court last year arguing that the material support law is unconstitutional, and he lost. So it's settled.

Which makes it very odd that Giuliani, Bolton, Ridge, Bush-era Attorney General Michael Mukasey, and Bush Homeland Security adviser Frances Frago Townsend attended a rally last month in Paris to support the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a terror group dedicated to overthrowing the Iranian regime. It's odd because 1) The MEK are communists (that's an MEK terrorist pictured along with the group's logo, which features

MEK
Uncovered

229



a sickle), 2) they helped Saddam Hussein carry out atrocities against Iraq's Shiite population in the 1990s, and 3) they killed Americans in the 1980s and helped carry out the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. But it's also odd because the MEK is currently on that State Department list of terror groups, so happy thoughts about them are illegal.

The former Bush officials presumably like the MEK because the MEK wants to kill Iranians, which is a good thing right now even though Saddam Hussein probably killed more Iranians than anyone who ever lived and that didn't seem to get him much sympathy from John Bolton. The Middle East is confusing! "The United States should not just be on your side," Giuliani told the MEK crowd at the rally. "It should be enthusiastically on your side. You want the same things we want." The event was sponsored by something called the French Committee for a Democratic Iran, which the Washington Post describes as "a pressure group formed to support MEK."

Giuliani's use of the second-person there—the U.S. should be on "your side"—is kind of important, because under the Supreme Court's interpretation of the material support statute, any public "advocacy performed in coordination with, or at the direction of, a foreign terrorist organization" is a crime. Giuliani could say "I love the MEK" on Fox News, and that wouldn't be a crime. But if he says it in a way that is coordinated with the MEK, then it becomes a crime. And when you say it actually,

directly to the MEK at a rally for a pressure group formed to support the MEK, that sounds a lot like coordination.

Of course, Giuliani et. al. don't really want MEK to go around killing people. They probably just want to bring the group out into the open and help it pursue the end to Iranian tyranny through peaceable, lawful conduct. And any law that criminalizes that sort of support is a stupid and bad law. Right, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, who had the enthusiastic support of Giuliani during your nomination process?

Material support meant to "promot[e] peaceable, lawful conduct,"...can further terrorism by foreign groups in multiple ways. "Material support" is a valuable resource by definition. Such support frees up other resources within the organization that may be put to violent ends. It also importantly helps lend legitimacy to foreign terrorist groups-legitimacy that makes it easier for those groups to persist, to recruit members, and to raise funds-all of which facilitate more terrorist attacks.

We put in calls to Giuliani, Bolton, Mukasey, and Ridge to ask how they differentiate their attendance at a rally of MEK members from supporting a terrorist group, but haven't heard back.



Leading conservatives openly support a Terrorist group

January 2011

How can CNN continue to employ Fran Townsend in light of her pro-terrorism advocacy?

Imagine if a group of leading American liberals met on foreign soil with — and expressed vocal support for — supporters of a terrorist group that had (a) a long history of hateful anti-American rhetoric, (b) an active role in both the takeover of a U.S. embassy and Saddam Hussein's brutal 1991 repression of Iraqi Shiites, (c) extensive financial and military support from Saddam, (d) multiple acts of violence aimed at civilians, and (e) years of being designated a "Terrorist organization" by the U.S. under Presidents of both parties, a designation which is ongoing? The ensuing uproar and orgies of denunciation would be deafening.

But on December 23, a group of leading conservatives — including Rudy Giuliani and former Bush officials Michael Mukasey, Tom Ridge, and Fran Townsend — did exactly that. In Paris, of all places, they appeared at a forum organized by supporters of the Mujaheddin-e Khalq (MEK) — a group declared by the U.S. since 1997 to be "terrorist organization" — and expressed wholesale support for that group. Worse — on foreign soil — they vehemently criticized their own country's

MEK
Uncovered

232



opposition to these Terrorists and specifically “demanded that Obama instead take the [] group off the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations and incorporate it into efforts to overturn the mullah-led government in Tehran.” In other words, they are calling on the U.S. to embrace this Saddam-supported, U.S.-hating Terrorist group and recruit them to help overthrow the government of Iran. To a foreign audience, Mukasey denounced his own country’s opposition to these Terrorists as “nothing less than an embarrassment.”

Using common definitions, there is good reason for the MEK to be deemed by the U.S. Government to be a Terrorist group. In 2007, the Bush administration declared that “MEK leadership and members across the world maintain the capacity and will to commit terrorist acts in Europe, the Middle East, the United States, Canada, and beyond,” and added that the group exhibits “cult-like characteristics.” The Council on Foreign Relations has detailed that the MEK has been involved in numerous violent actions over the years, including many directed at Americans, such as “the 1979 takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran by Iranian revolutionaries” and “the killings of U.S. military personnel and civilians working on defense projects in Tehran in the 1970s.” This is whom Giuliani, Ridge, Townsend and other conservatives are cheering.

Applying the orthodoxies of American political discourse, how can these Terrorist-supporting actions by prominent Ameri-





can conservatives not generate intense controversy? For one thing, their appearance in France to slam their own country's foreign policy blatantly violates the long-standing and rigorously enforced taboo against criticizing the U.S. Government while on dreaded foreign soil (the NYT previously noted that "nothing sets conservative opinion-mongers on edge like a speech made by a Democrat on foreign soil"). Worse, their conduct undoubtedly constitutes the crime of "aiding and abetting Terrorism" as interpreted by the Justice Department — an interpretation recently upheld as constitutional by the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision last year in *Holder v. Humanitarian Law*. Georgetown Law Professor David Cole represented the Humanitarian Law plaintiffs in their unsuccessful challenge to the DOJ's interpretation of the "material support" statute, and he argues today in *The New York Times* that as a result of that ruling, it is a felony in the U.S. "to engage in public advocacy to challenge a group's 'terrorist' designation or even to encourage peaceful avenues for redress of grievances."

Like Cole, I believe the advocacy and actions of these Bush officials in support of this Terrorist group should be deemed constitutionally protected free expression. But under American law and the view of the DOJ, it isn't. There are people sitting in prison right now with extremely long prison sentences for so-called "material support for terrorism" who did little different than what these right-wing advocates just did. What justifies allowing these Bush officials to materially support a Terrorist group with impunity?

Then there's CNN. How can they possibly continue to employ someone — Fran Townsend — who so openly supports a Terrorist group? Less than six months ago, that network abruptly fired its long-time producer, Octavia Nasr, for doing nothing more than expressing well wishes upon the death of Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, one of the Shiite world's most beloved religious figures. Her sentiments were echoed by the British Ambassador to Lebanon, Frances Guy, who wrote a

piece entitled “The Passing of a Decent Man,” and by the journal Foreign Policy, which hailed him as “a voice of moderation and an advocate of unity.” But because Fadlallah had connections to Hezbollah — a group designated as a Terrorist organization by the U.S. — and was an opponent of Israel, neocon and other right-wing organs demonized Nasr and CNN quickly accommodated them by ending her career.

Granted, Nasr was a news producer and Townsend is at CNN to provide commentary, but is it even remotely conceivable to imagine CNN employing someone who openly advocated for Hamas or Hezbollah, who met with their supporters on foreign soil and bashed the U.S. for classifying them as a Terrorist organization and otherwise acting against them or, more radically still, demanding that the U.S. embrace these groups as allies? To ask the question is to answer it. So why is Fran Townsend permitted to keep her CNN job even as she openly meets with supporters of a Terrorist group with a long history of violence and anti-American hatred?

There is simply no limit on the manipulation and exploitation of the term “terrorism” by America’s political class. Joe Biden and Mitch McConnell support endless policies that slaughter civilians for political ends, yet with a straight face accuse Julian Assange — who has done nothing like that — of being a “terrorist.” GOP Rep. Peter King is launching a McCarthyite Congressional hearing to investigate radicalism and Terrorism sympathies among American Muslim while ignoring his own long history of enthusiastic support for Catholic Terrorists in Northern Ireland; as Marcy Wheeler says: “Peter King would still be in prison if the US had treated his material support for terrorism as it now does.”

And WikiLeaks this morning published a diplomatic cable from the U.S. summarizing the long-discussed meeting on July 25, 1990, at which the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, talked to Saddam — a month before Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait — about the history of extensive American support for his re-





gime, the desire of the U.S. for friendly relations with Saddam, and her statement that the U.S. does not care about Saddam's border disputes with Kuwait (Glaspie recorded that she told Saddam: "then, as now, we took no positions on these Arab affairs"). Months later, the U.S. attacked Iraq and cited a slew of human rights abuses and support for Terrorism that took place when the U.S. was arming and supporting Saddam and during the time they had removed Iraq from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism in order to provide that support.

The reason there isn't more uproar over these Bush officials' overt foreign-soil advocacy on behalf of a Terrorist group is because they want to use that group's Terrorism to advance U.S. aims. Using Terrorism on behalf of American interests is always permissible, because the actual definition of a Terrorist — the one that our political and media class universally embraces — is nothing more than this: "someone who impedes or defies U.S. will with any degree of efficacy."

Even though the actions of these Bush officials violate every alleged piety about bashing one's own country on foreign soil and may very well constitute a felony under U.S. law, they will be shielded from criticisms because they want to use the Terrorist group to overthrow a government that refuses to bow to American dictates. Embracing Terrorist groups is perfectly acceptable when used for that end. That's why Fran Townsend will never suffer the fate of Octavia Nasr, and why her fellow Bush officials will never be deemed Terrorist supporters by the DOJ or establishment media outlets, even though what they've done makes them, by definition, exactly that.

UPDATE: Amazingly, Fran Townsend, on CNN, hailed the Supreme Court's decision in Humanitarian Law — the Supreme Court ruling that upheld the DOJ's view that one can be guilty of "material support for terrorism" simply by talking to or advocating for a Terrorist group — and enthusiastically agreed when Wolf Blitzer said, while interviewing her: "If you're thinking about even voicing support for a terrorist group, don't do

it because the government can come down hard on you and the Supreme Court said the government has every right to do so.” Yet “voicing support for a terrorist group” is exactly what Townsend is now doing — and it makes her a criminal under the very Supreme Court ruling that she so gleefully praised.

UPDATE II: In 2008, an Iranian-American woman –Zeinab Taleb-Jedi — was convicted in a federal court of providing “material support for terrorism” based solely on her membership in MEK. She argued that MEK should not be deemed a Terrorist group and that she has the First Amendment right to belong to it, but the judge rejected both claims. While she joined the group as opposed to merely advocating for it (the way these conservatives are doing), the Supreme Court in *Huminatarian Law* made clear that both can be means of providing “material support.” Why should Taleb-Jedi be prosecuted but not Giuliani, Townsend, Ridge and friends?





Rudy Giuliani Denies Supporting Terrorist Organization

January 2011

Former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, who is reportedly considering another run at the presidency, has co-written an op-ed denying he provided material support to a terrorist organization.

Here's the backstory: Last week, Georgetown University Law Professor David Cole penned an op-ed in the New York Times asking whether Giuliani - as well as former homeland security secretary Tom Ridge, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey and former national security adviser Frances Townsend - committed a federal crime when they spoke in support of a group called the Mujahedin-e Khalq at a conference in Paris. As Cole noted, the United States considers the Mujahedin-e Khalq a "foreign terrorist organization" - and it's a crime to provide material support to such organizations. Cole argues that since Mukasey's own Justice Department (as well as the current one) says speech coordinated with a terrorist organization constitutes material support - a position backed by the Supreme Court - Giuliani and the others are at risk of criminal charges. (Cole, it should be noted, was arguing that he does not believe such speech should be a crime and calling for the law to be changed. He was also using the MEK situation to suggest the Supreme Court had erred in ruling against him in

MEK
Uncovered

238



a separate case.)

Mujaheddin-e Khalq, or MEK, is an Iranian exile group that the Washington Post reports was “added to the [terrorist] list in 1997 as part of an effort by President Bill Clinton’s administration to reach out to Tehran.” Giuliani and his colleagues are pushing for the group to be removed from that list. At the conference, Giuliani reportedly told MEK members that the United States “should not just be on your side, it should be enthusiastically on your side. You want the same things we want.”

In the op-ed released today in National Review Online, Giuliani and the others argue MEK isn’t a terrorist organization. They write that it is only on the terrorism list for political reasons, and note that the European Union and the United Kingdom have removed the group from their terrorism lists.

They go on to argue that it’s not a crime to speak out in favor of the group because the material-support statute allows them latitude to do so - a crime is only committed, they write, when the accused are working “under that foreign terrorist organization’s direction or control.”

“Individuals who act entirely independently of the foreign terrorist organization to advance its goals or objectives shall not be considered to be working under the foreign terrorist organization’s direction and control,” the law reads. Giuliani and the others write that “as a result, we felt quite secure, thank you, in relying on the protection Congress placed in the statute,



backed up by the First Amendment.”

Yet it's not clear that the efforts of Giuliani and the others constituted acting “entirely independently,” particularly since, as Gawker notes, the Supreme Court has deemed “advocacy performed in coordination with, or at the direction of, a foreign terrorist organization” a crime. Seeing as Giuliani and the others were speaking at French Committee for a Democratic Iran, which was reportedly formed to support the MEK, the case could be made that they were acting “in coordination with” the group.

According to Allan Gerson, a lawyer representing the MEK who wrote to the Times to respond to Cole's op-ed, “MEK's designation as a foreign terrorist organization has been almost universally condemned as without merit.”

“Mr. Cole may be correct in contending that Congress needs to clarify the law governing material support of terrorism, but in his effort to reach that goal he should not make a sacrificial lamb out of the MEK, which is at the heart of the peaceful democratic opposition to the mullahs in Iran,” he wrote. That position is supported by Near East Policy Research president Ali Safavi, who writes that the charges against the group are unsubstantiated.

But the Council on Foreign Relations points to the MEK's one-time “association with Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime” and writes that its efforts in opposition to the Iranian government have included attacks that “have often killed civilians.”

The CFR writes: “Despite MEK's violent tactics, the group's strong stance against Iran--part of President Bush's ‘axis of evil’--and pro-democratic image have won it support among some U.S. and European lawmakers, according to a 2005 Center for Policing Terrorism report, and there has been an ongoing, vigorous campaign by its supporters in the U.S. Congress to have it removed from the terrorist list.” The CFR goes on to detail alleged attacks and assassinations by the MEK.

CBS News' Senior National Security Analyst Juan Zarate says

there has been “an ongoing debate about MEK for some time.” “In the past it has engaged in terrorist activities, which is why it has garnered the designation as a terrorist organization,” he said. “But there is a legitimate policy and legal debate as to whether or not a group can redeem itself, in a sense, because it no longer engages in those activities or renounces those activities and also has a political voice.”

Liberal commentator Glenn Greenwald argues that Giuliani is essentially being afforded special treatment despite breaking the law.

“Like Cole, I believe the advocacy and actions of these Bush officials in support of this Terrorist group should be deemed constitutionally protected free expression,” he writes. “But under American law and the view of the [Department of Justice], it isn’t. There are people sitting in prison right now with extremely long prison sentences for so-called ‘material support for terrorism’ who did little different than what these right-wing advocates just did. What justifies allowing these Bush officials to materially support a Terrorist group with impunity?”





Anti-Terrorism Mouthpieces Now Supporting Terror

January 2011

The January 3 posting of Washington's Blog (anonymous) opined that the "Biggest Terrorism Scaremongers are THEMSELVES Promoting Terrorism." The blogger isn't the first to make that assertion. He cited well-known investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, writing in the New Yorker, who said that the Bush administration helped fund groups that the United States claims are terrorists.

It is widely accepted that U.S. personnel have trained and funded groups in Iran in order to destabilize and overthrow the current regime under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and that these groups used terroristic methods such as bombings and assassinations to destabilize the regime.

Fred Burton, former U.S. State Department counterterrorism agent, wrote:

The latest attacks inside Iran fall in line with US efforts to supply and train Iran's ethnic minorities to destabilise the Iranian regime.

Specifically, though, in this instance the blogger was referring to actions taken by Rudolph Giuliani, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former National Security Advisor Fran Townsend, and former Attorney General Michael Mukasey. The blogger's volley is leveled at the men for not just for



supporting terror but for committing a crime in doing so. The men are accused of aiding Mujaheddin-e Khalq (MEK).

MEK is a communist group that helped Saddam Hussein carry out attacks against Shiites in the '90s, attacked Americans in Iran in the '80s, and helped with the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979. In 2009, it was designated by the United States to be a foreign terrorist organization.

The four Americans, siding with MEK in opposition to the current Iranian regime, demanded that the group be removed from the list in order to overturn the government in Tehran.

Giuliani said:

But the United States has laws against advocating on behalf of any group labeled a “foreign terrorist organization” by the United States.

Georgetown University law professor and attorney David Cole had this to say in the January 3 New York Times:

The problem is that the United States government has labeled the Mujahedeen Khalq a ‘foreign terrorist organization,’ making it a crime to provide it, directly or indirectly, with any material support. It is therefore a felony, the government has argued, to file an amicus brief on behalf of a ‘terrorist’ group, to engage in public advocacy to challenge a group’s ‘terrorist’ designation or even to encourage peaceful avenues for redress of grievances.

The Supreme Court has ruled that any “advocacy performed



in coordination with, or at the direction of, a foreign terrorist organization” is a crime. In addition, the Patriot Act makes it a crime to help any group designated as terrorist by the State Department.

So, what the men did would clearly seem to be a federal crime. Whether sanctions will be forthcoming, or what they will be remains to be seen.



TIME

Why Are Some U.S. Politicians Trying to Remove an Iranian ‘Cult’ From the Terror List?

March 2011

The two leading figures of Iran’s opposition Green Movement – presidential candidates Mir Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi are under arrest as the regime cracks down on any effort to emulate the Arab world’s democracy rebellions. But Iran’s opposition may be in store for another blow – this time, at the hands of those in Washington who profess to support their cause.

A newly fashionable foolishness in Washington is public advocacy by leading establishment figures on behalf of Iran’s Mujahdeen e-Khalq (MEK), which has since 1997 been on the State Department’s list of foreign terror organizations. It may be a radical group founded from a mix of Marxist and Islamist ideas, which the State Department says killed Americans working in Iran in the 1970s and which served as an adjunct to Saddam Hussein — and it may function as a cult, according to the RAND Corporation, with many members forced to remain in the organization against their will — but the campaign to take it off the State Department’s “terrorist” list unites longtime neocon ideologues, former U.S. military and security officials, Republican presidential hopefuls and now a growing number

MEK
Uncovered

245



of senior Democratic foreign policy mavens.

And it appears to be well-funded, with a number of the speakers at the campaign's keynote events admitting to having been paid to show up, most recent among them, former Democratic congressman Lee Hamilton, a respected foreign policy grey-beard.

The MEK was created in the mid-1960s to fight the Shah of Iran. Although it participated in the revolution of 1978/9, it broke with the Islamists and went into armed opposition as they took over, launching a number of terror attacks inside Iran. It was welcomed into Iraq by Saddam Hussein as a proxy force against his enemies in Tehran, establishing its main military base at Camp Ashraf in eastern Iraq. The MEK fought alongside Iraqi forces against Iran in the brutal war that raged from 1980-1988, a fact that has forever damned it in the eyes of millions of Iranians — even those who are willing to challenge the current regime.

When the U.S. occupied Iraq in 2003, the fate of the MEK became an American problem. While the Bush Administration, in line with the terrorist designation and commitments to Iran, undertook to close the camp, it hedged on the issue as more hawkish elements in and around the Administration lobbied furiously for the MEK to be supported as a proxy force to wage war against Iran — you know, just like Saddam had done. The MEK claims to have renounced violence in 2003, and has been

MEK
Uncovered

246

lobbying to have its “terrorist” status changed in the West — an effort that succeeded in Europe in 2009 when it was removed from the EU equivalent of the State Department’s list. Camp Ashraf remains open, however, although the Iraqi government has demanded its closure — although as U.S. influence declines, an Iran-friendly Iraqi government could move against it. That’s one of the concerns animating the sudden show of sympathy for the group in Washington. Another is frustration at the failure of U.S. efforts thus far to compel Iran to relinquish its nuclear program – and a desire to seek regime change on the cheap. And then there’s also clearly a smart lobbying effort on behalf of the MEK, whose membership is believed to number between 5,000 and 10,000, and its political wing, the Paris-based National Council of Resistance.

At a recent event, former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson, who was President Clinton’s U.N. Ambassador at the time the MEK was added to the “terrorist” list, said Iranians’ “thirst for freedom and democracy” required that it be taken off the list. Former Joint Chiefs chairman General Hugh Shelton said that the MEK was “the largest organized resistance to Iran’s current regime” and urged that it be immediately removed from the list. “MEK is obviously the way that Iran needs to go,” he added.

Speaking at an event in Paris last December along with former Bush cabinet member Tom Ridge and GOP presidential hopeful Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, former Homeland Security czar Michael Mukasey called the MEK “a moderate, secular and democratic political organization as well as the largest and most organized opposition group in Iran.” And last month, former New Jersey Democratic Senator Robert Torricelli chaired a panel urging the Obama Administration to embrace the MEK, that included former CENTCOM chief Anthony Zinni, former Obama National Security Adviser Gen. Jim Jones, and President Bush’s former U.N. ambassador, the arch-hawk John Bolton. Even more bizarre was Torricelli’s “by any means





necessary” logic when he asked, last month, “Is it even possible to oppose a terrorist state, and be a terrorist yourself?” The answer, for grownups, is yes, it is quite possible. Terrorism is not simply an epithet applied to those we don’t like; if the term is to have any meaning at all it has to have an objective definition — and typically, in international forums, that definition involves the systematic directing of violence against non-combatants in pursuit of political goals. And by that measure, the MEK has engaged in acts of terrorism — although there’s certainly a case to be made that throughout history, groups that have engaged in terrorism have later become part of the political process in their countries.

But the problem with Washington’s new MEK fantasy is that — like its fascination with the Iraqi exile Ahmed Chalabi who nine years ago convinced American leaders that their troops would be greeted by Iraqis with “sweets and flowers” — it is failing to notice the obvious: Just as the CIA used to joke that Chalabi was far more influential along the Potomac than he was along the Tigris, so are the new crowd of MEK converts ignoring the fact that the MEK is detested not only by Iran’s regime, but also by the very opposition movement that has challenged the regime in the streets.

When the Green Movement took to the streets to challenge the regime in the wake of Iran’s contested 2009 presidential election, the regime sought to portray the MEK as behind the movement, in order to discredit it in the eyes of ordinary Iranians.

Former presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi was having none of it, branding the MEK a “hypocritical and dead organization”. Fellow Green Movement leader Zahra Rahnavard, wife of Mir Hussein Moussavi, was even more forthright in an interview with a Farsi news outlet last year: “This government has tried to revive the MEK by associating it with the Green Movement, which again is a very funny notion because the Green Movement is a people’s movement that is alive and dy-

namic and holds a very red wall between itself and the MEK.” Tehran-based journalist Jason Rezaian writes that the hostility is based on the MEK having fought for Saddam Hussein in a war that left hundreds of thousand of Iranians dead or maimed. It’s regarded in the same way that Americans view John Walker Lindh. “There are still thousands, perhaps millions, of Iranians completely willing to speak openly about their attitudes on the 2009 election,” Rezaian writes, “but good luck finding a single person who is pro-MEK.”

“Sitting here in Tehran,” he continues, “the mere thought of the MEK becoming a legitimate contributor to the policy dialogue on Iran is laughable, except to those of us who would actually like to see an end to the more than three decades of animosity between the U.S. and Iran, and hope for a productive future relationship through real diplomacy. To us — and we are much stronger in number than the MEK could ever hope to be — the idea is insane, heartbreaking and reprehensible.”

That view is echoed by Michael Rubin in Commentary magazine, proving that not all neocons share the enthusiasm of some for the MEK. “There is no doubt that the [MEK] has targeted Americans, and no amount of slick public relations should erase that. During my time in Iran, it was clear that while Iranians respect the United States and have little good to say about their own government, they all detest the [MEK]... One thing is certain: embracing the [MEK] is the surest way to make anti-American the 65 million Iranians who dislike their government and dislike theocracy.”

Rubin is also skeptical of the roots of the current campaign to legitimize the MEK: “If American officials call for the delisting of the MKO, that is their right. For an honest debate on the issues, however, they should acknowledge the honorarium or consulting fees they receive from the group.”

Given President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s own propaganda efforts to link Iran’s domestic opposition to the MEK, though, it’s hard to imagine he’d have any problem with Washington





**RadioFreeEurope
RadioLiberty**

Camp Ashraf Escapee Says MKO Bans Mar- riage, Radio, Internet

April 2011

Iraq's Defense Ministry has announced that several residents of Camp Ashraf have fled the camp and appealed to Iraqi military forces for help.

Camp Ashraf, which is located some 60 kilometers from Baghdad and 100 kilometers from the border with Iran, is home to some 3,500 members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO, aka People's Mujahedin of Iran). Iran has banned the group, and like the United States, considers it a terrorist organization. Iraq has said the camp must go.

Last week, 34 camp residents were killed during a raid by Iraqi forces under circumstances that are not clear.

The MKO says camp residents were killed by Iraqi forces. The Iraqi government, however, says it believes about 30 people were shot dead by guards at the camp.

The UN and rights groups have called for an independent investigation into the deaths.

Amnesty International has said that video clips of the April 8 clashes that the MKO has uploaded to YouTube appear to show Iraqi soldiers indiscriminately firing into the crowds and

MEK
Uncovered

250



using vehicles to try and run others down.

Iraq's Defense Ministry said that three MKO leaders were among the camp residents who escaped.

On April 19, Defense Ministry spokesman Muhammad al-Askari reportedly told a press conference in Baghdad that "three leaders of the People's Mujahedin of Iran managed to escape Camp Ashraf." He named them as "senior leader Maryam Sinjari, leader Abdul Latif Shardouri [Abdollahatif Shadvari], and leader Ibrat Kikhai."

I interviewed Shadvari last week. He told me he escaped from Camp Ashraf two months ago and turned himself in to Iraqi forces. He also said some of the other residents of the camp were being held there against their will.

Former MKO members have described the group as a cult that promotes celibacy and martyrdom, takes away members' children, and uses psychological methods to pressure members and force them to remain obedient and follow orders.

The MKO has rejected the claims and accuses former members of being tools of Tehran.

Shadvari, who spoke to me from Baghdad where he said he's staying at a hotel, said he joined the MKO when he was 15 years old. Here's some of our conversation:

Persian Letters: Can you tell me something about yourself and describe how you came to join the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization?





Abdollahif Shadvari: My name is Abdollahif Shadvari, I'm from Baluchistan. I've been with this organization for 25 years. I joined the MKO from Pakistan and through a friend who has been martyred.

I haven't had any contact with my family during the [past] 25 years because there was no possibility of contacting them. My family thought I was dead. Using the telephone, mobile phone, Internet, and even listening to radio is forbidden in the organization.

During these 25 years I was under a lot of pressure and I decided to hand myself over to Iraqi forces. I did that two months ago and now I'm at a hotel. I've been in touch with the Red Cross and also with the Iraqi government. I hope to go to another country.

Persian Letters: Do you know which country you might go to? What will be your situation once you get there?

Shadvari: I'm supposed to discuss it with the Red Cross and the United Nations. The issue is, as [MKO leader Massoud] Rajavi has said many times, whoever wants to escape from Ashraf will be punished with death and execution. Not only me, but many of my friends who are now in Ashraf don't have the possibility to leave the camp. Escape is the only way.

Escaping from there requires two or three months of preparation. I thought a lot about it and planned it so I could finally escape. [MKO leaders] always tell us: "You can't enter any [other] country. Ashraf is the only place you have."

Persian Letters: Are you saying that some people are held in Ashraf against their will? They're forced to stay there?

Shadvari: Yes, many are under pressure. They're worried about their future; they don't know what will be with them. I call on the Red Cross and international organizations to talk with each of the camp residents individually. This issue must be solved and the bloodshed must be stopped.

Persian Letters: Why do you think the MKO wants to keep people in Camp Ashraf? Why don't they let those who don't want

to be there go?

Shadvari: It's obvious. If people [leave Ashraf], the organization will fall apart, there won't be any Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization anymore.

Persian Letters: Are you married?

Shadvari: No. I was 15 when I joined the organization. Now I'm 40.

Persian Letters: Why didn't you get married? Was it your choice?

Shadvari: Getting married is banned in Camp Ashraf. Not only getting married, but talking to women is banned.



The Foolish Embrace of the MEK

July 2011

The bizarre enthusiasm for the Mujahideen-e Khalq keeps growing in Washington. Trita Parsi describes the terrorist group's intense lobbying efforts to have the group removed from the government's list of terrorist organizations (via Chris Bodenner):

Since early January 2011, the MEK has spent millions of dollars on lobbyists, PR agents and communications firms to build up pressure on Secretary Hillary Clinton to take the group off of the terrorist list. Their argument is that the MEK rejected violence and terrorism in 2001 and as a result should be de-listed. But this is not true, according to the FBI. A recently disclosed FBI report from 2004 reveals that the group continued to plan terrorist acts at least three years after they claimed to renounce terrorism.

No one should be surprised — not even DC's "unwitting members of Congress" — as the FBI calls the group's supporters on Capitol Hill. The State Department has documented the MEK's disturbing record: killing Americans and Iranians in terrorist attacks; fighting for Saddam Hussein against Iran and assisting Saddam's brutal campaign against Iraq's Kurds and Shia; its "cult-like" behavior; the abuses and even torture it commits against its own members; and its support for the U.S. embassy takeover and calls for executing the hostages.

And let's not forget, the MEK suppresses and holds captive its

MEK
Uncovered

254



own members – more than 70 percent of the MEK members in Camp Ashraf in Iraq are held there against their own wishes, according to a RAND Corporation study.

I have marveled at the willingness of numerous former government officials, retired military officers, and elected representatives to embrace the MEK. There's no question that they are motivated by their loathing of the Iranian government, but their hostility to the regime had led them to endorse a group that most Iranians loathe. Michael Rubin has been sharply critical of MEK boosters here in the U.S. for some time now, and he most recently called out Michele Bachmann for her foolish support for the group, which she refers to as “one of the bravest Iranian dissident groups” and “freedom-seeking.” Bachmann is hardly alone in her folly. She has quite a lot of company, as Muhammad Sahimi tells us:

Howard Dean, former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, is one. President Obama's former National Security Adviser Gen. James L. Jones is another. Others include Bill Richardson, former energy secretary and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; Michael Mukasey, attorney general under President George W. Bush; Tom Ridge, former governor of Pennsylvania and homeland security secretary under Bush; Gens. Peter Pace and Hugh Shelton, former vice chair and chairman, respectively, of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Louis Freeh, former FBI director; Lee Hamilton, former Democrat-



ic congressman; Michael Hayden, former director of the CIA; Gen. Anthony Zinni, former commander of the Central Command; Frances Townsend, homeland security adviser in the Bush White House; and Brad Sherman and Dana Rohrabacher of the House of Representatives.

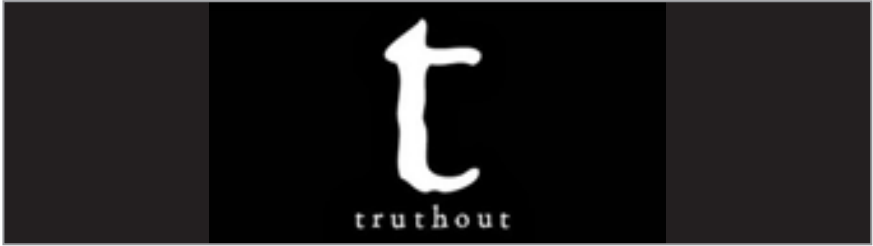
In the past, the U.S. has supported ethnic separatist groups inside Iran in their armed opposition to Tehran, and some of these groups have resorted to attacks on civilian targets. When Jundullah was added to the list of terrorist organizations, it seemed as if that policy of subversion through sponsoring terrorism might have been abandoned. If the effort to de-list the MEK is successful, it seems more than likely that the group will be used as a proxy to launch attacks against Iranian interests.

As Parsi explains:

First, the desire to de-list them in Washington seems partially driven by gravitation towards covert military action against Iran. Neither sanctions nor diplomacy have yielded the desired results on the nuclear issue, and some in Washington are advocating using the MEK to conduct assassination and sabotage campaigns inside Iran.

As one former State Department official put it, the “paradox is that we may take them off the terror list in order for them to do more terror.”

This will not only help the regime to consolidate power in the name of anti-terrorism, but it will be an unexpected propaganda boost for the regime by convincing most Iranians that the U.S. has sided with a group they understandably regard as an enemy of their country.



War With Iran? US Neocons Aim to Repeat Chalabi-Style Swindle

July 2011

In 1991, Iraqi exiles set up the Iraq National Congress (INC) with funding from the CIA. Under the leadership of Ahmad Chalabi, and flush with tens of millions dollars in US government funding, the INC allied itself with the neoconservatives in Washington and unceasingly beat the drums of war, presenting itself as the popular democratic alternative to Saddam Hussein and feeding faulty intelligence to an eager media and Bush

administration. Eventually, they succeeded in dragging the United States into disastrous war that cost Americans and Iraqis their lives and caused incalculable damage to American prestige and power.

Now, history may be repeating itself.

A segment of our political establishment that is chafing at the bit for a military attack on Iran has found their INC, in the form of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (also known as the MEK, or MKO), a radical Islamic terrorist group with Iranian roots that has been designated a terrorist organization since the State Department created the Foreign Terrorist Organization list in 1997.

Appearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 24, John Bolton, the former ambassador to the UN



257



under President Bush, reiterated his calls for military action against Iran and openly expressed his support for the MEK. Weeks later, former Bush attorney general Michael Mukasey appeared before the Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee and called for the US to delist the MEK. Mukasey was even photographed prior to the hearing receiving counsel from the leadership of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the MEK's political wing, which is also designated as a terrorist organization.

Bolton and Mukasey are not alone in their avowed public support for this known terrorist group. They have been joined by a number of former senior Bush administration officials, other hawks and advocates of the whatever-it-takes war on terror - luminaries such as Rudy Giuliani, former CIA director James Woolsey, and former head of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, as well as a number of Republican and Democratic legislators. Why would some of the most vocal advocates for prosecuting the war on terror now take an Islamic terrorist group under its wing and persistently lobby the State Department and the US Congress to have the group removed from terrorist list? Simply put, they say the enemy of the enemy is our friend. Maryam Rajavi, the MEK leader and self-proclaimed president of Iran, is their new Chalabi.

Make a tax-deductible donation to Truthout this week, and your contribution will be doubled by a charitable foundation! Keep

independent journalism strong - support Truthout by clicking here.

The MEK is an Islamic radical organization that was formed in the 1960's as an urban guerilla movement against the shah of Iran. During the 1970's, the group targeted and successfully killed US military personnel and American civilians based in Iran. It played a major role in the overthrow of the shah in 1979, eventually fell out with the Khomeini regime and fled to Iraq. There, they regrouped under the patronage of Hussein, and fought alongside him against Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. As documented by the CIA, the MEK was later used by a beleaguered Hussein to crush the Kurdish rebellion that came immediately after Iraq's defeat in the Persian Gulf war. Following Hussein's ouster, the Iraqi government has been working to try to expel the reviled group from Iraq.

Over the course of the last two decades, a well-funded MEK has developed a powerful propaganda machine that has sought to depict the group as a formidable military force, as well as the genuine democratic representative of the Iranian people. These claims have been proven to be groundless. The naked reality is that the MEK are neither a force nor a democratic representative of Iranians, but simply a well-funded militaristic cult with shadowy leaders. They are widely despised by Iranians for having betrayed Iran by siding with Hussein. These facts have been extensively documented, as can be seen in a recently released FBI report that presents evidence of ongoing terrorist activities by the MEK.

Despite their claims to the contrary, the MEK had no role in the popular uprising of June 2009. The leaders of the Green Movement, the Iranian democratic movement, have nothing to do with this traitorous cult. In fact, the MEK claim to a role has helped enable the Islamic regime to tar the whole Green movement with a treasonous label.

Pressure to remove the MEK from the State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organizations list is a cynical ploy by the neocons



that can have only negative consequences for both the United States and Iran. It would allow an Islamic radical terrorist group to operate freely in the United States and eventually get funded by the US taxpayer, courtesy of a clueless Congress. The proponents of war with Iran simply want another INC, and another Chalabi, to promote and start a military conflict with Iran. This country does not need another war, and we need not make that mistake once again.

Instead of legitimizing the MEK, we call on the law-enforcement agencies to investigate the illegal activities of this group, their funding and their allies. After all, they are still on the US State Department terrorist list. So, why are they allowed to lobby our lawmakers in the Senate and the House? The FBI should treat the MEK like all others terror-listed groups, and help protect the American people from these terrorists in our midst - and from another attempt to hijack the country and steer us into a disastrous war of choice.



MEK
Uncovered

260

US move to delist MEK as terror group worries Iran's opposition

July 2011

It is a bizarre, exiled Iranian opposition group that has existed mostly on the fringes of history. But the cultish Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), or “people’s holy warriors”, will seize the international spotlight if the US State Department decides in coming weeks to remove the group from its list of foreign terrorist organisations.

The well-funded organisation, once allied to Saddam Hussein, has friends in high places in Washington.

Removing the MEK from the US’s terrorism blacklist would make already frosty relations between Tehran and Washington even icier.

It also “would allow the Mujahedin to receive US funding and become a powerful force in support of war with Iran, just like the Iraqi exiles who deceived us into war with Iraq did,” Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), warned last week.

Iran’s domestic opposition meanwhile insists that lifting the MEK’s terrorist designation would spell disaster for the Green Movement’s peaceful, home-grown drive for democracy, which enjoys genuine, widespread support.

It would embolden Iran’s ruling hardliners to intensify their re-

MEK
Uncovered

261



pression of the Green Movement, by implying that it is somehow linked to the “detested MEK terror group”, Mohsen Kadivar, a dissident cleric, wrote recently in Salon, an online US news magazine.

The MEK, dedicated to overthrowing Iran’s Islamic regime and considered a terrorist group by Iran as well as the US, is despised by ordinary Iranians because it fought alongside Saddam’s forces in the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran war.

In response to an MEK lawsuit, a US federal court last year ordered the State Department to review the group’s terrorist designation.

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, is due to announce her decision next month. The MEK was blacklisted as a terrorist organisation in 1997 by her husband’s administration.

The group, however, has been taken off similar terrorism lists by the European Union after court decisions found no evidence of terrorist activity in recent years.

The MEK is led by the husband-and-wife team of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. The latter, touted by the MEK as Iran’s “president-in-waiting”, lives in suburban Paris.

Her spouse is a spectral figure who has not appeared in public for years. His whereabouts are unknown, although informed speculation suggests that he spends most of his time at Camp Ashraf, the MEK’s main base, a sprawling, mini-state within a state 65 kilometres north of Baghdad.

The MEK was founded in 1965 as an urban guerilla movement opposed to the US-backed Shah and played a key role in the 1979 Islamic revolution. Its ideology was a blend of revolutionary Islam and Marxism.

The MEK vehemently opposed US involvement in Iran and the State Department links the organisation to the deaths of at least six Americans in Iran during the 1970s.

The MEK also backed the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran in November 1979. When the hostages were freed 444 days later, the MEK berated the regime for “capitulating to imperialism”.

But the MEK soon broke with the late Ayatollah Khomeini in a violent power struggle and was forced underground in 1981 when thousands of MEK members were arrested and many hanged. Most of its senior leaders fled to France. Another wave of executions followed in 1988.

But the MEK also got in punishing blows, assassinating scores of regime officials. The right arm of Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, remains partially paralysed from an MEK bomb attack in 1981.

In 1986, under pressure from France, the MEK relocated to Iraq, where Saddam armed and funded it. Its main base there was Camp Ashraf, conveniently located 50 miles from the Iranian border for attacks against the Islamic republic.

But in 2003 the MEK suffered a devastating blow when Saddam was toppled by the US-led invasion. American forces stripped the group of its tanks and heavy weaponry but accorded its members “protected person” status.

About 3,400 Iranian former rebel fighters, many of them women, have since lived a limbo-like and precarious existence at Camp Ashraf.

Their plight made headlines in early April when Iraqi troops raided the camp, leaving at least 34 residents dead, according to a UN investigation. The MEK is strongly disliked by Iraq’s Shiite-led government, which is on good terms with Iran.





Many rights activists describe the MEK as a cult whose leaders have brainwashed members and dictate every aspect of their lives.

Former members paint a grim picture of life in Camp Ashraf, most of whose inhabitants are said to be middle-aged.

Massoud Khodabandeh, a former senior high-ranking MEK member, said: “People aren’t allowed to get married. Some there haven’t heard or seen a child for 25 years. There are no phones, no internet, no postal services, nothing.”

Mr Khodabandeh runs an organisation helping those trying to quit the MEK, and believes many at Camp Ashraf want to leave but are effectively held hostage by the Rajavis.

“Those caught trying to run away get severely punished,” he said in a telephone interview from Leeds, England, on Sunday. One of the most detailed studies of the MEK was conducted in 2005 by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the US-based watchdog.

Outlandish practices ordered by the Rajavis included “divorce by decree of married couples, regular writings of self-criticism reports, renunciation of sexuality, and absolute mental and physical dedication to the leadership,” HRW said.

Its report focused on cases of would-be defectors being tortured at Camp Ashraf, including two who died under interrogation.

Yet the MEK has powerful supporters in Washington and European capitals.

Among the MEK’s heavyweight cheerleaders in the US are Jim Jones, President Barack Obama’s former national security adviser, Dennis Blair, the former director of national intelligence, and James Woolsey, who headed the Central Intelligence Agency.

Iran specialists are baffled by the vocal backing the MEK enjoys among some heavy-hitters in Washington. Gary Sick, an Iran expert at Columbia University in New York, said: “Their [the MEK’s] support inside Iran is very, very limited.

“The fact that they’re against the government in Iran doesn’t make them good,” he added in a recent telephone interview. “The only thing that I can think of that would be worse than the present government of Iran is a government of the MEK.”





THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Silencing the Moderate Middle

August 2011

The recent terrorist attacks in Norway gave the world a glimpse of what happens when violent fanatics take the fore and moderates are sidelined. To paraphrase Edmund Burke, the silence of good men is all it takes for evil to triumph. Today, we in the United States face our own Norwegian moment as a massive lobbying campaign is underway to remove the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) from the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. How we respond to this test will be a defining moment for American democracy and the rejection of fanaticism in our midst.

To provide a little background, the MEK is an Islamic organization that was put on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) since the establishment of the list in 1997. Born on a profoundly anti-American platform, the MEK has murdered Americans and is considered by Human Rights Watch to be an anti-democratic cult. After joining Saddam in his war against Iran in what Iranians almost universally regard as an act of treason, the group lost virtually all popular support.

Based in France today, the group is well aware of its lack of support among Iranians. Because of its lack of support, the MEK has implemented a policy of putting forth front organizations and individuals who do not openly claim to be part of the organization, but push the group's agenda while simultaneously attacking all other opposition.

MEK
Uncovered

266



The term used in France to describe these “fellow travelers” is *compagnon de route*. These people in effect share the agenda of the MEK and answer only to the cult’s leadership, while freeing themselves of the burden of responding to criticism of the group. In attempting to retain its place in the opposition, the MEK has employed these individuals as attack-dogs to destroy everyone else.

One obvious example is the case of the former Paris perfume merchant convicted of selling stolen perfume. Seyyed Hassan Daioslam — who dropped the Seyyed and the Eslam from his name to appeal to the anti-Arab sentiments held by his neo-conservative backers — has spearheaded much of the MEK’s attacks in recent years. He denies any ties with the MEK. But former members of the MEK and other former associates of Daioslam dispute that claim.

One of the leading experts on the organization is a former member of the MEK by the name of Massoud Khodabandeh. Regarding Daioslam he wrote:

I can say without doubt that Hassan Daioslam is a member of what I call for accuracy ‘the Rajavi cult’ [referring to MEK leaders Massoud and Maryam Rajavi]. In this respect he is obedient to the Rajavi leadership and would not act in a way inconsistent with their requirements and certainly not without their knowledge or consent (if not to say actual order). The term ‘membership’ describes his relationship to the Rajavis.





The MEK, just like Al Qaida, does not have ‘membership cards’. But I doubt very much the MEK would deny that he is a member, just as they never have denied that Alireza Jafarzadeh is a member. Daiioleslam’s writings are on the MEK websites. They do not publish just anyone’s writing. Only those obeying organizational constraints.

In a 2007 article by Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, this former high-ranking MEK member says the following:

Hassan Daiioleslam, who is also considered as a member of the Mojahedin Khalq Organisation (Rajavi Cult) had been under harsh criticism for a long time by the cult leader Massoud Rajavi because he would not leave the USA and join the cult under the rule of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. But now, in the new circumstances in which the remnants of the Rajavi cult after the fall of Saddam Hussein find themselves in western countries, Hassan’s social position and his ability to speak English has grabbed the attention of Rajavi. He seems to be next in line to be consumed [for the group’s interests].

Mehdi Noorbakhsh, a professor at the Harrisburg University and a long time acquaintance of also Daiioleslam, says that Daiioleslam:

Was living in Europe for several years until he moved to the United States in Phoenix, Arizona. He was re-bought by MEK one more time and he is now active in selling and defending the positions of this terrorist organization.

The attacks are not just aimed at destroying all other opposition to the Islamic Republic, but crucially to undermine any policy short of violent confrontation with Tehran. Hassan Dai, as he now introduces himself, has hysterically gone after much respected academics like Ray Takeyh of the Council on Foreign Relations. As one of the leading Iran experts in the United States, Takeyh has provided serious and sober analysis of the MEK and its countless violations of human rights. For this he has been viciously attacked and referred to as an “appeaser.” And of course there is the group that has become the primary

target of Dai's attacks, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC). The motive behind those attacks has been no different. NIAC in many ways has become the Iranian-American equivalent of J-Street. Both J-Street and NIAC have caused panic among established groups in their respective communities because they give voice to a moderate middle who never felt at home with their community's far-right traditional organizations. In an email obtained through NIAC's lawsuit against Dairoleslam, he writes to neo-conservative operative Kenneth Timmerman that "I strongly believe that Trita Parsi is the weakest part of the Iranian web..." Dairoleslam goes on to say that "I believe that destroying him will be the start of attacking the whole web. This is an integral part of any attack on Clinton or Obama." Clearly it is not just the position of the MEK that Dairoleslam feels threatened, but more importantly a pro-war policy that would give them the opportunity to replace one dictatorship with another.

Not surprisingly, Dairoleslam is in favor of delisting the MEK from the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. In another private email that was recently made public as part of the lawsuit against him, Dairoleslam states that the MEK should be "included in a general support of Iranian opposition as a whole" and "it has been a great mistake to discard them."

Even lower on the totem pole of smear merchants is an individual named Safar Gerabagi, known to some as "Dr. Arash Irandoost." His organization, the Pro-Democracy Movement of Iran (PDMI) features portraits of brutal dictators prominently on its website, while the irony seems to be lost on him. The so-called "movement" does not appear to have any members other than himself.

Predictably, on the blog of the self-declared "next most outspoken Iranian" the MEK are referred to as Iran's "main opposition." And like Dairoleslam, he publicly denies being part of the MEK. When I contacted him to present a list of his group's accomplishments, he repeatedly declined to present even one.



By taking out of context a quote here and there and radically reinterpreting it, Daioleslam and the MEK have been able to convince a tier of the Iranian-American community that speaks little to no English that Ray Takeyh, Vali Nasr, NIAC and others are the representatives of the Islamic Republic in Washington. Of course, being unable to read the original English documents that Daioleslam relies on to make his claims, they have been forced to take at face value his wildly off-the-mark interpretations. These accusations against the MEK's perceived enemies have been thrown around so casually on Persian satellite television that to many they now appear as fact.

The MEK's battle however is a losing one. With a median age of over 60, the MEK is becoming increasingly less effective in the Iranian Diaspora's political arena. Partly due to changing demographics, the new younger opposition has been able to show a boldness and confidence that has been unprecedented in the community. Whereas until recently Iranian-Americans in positions of influence were afraid to be too critical of the MEK, groups like NIAC are today openly taking the fight to them in an environment where ideas are more powerful than brute force.

The challenge for the Iranian-American community is in how it reacts to this new reality. As the community finds its voice and the stance of the traditional establishment comes to reflect an ever decreasing portion of the community, Iranian-Americans sitting on the fence will have to decide whether to maintain the failed status quo, or bravely and openly make the voices of the moderate middle heard.

Ultimately, empowering the MEK and giving more room to extremists would not just be a gift to the Iranian regime, but a lifeline. The Islamic Republic would love nothing more than to crush and destroy the opposition, and the MEK has been tirelessly working to do this to posit itself as the only opposition. It is not true that the enemy of our enemy is always our friend. In this case, there is more than one enemy.

Top US Officials Paid to Endorse Iranian Terror Group

August 2011

The Christian Science Monitor has released an enormous new article today detailing the results of their investigation into the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), the Islamist-Marxist group currently trying to buy its way off of the US State Department's list of international terrorist organizations.

The article details how a large number of top US officials past and present have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to give public endorsements of the MEK, with high profile national security officials from both parties loudly championing the organization as a force for "democratic change" in Iran.

One US official is quoted by CSM as saying that "top-level national security officials never heard about the MEK; it never rose to their level until now," and that when they are presented the political platform and a contract for \$20,000 for a 20 minute speech, it "looks pretty compelling."

Yet the group's history is one of decades of violent attacks not just against the Iranian government, but also against the United States, and the group's claims of having abandoned violence have not been supported by US intelligence reports. Long an ally of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, the MEK was quickly embraced by a number of hawks as a good way of promoting a war against Iran. This put its status as a terrorist

MEK
Uncovered

271



organization outside of the world of fact, and into the world of political expediency.

But if there's one thing top Democrat and Republican political leaders like more than war, its cash, and the millions of dollars in "speech" payments is likely another reason the State Department will be under intense pressure to quietly remove them from the list.



Iranian group's big-money push to get off US terrorist list

August 2011

Washington; and Istanbul, Turkey — A high-powered array of former top American officials is advocating removal from the US terrorist list of a controversial Iranian opposition group with a long anti-American history.

With a decision due within weeks by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former US four-star generals, intelligence chiefs, governors, and political heavyweights are calling for the US government to take the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK/MKO) off the terror list it shares with Al Qaeda and Hezbollah.

Many of these former high-ranking US officials – who represent the full political spectrum – have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to speak in support of the MEK.

They rarely mention the MEK's violent and anti-American past, and portray the group not as terrorists but as freedom fighters with “values just like us,” as democrats-in-waiting ready to serve as a vanguard of regime change in Iran. Some acknowledge that they knew little about the group before they were invited to speak and were coached by MEK supporters.

Their efforts may be working: Knowledgeable officials say the millions of dollars spent on the campaign have raised political pressure to remove the MEK from the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list to the highest levels since the group –

MEK
Uncovered

273



whose record includes assassinations of US military advisers and attacks on US diplomats – was one of the first to be put there in 1997.

But the delisting of the MEK, Iran experts say, could benefit Iran's hard-line rulers by giving them more reason to brutally clamp down on Iran's internal, nonviolent opposition. The Green Movement – which led street protests in 2009 – steadfastly rejects the MEK as an anti-democratic and violent force. “The people who are saying [the MEK] are no longer terrorists are also saying they are democratic,” says John Limbert, a former US hostage in Iran from 1979-1981, who was US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iran until last year.

“The issue is, have [the MEK] changed their terrorist nature?” asks Ambassador Limbert. “If they say, ‘We renounce terrorism,’ I have no confidence in that. What is it in their past – or in their present – that leads you to have confidence in such a statement?”

The State Dept. will be weighing many ramifications, from how this will play out in the streets of Tehran to how it will affect US strategic credibility.

“The MEK, with its violent history, is exactly what the Iranian regime needs to legitimate its violence against the peaceful opposition,” says Maziar Bahari, a journalist who was incarcerated in Iran during the 2009 protests. He spoke Aug. 4 in Washington at a panel organized to warn of the risks of delis-

ting the MEK.

Reformist cleric Mohsen Kadivar and US-based academic Ahmad Sadri warn of broader dangers. Taking the MEK off the terrorist list, they have written, would “trigger a huge loss of US soft power in Iran, damage Iran’s democratic progress, and help Iranian hardliners cement a long-term dictatorship.”

Legal cases have seen the MEK removed from terror watch lists on procedural grounds in the UK and European Union in recent years. A decision on the US designation is now imminent; a federal appeals court in Washington last year ruled that the State Dept. had violated the group’s right to due process, because it had not been allowed to contest unclassified information used to justify its designation.

That information, submitted in autumn 2009, disclosed that “the MEK trained females at Camp Ashraf in Iraq to perform suicide attacks in Karbala” – a charge the group called “manifestly implausible” in court. It also included a US intelligence community assessment that the MEK “retains a limited capability and the intent to use violence to achieve its political goals.”

A detailed 2009 report, prepared for the US Department of Defense by the RAND Corp., notes further that the MEK has made “repeated requests ... to have its weapons returned” at Camp Ashraf, the military camp given to the MEK by Saddam Hussein, where 3,400 members remain, disarmed.

Roots of the American label

American antipathy to the MEK stretches back four decades, when it was first formed in the 1960s with an anti-US, Marxist-Islamist ideology. Violent “armed struggle” was glorified from the start.

The group assassinated at least six US military advisers and citizens in Iran in the 1970s, supported the Islamic revolution and then the seizure of the American Embassy in 1979, and tried to block any deal with what it then called “the US, this satanic force threatening the world ... the main adversary.”

MEK
Uncovered

275



US government documents frequently use the term “cult-like” when describing the MEK, and describe “years of ideological training” for members akin to “brainwashing.” The MEK has long denied that it is a cult and routinely charges critics with being agents of the Islamic Republic.

The MEK says it renounced violence in 2001, after claiming responsibility for 350 attacks in 2000 and 2001, according to a RAND tabulation. It is not known to have carried out any attacks for several years, though a 2004 FBI report found that the group was “currently actively involved in planning and executing acts of terrorism.”

That conclusion was based on wiretaps of calls between MEK bases and headquarters in Iraq, France, and Los Angeles that discussed “specific acts of terrorism to include bombings” – and were corroborated by French intelligence and German police wiretaps, according to the FBI report.

Militant groups can change. Both Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, for example, used violence before becoming influential political forces in their own right. The MEK is one of those, say its increasing number of American advocates.

Yet current US officials and many Iran experts – hawks and doves alike – question the MEK’s ability to change in light of the group’s unique history and its cult-like characteristics. They say the fact that it is widely despised inside Iran also makes it a dangerous tool to change Iran’s Islamic regime.

All have been stunned by the speed, heft, and sheer wealth of the current delisting campaign, after years of determined but fruitless efforts.

Dismissing the terrorist label

Removing the terrorist designation is critical to the MEK to bolster its legitimacy. It would also enable the MEK to openly fund-raise in the US – despite having used fraudulent techniques in the past that prompted FBI investigations into smuggling rings, forgery, and fraud schemes that resulted in prison

time for dozens of members.

A host of former American officials, in speech after speech since December, dismiss the MEK's terrorist designation. At more than a dozen events in Washington and Europe since December, they assert instead that the group offers a popular "third way" between failed dialogue with the Islamic Republic and military action.

"With Al Qaeda and Hamas, you would never think they would be able to drum up this kind of support," one State Dept. official told the Monitor. "But with the MEK, they trawl the halls of Congress. Picture this with any other terrorist group; find one." Talking points for the former US officials often include demanding that the Obama administration "free" the MEK from the terrorist list and ensure "protection" of Camp Ashraf before the controversial enclave is closed at the end of the year by the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Some argue that the MEK "provided invaluable information" to the US during the Iraq war, as Gen. Hugh Shelton, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, did last month. Yet current US officials have publicly disputed that view, and the 2009 RAND report states that "the CIA unsuccessfully attempted to persuade some MEK leaders to leave the group and provide intelligence information about Iran."

The group is often credited with announcing in 2002 the existence of Iran's undeclared uranium enrichment facilities at Natanz, but experts widely believe the intelligence came from Israel and was funneled through the MEK. The State Dept., in its October 2009 court filing, noted that UN inspectors say "much" of the information they receive from the MEK about Iran's nuclear program "has a political purpose and has been wrong."

Substantial fees

Former US officials taking part in MEK-linked events told the Monitor or confirmed publicly that they received substantial fees, paid by local Iranian-American groups to speaker bu-





reus that handle their public appearances.

The State Dept. official, who is familiar with the speech contracts, explains the mechanism: “Your speech agent calls, and says you get \$20,000 to speak for 20 minutes. They will send a private jet, you get \$25,000 more when you are done, and they will send a team to brief you on what to say.”

“Top-level national security officials never heard about the MEK; it never rose to their level until now,” says another US official. “So when MEK representatives show them a political platform comprised of the ‘15 greatest ideas of Western civilization,’ it looks pretty compelling.”

The contracts can range up to \$100,000 and include several appearances. They sometimes explicitly state, according to the State Dept. official, that “We are not a front organization for the MEK.”

The speaking events have created some extraordinary spectacles, including that of US heavyweights sharing the stage with the MEK’s self-declared “president-elect” Maryam Rajavi. At a mid-June MEK rally in Paris, for example, Mrs. Rajavi was flanked by five rows of former top US and European officials. The noisy throng of thousands of well-orchestrated MEK supporters, draped in yellow vests and waving flags, banners, and balloons as clouds of confetti fell, looked like an American political convention.

Rajavi said the US had “shackled the main force for change in Iran through an unwarranted label,” which had “acted as a barrier to Iranian people’s freedom.” The MEK leader called on the US government to “heed” senior former officials demanding delisting and “recognition of the Iran resistance.”

Those former officials lined up in Paris to voice their support for the MEK, and to criticize Washington’s Iran policy:

- “How about we follow an Arab Spring with a Persian Summer?” asked Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York, during his speech, as an American flag waved on the screen behind him. “We need regime change in Iran, more than we do

in Egypt or Libya, and just as we need it in Syria.”

It wasn't Mr. Giuliani's first time speaking at a pro-MEK event: “Appeasement of dictators leads to war, destruction and the loss of human lives,” Mr. Giuliani told a similar group of Iranian exiles in Paris last December. “For your organization to be described as a terrorist organization is just really a disgrace.”

- Michael Mukasey, the former US attorney general, declared: “There is one organization and one alone, that stands for immediate democratic change in Iran, and that is the MEK.”
- Andrew Card, former White House chief of staff under George W. Bush, told the crowd the gathering was a “great reflection of support for the people of the MEK. It is truly time ... for the people all over the world who care about democracy to stand with the Iranian people and the MEK in the struggle for democracy.”
- Tom Ridge, the former US homeland security chief, also took the podium: “It's an extraordinary honor for me, and a great privilege for my colleagues from the United States,” Mr. Ridge said, “to have the opportunity...to work with an individual that we believe clearly is one of the most inspirational, great leaders of the 21st century: Viva Maryam!”

Rajavi has indeed inspired fanatical loyalty among some MEK members. Her brief arrest in France in 2003 on terrorism charges sparked a wave of self-immolations.

Her portrait – along with that of husband and co-leader Masoud Rajavi, who has been in hiding since 2003 – is as ubiquitous at Camp Ashraf as Saddam Hussein's once was across Iraq, and Ayatollah Khomeini's still is in Iran. Every day at the camp, the MEK motto is heard: “Iran is Rajavi, Rajavi is Iran. Iran is Maryam, Maryam is Iran.”

Such praise therefore often features at MEK-linked events addressed by prominent Americans, mixed with other MEK talking points.

Howard Dean, the former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, hailed Rajavi in Berlin last March.

“Madame Rajavi does not sound like a terrorist to me; she



sounds like a president,” Mr. Dean said, gesturing toward the MEK leader from the dais. “And her organization should not be listed as a terrorist organization. We should be recognizing her as the president of Iran.”

Mr. Dean confirmed to the Monitor that he received payment for his appearances, but said the focus on high pay was “a diversion inspired by those with a different view.”

Influence and money

Lee Hamilton, former co-chair of the 9/11 Commission, told the Monitor he received a “good fee” to speak in Washington. He “approved” of the MEK’s 10-point platform, which enshrines democracy, gender equality, and freedom, but added: “We all know it’s a piece of paper.... Now is that in fact their practice? I don’t think I am the one to judge that.”

Hamilton told the audience he remains “really puzzled” about why the MEK remains on the terrorist list.

Former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell also spoke at an MEK-linked event and was paid \$20,000 for a 10-minute speech. Mr. Rendell confirmed that figure to the Monitor, and said: “No amount of money could make me say something I didn’t believe.”

During his mid-July speech in Washington, however, Rendell stated that he had received a call on Monday, inviting him to appear the following Saturday. He told the audience that at first he declined, telling his would-be hosts: “I don’t know hardly anything about this subject, so ... I don’t think I’m qualified to come.”

Rendell thanked them for convincing him to come anyway, for briefing him during the week, for the material they sent, and for further discussions that morning.

“It’s been a great learning experience for me, and as a result of what I’ve learned, on Monday I will send a letter to President Obama and Secretary Clinton, telling them ... that the United States is morally bound to do everything we can to ensure the safety of the residents of Camp Ashraf,” said Rendell.

That comment prompted a standing ovation, followed by Rendell's call for removal from the terrorist list if, as his fellow speakers had indicated, the "MEK is a force for good, and the best hope we have."

Judge Mukasey told the Monitor he received money for some of his appearances, but added that "the issue of fees is a red herring. Al Gore gets paid to speak about global warming; does anyone question the sincerity of his beliefs?"

One former US diplomatic official told the Monitor he was offered \$25,000 to speak in Paris last December, but declined. He was told he could deliver general remarks about human rights in Iran and did not have to mention the MEK, though "the MEK link was clear; there was no hiding of it at all." In his case, he was told "rich Iranians in Europe" would foot the bill.

"Those who speak ... have every right in the world to issue statements and make speeches that say [the MEK] ought to be off the terrorism list," says this former official, who asked not to be named. "I just don't think they should do it for money." Top-flight speakers include Bill Richardson, the former secretary of Energy; Gen. Peter Pace, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Wesley Clark, the former Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO; and James Jones, President Obama's former national security adviser.

"You are credible, you are connected, you are respected. And I am amazed that we've not reached out," Gen. Anthony Zinni, the former commander of CENTCOM, said at a January event in Washington. "No one is asking for money, for military support, and guns. They are asking for a hand to be reached out, a light to be shined on what they are doing."

Speakers also include former CIA chiefs James Woolsey, Porter Goss, and Michael Hayden. Several others confirmed to The Financial Times that they received cash to speak, including John Bolton, former US ambassador to the UN; Louis Freeh, former FBI director; Gen. James Conway, former Commandant of the Marine Corps; and Shelton.





“It’s a very formidable list, full of national security experts, and each of us recognizes the importance of Iran to US security,” P.J. Crowley, the former US State Dept. spokesman until March, who spoke at a June event in Washington, told the Monitor.

Among Mr. Crowley’s talking points at State was that the MEK belonged on the terrorism list. He says he was therefore “deliberately circumspect” in his speech and did not take a position on MEK delisting.

“I was offered a fee to appear, but what I said were my own comments, uninfluenced by what I was paid,” said Crowley.

A large-scale operation

In scale and effectiveness at drawing in big names, this campaign stands alone, says Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), a group that for years has sought to increase the voice of Iranian-Americans in Washington and advocated US-Iran engagement.

The NIAC has launched a counter-campaign, concerned that delisting the MEK would “radicalize” Iran’s homegrown democracy movement, and “unleash a major force for war” between the US and Iran.

“We’ve never seen this kind of money,” says Mr. Parsi. “At one conference with 10 speakers, if they average \$50k a pop, that is half a million dollars just in speaker fees.”

The momentum to remove the terrorist status “is all about [the MEK’s] ability to muster a political lobbying campaign,” says Parsi. If the decision were based on “the merits of the case, this would be as uncontroversial as the four times that the Bush administration re-listed them. Four times. No controversy.”

One reason may be the caliber of the MEK’s advocates today, and their insistence that they would not back a group with links to terrorism.

For example, Mr. Freeh, who was in charge during some of the FBI’s investigations of the MEK in the 1990s, told an MEK-linked conference in Washington in March that there is “ab-

solutely no credible evidence, we think even on a classified basis,” that justifies the MEK’s terrorist listing.

He made no mention of the FBI’s 2004 report that found the MEK “actively involved in planning and executing acts of terrorism.”

At a similar event in mid-July, Mr. Freeh praised the “bravery” of the MEK for “leading the fight for freedom in Iran. Just as our military forces fight for freedom on the battlefields, you fight in a more difficult and much more dangerous place.”

Freeh asked the audience if such prominent panelists – which on that day included Shelton, Dean, Rendell, and Anita McBride, the former chief of staff for Laura Bush – would be there if there was “even a remote possibility” the MEK were in fact terrorists.

Raising doubts about change

But the MEK’s history has raised doubts among Iran specialists and in US government reporting about its ability to turn away from violence after embracing it for decades.

The MEK was just one popular faction that toppled the pro-West Shah in Iran’s 1979 revolution – but the only one that assassinated Americans. One MEK song from the time revels in anti-US sentiment: “Leave American, your blood is [already spilling] on the ground.”

The MEK lost out in the post-revolution power struggle; thousands of its members were killed. MEK actions peaked at a rate of three assassinations and attacks per day – its propaganda included how-to assassination guides. The MEK has claimed responsibility for killing thousands of Iranians it called “agents of the regime.”

Among numerous actions abroad, in 1982 the MEK seized the Iranian Interest Section in Washington, taking nine people hostage and doing \$500,000 in damage.

On a single day in 1992, the MEK orchestrated attacks on 12 diplomatic facilities in 10 countries. In New York, the Iranian Mission to the UN was “invaded” by five men with knives, who



took three hostages and went on a two-hour rampage “behind chained doors,” according to news reports. In Ottawa, the Iranian Embassy was “attacked and pillaged” by some 55 people armed with sticks and hammers.

Expelled from Iran in 1981, and then evicted from France, the MEK in 1986 set up in Iraq where they “became a wholly owned subsidiary of Saddam Hussein’s regime,” according to Ken Pollack, a former CIA analyst and National Security Council director for Gulf affairs, in his book “The Persian Puzzle.”

Saddam “armed them, paid them, and sent them on missions into Iran during the later stages of the Iran-Iraq War,” notes Mr. Pollack, adding that they became “such creatures of the Iraqi regime” that they helped crush Shiite and Kurdish revolts in 1991 that the White House had encouraged – actions that today are one reason for enduring anti-MEK hostility from Iraq’s Shiite-led government.

The MEK denies fighting in Saddam’s wars and often claims it was “independent” of the Iraqi dictator’s regime, but Pollack’s description is confirmed by numerous independent sources.

A US State Dept. report in 1994 dismissed MEK efforts to reinvent itself. Noting the MEK’s “dedication to armed struggle”; the “fact that they deny or distort sections of their history, such as the use of violence”; the “dictatorial methods” of their leadership; and the “cult-like behavior of its members,” the State Dept. concluded that the MEK’s “29-year record of behavior does not substantiate its capability or intention to be democratic.”

That report describes tactics that foreshadow the MEK’s lobbying campaign today, 16 years later. It notes a “formidable Mojahidin outreach program,” which “solicits the support of prominent public figures,” and the “common practice ... to collect statements issued by prominent individuals.”

The more recent 2009 RAND study came to similar conclusions. It speaks of the MEK’s “long history of deception,” and how it has become “increasingly adept at crafting ... its image

as a democratic organization that seeks to bring down Iranian tyrants.”

When the US invaded Iraq in 2003, it also took ownership of the sprawling MEK base at Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad near the Iranian border. US forces did not disband the camp; hawkish talk in Washington was that the thousands of MEK militants might be recycled for future use against Iran.

Who pays?

The sources of funding for the campaign to rehabilitate the MEK are not clear, even to US officials. The Monitor sought contact with more than a dozen speakers which, combined with news reports and official disclosures, paint a picture of several Iranian-American groups – some with past links to the MEK, and all engaged in pro-MEK activities – bankrolling the effort.

Besides the string of well-attended events at prestigious American hotels and locations, and in Paris, Brussels, and Berlin, the campaign has included full-page advertisements in The New York Times and Washington Post – which can cost \$175,000 apiece – that demand delisting the MEK and protection of Camp Ashraf.

Several conferences have been sponsored by ExecutiveAction, LLC, whose CEO Neil Livingstone has long been active with MEK issues. His company has produced lengthy reports rebutting official US positions on the MEK.

According to his company website, Mr. Livingstone is also a member of the Iran Policy Committee (IPC), which in 2005 laid out a regime-change plan for Iran; its top priority was delisting the MEK.

An IPC panel in 2007 lists one speaker as Alireza Jafarzadeh, the MEK spokesman in Washington who the RAND report notes had “directed the MEK’s US lobbying apparatus” until it was designated an FTO. Mr. Crowley told the Monitor that Mr. Jafarzadeh – who today runs a Washington consultancy and conducts pro-MEK work – is “the driving force” behind the

MEK
Uncovered

285



current campaign.

Mukasey, the former attorney general, was photographed speaking with Jafarzadeh at a July 7 hearing on Capitol Hill titled “Massacre at Camp Ashraf: Implications for US Policy.” He told the Monitor that Jafarzadeh was “as far as I know, liaison to the Iranian-Americans who attended the hearing.”

Jafarzadeh did not respond to communications from the Monitor asking for comment.

Several speakers at MEK-linked events told the Monitor they were paid by the Iranian American Community of Northern California. Director Ahmad Moein did not respond to multiple telephone and e-mail attempts to reach him; the group’s website is dedicated to pro-MEK issues and events.

The California group hired the powerful Washington law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld to lobby on its behalf to remove the MEK from the terrorism list.

Also supplying some funds has been Colorado’s Iranian American Community, according to a disclosure report filed in early July by Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA) and posted at legistorm.com. That group paid \$6,589.62 for six days of first class travel and lodging expenses for Rep. Filner to attend the June MEK rally in Paris.

The House disclosure form describes him attending a “Grand meeting of Iranians in support of human rights and democracy for Iran.” It makes no mention of the MEK, nor meeting Rajavi. In his speech, Filner said: “I bring you greetings and support from the Congress of the United States ... I want to congratulate Madame Rajavi ... we will succeed.”

In 2007, Filner also accepted \$7,949.40 worth of travel to attend a “rally for Iranian human rights” in Paris. Both trips were paid for by Tim Mehdi Ghaemi of the Colorado group, according to the required “Private Sponsor Travel Certification Form.”

In 2004, this Colorado group was among 23 co-sponsors of a fundraiser for Iran’s Bam earthquake victims that turned into a “night of resistance.” Seventeen were found to have MEK

connections, including the Colorado group, according to news reports at the time. Then-Pentagon adviser Richard Perle delivered a paid speech, unaware of the MEK link. The US government froze the assets of the primary sponsor, the Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia.

Such groups are familiar to US agencies as a means for MEK supporters to raise and spend funds, despite the terrorist designation. The State Dept. has described how the MEK “has formed associated groups with benign names” to raise cash and sympathy.

“I am not aware of any activities they undertake that are not MEK-related,” says one US official about these regional organizations. “I couldn’t begin to count them all.... They’ve got so many shells and fronts among their organizations that we can’t keep up with them all.”

Camp Ashraf

But a top priority for speakers at pro-MEK events is Camp Ashraf and its 3,400 occupants, who after years of military training during the Saddam era were disarmed with a promise of protection from US commanders.

The camp – due to be closed by the end of the year – has largely cut itself off from the outside world, with restricted access to telephones, Internet, and satellite television. MEK members, their identity documents long ago confiscated by the MEK, take part in frequent self-criticism sessions and must pledge to “eternal divorce.”

“Love for the Rajavis was to replace love for spouses and family,” notes the 2009 RAND report, which found that perhaps 70 percent of the people there “may have been recruited through deception” and are kept at Ashraf “against their will.”

Severe gender segregation means that “lines are painted down the middle of hallways separating them into men’s and women’s sides,” the RAND report reads. “Even the gas station at Camp Ashraf has separate hours for men and women.”

Prior to 2003, all MEK members carried cyanide tablets in





leather pouches around their necks, according to RAND. Since then, “the MEK frequently used the threat of suicide as a negotiating tactic or to frustrate investigations.”

US officials are trying to convince the MEK to temporarily shift elsewhere in Iraq before disbanding, pinning their hopes on United Nations refugee status and resettlement elsewhere.

Mukasey told the Monitor that “What is developing [at Camp Ashraf] is another Srebrenica, with US complicity,” because Iraqi security forces – hostile to the MEK as past agents of Saddam – have several times in two years engaged in clashes at the camp, most recently in April when 34 were killed.

Former Governor Dean told an MEK-linked audience in July: “Let’s stop the name-calling and foolishness and look at this for what it is. This is genocide, and we will not have it!” Then he spoke of broader ambitions: “We will free the people of Ashraf, and we will free the people of Iran from the tyranny of the mullahs.”

Still uncertain, however, is the path that will lead there. Despite the warning by many Iran experts that the MEK belongs on the terrorism list, the high-powered campaign to resurrect the group carries on.

Also speaking in July, Shelton called the Camp Ashraf resettlement proposal a “recipe for ethnic cleansing,” adding: “Wake up, State Department! Take the MEK off the FTO list today.” He said the “10-point program and human rights platform” published by Mrs. Rajavi “makes it a no-brainer.”

Then Shelton posed the question: “Why would we not want to put the weight and power of this country behind an organization that we know stands for the same principles we stand for, and that is the best-organized, the best-led organization to take on the current Iranian regime?”



THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Mujahideen-e Khalq: Former U.S. Officials Make Millions Advocating For Terrorist Organization

August 2011

WASHINGTON — The ornate ballroom of the Willard Hotel buzzed with activity on a Saturday morning in July. Crowded together on the stage sat a cadre of the nation's most influential former government officials, the kind whose names often appear in boldface, who've risen above daily politics to the realm of elder statesmen. They were perched, as they so often are, below a banner with a benign conference title on it, about to offer words of pricey wisdom to an audience with an agenda.

That agenda: to secure the removal of the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) from the U.S. government's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. A Marxian Iranian exile group with cult-like qualities, Mujahideen-e Khalq was responsible for the killing of six Americans in Iran in the 1970s, along with staging a handful of bombings. But for a terrorist organization with deep pockets, it appears there's always hope.

Onstage next to former FBI director Louis Freeh sat Ed Rendell, the former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania and cur-

MEK
Uncovered

289



rent MSNBC talking head; former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean; former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Hugh Shelton; former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo West; former State Department Director of Policy Planning Mitchell Reiss; former Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. James T. Conway; Anita McBride, the former chief of staff to First Lady Laura Bush; and Sarah Sewall, a Harvard professor who sits on a corporate board with Reiss.

All told, at least 33 high-ranking former U.S. officials have given speeches to MEK-friendly audiences since December of last year as part of more than 22 events in Washington, Brussels, London, Paris and Berlin. While not every speaker accepted payment, MEK-affiliated groups have spent millions of dollars on speaking fees, according to interviews with the former officials, organizers and attendees.

Rendell freely admits he knew little about the group, also known as People’s Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI), before he was invited to speak just days earlier. But he told the audience that the elite status of his fellow panelists and the arguments they made for delisting the group were enough to convince him that it was a good idea.

The event where Rendell spoke was just part of a surge in pro-MEK lobbying efforts in Washington during the past year, spurred by an ongoing State Department review of the group’s status, which is expected to be completed this month. In addi-

tion to funding conferences with influential speakers, supporters have taken out issue ads in newspapers, placed op-eds in major publications, commissioned academic papers, hired new lobbying firms and made scores of visits to lawmakers. At first glance, these methods seem like standard Washington lobbying practices. But the MEK is a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, and providing direct assistance or services to them is against the law, as is taking payment from them. So why isn't Howard Dean under arrest? The operative word is "direct".

The MEK's delisting campaign is funded by a fluid and enigmatic network of support groups based in the United States. According to an MEK leader, these groups are funded by money from around the world, which they deliberately shield from U.S. authorities. These domestic groups book and pay for their VIP speakers through speaker agencies, which in turn pay the speakers directly and take a fee for arranging appearances. That way, the speakers themselves don't technically accept money from the community groups. If they did, they might discover what their speaker agents surely know: That most of the groups are run by ordinary, middle-class Iranian Americans working out of their homes — people who seem unlikely to have an extra few hundred thousand dollars laying around to pay speaker fees and book five-star hotels to bolster the MEK's cause.

The speakers are just the type of national-security heavyweights a plaintiff terrorist organization needs. In addition to those named above, the commissioned figureheads include Obama's recently-departed National Security Adviser Gen. James Jones; former Bush Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge; onetime State Department Counselor Philip Zelikow and former CIA directors Porter Goss and James R. Woolsey. Retired military officers are popular — former NATO Supreme Allied Commander Gen. Wesley K. Clark and former Commander in Chief of United States Central Command Gen.





Anthony Zinni have both addressed MEK groups. Yet more speakers appear to have been chosen for their deep political ties, such as former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former New Mexico Gov. and U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson, former Bush White House Chief of Staff Andy Card, former Indiana Sen. Evan Bayh and former 9/11 Commission Chairman Lee Hamilton.

Hamilton acknowledged to IPS News that he was paid for his appearances, describing his fee at the time as “significant.” Dean also acknowledged that he was paid for at least a portion of the speeches he gave to MEK groups in London, Paris and Washington, as did Gen. Clark. Gen. Jones told The Wall Street Journal that he received a “standard speaking fee.” Gen. Zinni’s speaker agent confirmed that Zinni was also paid his “standard speaking fee” for an eight-minute address at an MEK-related conference in January — between \$20,000 and \$30,000, according to his speaker profile. The same firm arranged for Zelikow to speak at two MEK-affiliated events this spring, and it recruited John Sano, the former deputy director of the National Clandestine Service, for his first MEK-related appearance on July 26.

Goss’s first speech to an MEK support group was in April. He told The Huffington Post that it had been handled entirely by his speaker agent and that his payment came from his agent. According to his profile, Goss commands a minimum of \$20,000 to \$30,000 per engagement.

“I never discuss my speaking fees,” Card told HuffPost when asked how much he was paid for seven minutes’ worth of remarks in late July on Capitol Hill. His standard fee, however, is between \$25,000 and \$40,000 per speech. Gov. Richardson’s office referred questions to his speaker agent, who did not return a call for comment, but Richardson’s standard speaker fees are the same as Card’s.

Woolsey was the only one of the speakers who reported that he waived his standard fees for MEK-supporting events, citing

his belief in the cause as his motivation for appearing. Sewall, on the other hand, carefully distanced herself from the MEK's objectives. "I was invited to speak at a conference on the Arab Spring and I received a speaker fee," she said of her July 16 speech. "My remarks were aimed at an Iranian American audience that was concerned about Camp Ashraf. I, too, am concerned about the ongoing humanitarian situation there. But I would not want my presence at the conference to be equated with a position on the delisting of the MEK."

The rest of the speakers did not respond to repeated requests for comment by email and phone from The Huffington Post. Nevertheless, the sheer size of the roster of marquis names illustrates just how far some elder statesmen on government pensions will go to fund their (very) golden years.

But not everyone accepts invitations to speak at MEK-related events. Despite offers of up to \$40,000 for notably brief remarks, sources with knowledge of speaker negotiations said at least four invited speakers have declined this year because they had questions about the ultimate goals.

The payment of a speaker's fee does not, of course, imply that the speaker has been told what to say. Indeed, while most of the panelists at MEK-affiliated conferences support at least part of the Iranian network's agenda, others avoid mentioning the exile group at all.

In both cases, what they say is less important to the group's cause than the mere fact that they show up and say it. Unless a speaker has a can't-lose stock tip, nobody is inherently worth \$20,000 for a six-minute speech — it's the shine of the speaker's credibility that the MEK's supporters are buying. The group has a well-documented history of conflating speakers' attendance at these events and deducing from that a broad endorsement of their agenda. Facilitating this is the point of the invitation, and both sides are sophisticated enough to know it, whether it's written in their speaker contracts or not.

On July 16 at the Willard, first-time MEK conference speaker





Rendell said that he initially declined the invitation to speak because, “I don’t know hardly anything about this subject ...[and] I don’t think I’m qualified to come.” To his surprise, conference organizers wanted to book him anyway. To help prepare for the event, Rendell told the audience that he had a long phone call with one of the group’s representatives. He also studied a packet of materials the organization sent him about the MEK and their Iraq compound, Camp Ashraf. On the morning of the conference, Rendell met with more MEK supporters, as well as with Dean, a frequent MEK conference speaker.

Rendell’s rhetorical ability to quickly distill an issue didn’t fail him behind the podium. “It’s been a great learning experience for me,” he told the crowd. “As a result of what I’ve learned [from the MEK supporters], on Monday I will send a letter to President Obama and to Secretary Clinton telling them [first], that the United States is morally bound to do everything we can to ensure the safety of the residents of Camp Ashraf. And two, if Director Freeh and General Shelton and General Conway and Governor Dean and the rest of these great panelists say that MEK is a force for good and the best hope we have for a third option in Iran, then, good Lord, take them off the terrorist list! Take them off the terrorist list!”

As Rendell’s applause died down, he added that he had never heard of Camp Ashraf until the group invited him to speak.

Conference organizer Ahmad Moein later defended the decision to book Rendell, despite his professed ignorance on the topic at hand. “It is the responsibility of Iranian American communities, including ours, to invite officials with impeccable service to this country ... and to provide them the opportunity to speak about the issues of mutual concern,” Moein wrote in an email, noting that, like the organization, Rendell had previously condemned the Iranian regime.

The former governor’s decision and subsequent endorsement highlights a kind of intellectual peer pressure that pervades MEK-related conferences and seeps into the public debate.

Fueled by standing ovations, the speakers shower praise on one another and on their hosts, leading one speaker to even compare the aura around events to that of a religious revival. Rendell isn't the only paid speaker MEK supporters have personally prepped in recent weeks. After Sano accepted a last-minute invitation to speak at a July 26 event, he described how he "sat down with two members of the Iranian committee for a couple of hours ... and they gave me some background" on the organization and related issues. Sano added that their information "meshed up with some of the things I had done in the government."

As for whether he had any qualms about how much the speakers were compensated for addressing the groups, Sano, who delivered the day's longest remarks with a 14 minute speech, paused and thought. "I mean, I guess you can interpret it either way. I was familiar with the situation in Iran both from my previous life and from what I've read in the press," he said, adding that he believes in delisting the group. But in the end, Sano admired the panel's big names more than anything else. "That was convincing for me ... the other panel members."

On May 12, a large-type, full-page ad appeared in The Washington Post demanding that the United States, "Delist the MEK, Iran's Main Opposition." Listed below the call to action were the names of 10 prominent national security bigwigs — some of whom never agreed to be on the list. Asked why his name was on the ad, Zelikow told The Huffington Post that he had "nothing to do with" it and that "no one had asked for my permission to sign off on it." He added that he was "surprised to see it." The same ad also listed Gen. Clark without his permission, according to a spokeswoman who said Clark never authorized the use of his name, and first learned of the ad when he saw it in print.

The promotion was paid for by a British MEK support group, but neither the phone nor email address listed on the ad was functioning at press time. At least two of the listees — Dean



and Woolsey — agreed to have their names used. The other individuals did not reply to inquiries on the matter.

Zelikow and Clark’s experiences are typical of interactions with MEK groups, said Dr. Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) and a critic of the MEK. “You do one thing with [MEK-related groups], and from then on they sign your name to anything they want to. They figure it’s more difficult for a public figure to complain and draw attention to themselves than it is to just live with it,” he said.

Given the organization’s controversial history, it’s easy to see why some speakers might choose not to publicize their affiliation.

Founded on Marxist principles in 1963, the Mujahideen-e Khalq carried out a number of bombings and assassinations in Iran during the 1970s, including one that killed six Americans. It was initially aligned with the 1979 Islamic revolution, but Ayatollah Khomeini quickly deemed the MEK a threat to his newly-installed government. Forced out of Iran, they eventually settled near Khalis, Iraq, at Camp Ashraf, a desert compound about 75 miles from the Iranian border where the majority of MEK loyalists reside today.

From 1980-’88, a militant wing of the MEK supported Saddam Hussein in his war against their former countrymen, a conflict which resulted in massive casualties on both sides — further fueled by U.S. financial support for Iraq. As a result of their actions in the war, the group is reviled today within Iran by major segments of the pro-democracy Green Movement and by those loyal to the ayatollahs. In post-Saddam Iraq, the MEK is best known for having allegedly carried out attacks on Kurds and Shiite Iraqis during the early 1990s, under orders from Hussein. MEK supporters deny that the group participated in either of the conflicts. If the alliance with Saddam in the 1980s helped to keep them on the U.S.’s good side throughout the decade, that changed in the 1990s. In 1996, Congress created the Foreign Terrorist Organization List as part of the Antiter-



rorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, and when it went into effect in 1997, the MEK was one of the first groups placed on the list.

Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the MEK agreed to give up its weapons arsenal in exchange for protection from the U.S. military. But following a review in 2007, the U.S. State Department maintained the organization's classification as a Foreign Terrorist Organization when it ruled the group still possessed the "capacity and will" to commit terrorist acts.

Throughout all this, the MEK has been led by the same two charismatic figures: Maryam Rajavi and her husband, Massoud Rajavi. Mrs. Rajavi is based in Paris, where she leads an Iranian shadow-government known as the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI). Massoud Rajavi's whereabouts are unknown. Members have long argued that the NCRI is a separate organization from the MEK, but an extensive FBI investigation concluded in 2004 that the NCRI is "not a separate organization, but is instead, and has been, an integral part of the MEK."

As part of its advocacy, the NCRI offers itself as the viable alternative to the current regime, and a democratic opposition. But U.S. officials don't see it that way. "We do not view the MEK as a viable opposition movement for Iran," a senior government official with knowledge of the issue told The Huffington Post. "Its own structure is not democratic, so how can the Iranian people expect it to enact democratic change within the country? There is a viable democratic movement afoot in Iran, and the world saw that in 2009."

The question of the MEK's structure arouses intense debate. Independent reports from Human Rights Watch and from the RAND Corporation have cataloged the group's cult practices at Camp Ashraf, which according to RAND, include "a near-religious devotion to the Rajavis ... public self-deprecation sessions, mandatory divorce, celibacy, enforced separation from family and friends and gender segregation." MEK members



and supporters deny that the group is a cult, and they dismiss the reports as propaganda by the Iranian regime.

Visitors to the White House surely recognize the name Camp Ashraf. For months, MEK supporters have stationed themselves in a tent on Pennsylvania Avenue, pleading for U.S. troops to protect the encampment from retaliation by Iraqi forces aligned with Iran, and providing passersby with evidence of massacred supporters.

Following a particularly brutal assault on the camp by Iraqi soldiers in April of this year, Howard Dean defended the Mujahideen-e Khalq on MSNBC.

As the U.S. military prepares to leave Iraq later this year, the fate of Camp Ashraf's 3,400 residents is uncertain. Most recently, officers on the ground hoped to convince Ashraf residents to relocate to a safer camp, but they have so far refused. Complicating matters, the House Foreign Affairs Committee recently approved an amendment aimed at preventing the "forcible relocation" of Ashraf residents. At a recent Capitol Hill conference, members of Congress and some of the group's past paid speakers passionately objected to any attempts to move followers out of camp. But time is running out — without the U.S. military's constant protection, the residents are in very real danger of more attacks by local troops like the one in April. MEK supporters argue that the only way to save the residents of Ashraf is by delisting the MEK from the State Department's terrorist list. But the group's detractors say this is false, and that other military and diplomatic options exist which have nothing to do with the FTO listing. The European Union did remove the group from its terrorist list in 2009, however, following a series of court cases.

In July, Ray Takeyh, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, testified at a House Foreign Relations Committee hearing that, "[While] the MEK emphasizes its commitment to democracy and free expression, in neither deed nor word has it forsworn its violent pedigree." Former Bush Attorney General

and frequent MEK conference panelist Michael Mukasey disagreed, telling lawmakers that the MEK's terrorist designation is "based on acts that are alleged to have occurred at the time the Shah was in power in Iran," and "the State Department has no evidence of any violent act even attributed to the group since then."

Mukasey's claim is disputed by a number of sources, but the question of whether the MEK has renounced its militant origins lies at the core of the State Department's review. A spokesman for the State Department declined to comment on the ongoing examination.

During the past year, two court cases in the United States have affected the MEK support groups' U.S. operations. In June 2010, the Supreme Court upheld a broad definition of the kind of "material support" that would be illegal to provide to designated terrorist organizations, including the MEK. The following month, a federal appeals court ruled in favor of a lawsuit brought by the MEK support groups seeking FTO status review, which the State Department has since undertaken.

In the meantime, the MEK's supporters skirt the financial restrictions placed on Foreign Terrorist Organizations using a web of dozens of Iranian American community groups whose members live in the United States. Many of these groups were created in 2003, when the U.S. government shut down the stateside office of the MEK's sister operation, the NCRI. In Texas, three separate Iranian American societies were registered between January and April of 2003, with two of them registered within a day of each other, according to state records. Only one of these three groups, the Iranian American Community of North Texas, is still operating.

Members of these groups closely guard the details of their activities and financing, a practice that leads to widespread speculation in foreign policy circles that they serve as illegal front groups for the MEK. "Anytime there's an influx of money this big, you have to question the motives," said Dr. Parsi.





Spokesmen for active MEK support groups in Missouri and California say their secrecy reflects a need to protect family members in Iran from retaliation, and is not intended to cover up illegal financing. According to Kasra Nejat, president of the MEK-affiliated group the Iranian American Cultural Association of Missouri (IACAM), “The Iranian regime’s agents spy on ... community members ... [so] the communities have made it their policy to keep details of activities of their members private.”

But a senior NCRI leader, Mahin Filabi, says that the secrecy will continue only as long as the FTO restrictions remain in place. A former Iranian Olympic wrestler, Filabi says that the primary reason MEK-related groups in the U.S. hide their funding sources is because of the constraints of the FTO restriction. The State Department “has to take that list off, and let us have bank accounts,” he told HuffPost following a congressional briefing in late July. “Then they [will] know where [the money] is coming from. You call me ‘terrorist’ and say, ‘Hey, where is your money coming from?’ I’m not going to tell you.” According to Filabi, the MEK raises money all over the world through televised pledge drives on its Internet TV channel, Sima TV, among other modes of outreach. He described how “for three days [recently] they were collecting money. One guy in Australia, his name was Ahmed, called the TV and said ‘OK, I have a house, worth \$250,000, I am selling. I give [the money] to you.’” Filabi claimed not to know where Sima TV is based, or how its proceeds reach the United States, but he said MEK supporters watch it “in every country,” including Iran.

For the highly paid speakers, however, the murky origins of the group’s money appear to offer just enough cover for them to deny having ever knowingly provided material support to a Foreign Terrorist Organization. VIP speaker agents offer them another layer of separation by dealing directly with the MEK-related community groups — signing contracts, taking money and conducting the actual financial business involved. Of the

33 MEK speakers, nearly all of them are represented by one of three major speaker bureaus: Leading Authorities, Washington Speakers Bureau (WSB) and the International Speakers Bureau (ISB). Senior executives from each bureau declined to respond to calls and emails from The Huffington Post.

Given how much money MEK support groups spent on speakers this year, it's no surprise that speaker agencies closed ranks. What's hard to believe, however, is how these brokers could possibly ignore the obvious disparities between many of the inscrutable, scattered community groups that sign their contracts, and the enormous amounts of money these groups pay to hire the nation's most prestigious speakers.

One of the groups in question, the Iranian American Community Association of Missouri (IACAM), sponsored two high-profile events in Washington this winter, each of which entailed a half-dozen expensive speakers, according to the events' organizer, Dr. Neil Livingstone. But the group doesn't even have a website, and its president Kasra Nejat, refused to say whether his group sponsored the events, or what they cost. The group is headquartered in Nejat's house, and registered as a non-profit in Missouri, but not with the federal government. Nejat and his wife, Rahelph Nejat, each personally donated \$1,000 to Rep. Lacy Clay (D-Mo.) in June of last year, less than two weeks after Clay backed a measure in the House to remove the MEK from the FTO list.

Similar MEK-affiliated organizations are registered as non-profits in Virginia, Colorado, and Florida. Like the Missouri group, none of them has a federal tax-exempt status, and none of them maintains a website.

In January of this year, the Iranian American Community of North Texas (IACNT) hired the K Street lobbying firm diGenova & Toensing specifically to advocate on behalf of MEK delisting. According to lobbying registration forms, the IACNT's headquarters are a Carrollton, Texas, home belonging to physicist Homeira Hessami, but the crude website offers no indication





of how the community is funded. Records do, however, reveal that Hessami has personally donated nearly \$5,000 to pro-MEK lawmakers since 2009. A phone call and email to the group by The Huffington Post were not returned.

In March, one of the largest MEK support groups, the Iranian American Community of Northern California (IACNC) hosted a lavish conference on Capitol Hill with eight professional speakers, including Sec. Ridge, Gov. Dean and Mukasey, as well as nine members of Congress. One month later, the group hired a prestigious D.C. law firm, Akin Gump, to lobby directly for delisting the MEK.

Reached via email, a spokesman for the IACNC claimed that all their funding comes from “community members,” and that his community is “fully responsible for paying [Akin Gump] and we raise the reasonable fee for the firm among our community members.” He acknowledged that his group sponsored four major speaker events in Washington this spring, including the July 16 Willard conference, but said he was not “authorized to divulge the information about the cost of our activities such as rallies, demonstrations, conferences and meeting our representatives and church leaders.”

But it’s not just the MEK’s support groups that are secretive: The U.S. contractors they do business with keep secrets, too. One of them is former Sen. Bob Torricelli (D-N.J.), who dropped his reelection bid in 2002 amid allegations of accepting improper donations. Torricelli founded a lobbying firm, Rosemont Associates, and in 2007 watchdog groups questioned donations he made from his leftover campaign account. Torricelli has denied any wrongdoing in either case. In 1995, Torricelli received \$2,000 in campaign contributions from Nejat, the president of the Missouri-based MEK support group, the IACAM.

In January, February and July of this year, Torricelli moderated well-publicized Washington conferences for MEK-affiliated groups. Asked about his pay structure for the first two events, a spokesman for Rosemont Associates said that Torricelli “is

part of the legal team involved in the FTO delisting effort of the MEK. He works through the law firm Mayer Brown ... [and] any questions about the legal team [should be directed to the firm].”

Mayer Brown partner Andrew Frey confirmed that Torricelli had been retained as part of a legal team, but told HuffPost the firm had “no involvement in the conferences or in payment for them,” and Frey did not “really know,” how Torricelli was involved in the events.

Another of the MEK-related groups’ go-to men in Washington is Dr. Neil Livingstone, a security expert who has worked for unnamed MEK supporters since at least 2005. Livingstone is currently mounting a campaign for governor of Montana on the GOP ticket.

During the past six years, Livingstone has written three reports and organized three conferences that were paid for by MEK-related entities following with a massive 2005 report he co-authored with FreedomWorks founder Dick Arme, then a partner at DLA Piper. The 236 page document contains 1,194 references to the MEK, as well as a disclaimer that “[None of this report was] prepared under the direction, control, or with any financing from MEK or NCRI.”

Livingstone’s next two reports both accuse other groups of anti-MEK bias. The first attacks the RAND Corporation study on the MEK. The second report accuses the State Department of bias against the MEK. Livingstone refused to say who paid for any of the reports, which are occasionally distributed at MEK supporters’ conferences.

The three events Livingstone organized were all in Washington, on Dec. 17 of last year, Jan. 20 and Feb. 19. According to transcripts, Livingstone told guests that his company, ExecutiveAction LLC “sponsored” two of the events, but he later told The Huffington Post that the bills were in fact paid by the Iranian American Cultural Association of Missouri. He declined to say how much the MEK-affiliated groups paid him for planning



the events. Now that the State Department's decision regarding the MEK is imminent, Livingstone is moving on. He is in the process, he told The Huffington Post, of closing down his company to focus on his gubernatorial campaign.



304

Inside Mujahidin-e Khalq's Massive Lobbying Push

August 2011

The Christian Science Monitor has an extensive article on the Mujahidin-e Khalq's lobbying efforts. It reviews the terrorist group's history and the debate over removing it from the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list, but it goes into much greater detail in describing how the MEK has been getting the support of many prominent American advocates. The most disturbing thing in the article is the claim that top national security officials wouldn't have heard about the MEK prior to being approached by the group's representatives:

"Top-level national security officials never heard about the MEK; it never rose to their level until now," says another US official. "So when MEK representatives show them a political platform comprised of the '15 greatest ideas of Western civilization,' it looks pretty compelling."

If you knew nothing about the group until now, and you were extremely gullible, I suppose it could be. Ignorance would help to account for why so many former officials and politicians would be willing to associate themselves with the cause of a terrorist group, but it is hardly reassuring that "top-level" national security officials are so ignorant of the recent history of Iran and Iraq that being approached by representatives of this group wouldn't raise any red flags. It shouldn't come as a sur-

MEK
Uncovered

305



prise that these officials don't understand the region's politics and history very well, but that is just one more reason not to heed their recommendations on how to treat the MEK.

The article goes on to list quotes from Rudy Giuliani, Howard Dean, and a number of former Bush administration officials, all of whom are on the record saying embarrassing things in praise of the MEK. Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell may have qualified for the most egregious flattery when he said, "MEK is a force for good, and the best hope we have." While these people may not be able to appreciate what this sounds like to most Iranians, having so many prominent national figures in the U.S. singing this group's praises signals to Iranians that Americans see both the Iranian people and the regime as our enemy. If the State Department were so unwise as to remove the MEK from the FTO list, that would mark this administration as being more hostile towards Iran than the two administrations before it.

Confirming just how creepy the cult of personality built around Maryam Rajavi is, the article describes Camp Ashraf:

Her portrait – along with that of husband and co-leader Masoud Rajavi, who has been in hiding since 2003 – is as ubiquitous at Camp Ashraf as Saddam Hussein's once was across Iraq, and Ayatollah Khomeini's still is in Iran. Every day at the camp, the MEK motto is heard: "Iran is Rajavi, Rajavi is Iran. Iran is Maryam, Maryam is Iran."

Obviously, a new totalitarian political cult is not what Iranians need or want. The group has eagerly started saying all of the right things about democracy, but the group's organization and practices show that it has no values in common with the legitimate Iranian opposition or with the United States. In the past, the State Department has understood this:

A US State Dept. report in 1994 dismissed MEK efforts to reinvent itself. Noting the MEK's "dedication to armed struggle"; the "fact that they deny or distort sections of their history, such as the use of violence"; the "dictatorial methods" of their leadership; and the "cult-like behavior of its members," the State Dept. concluded that the MEK's "29-year record of behavior does not substantiate its capability or intention to be democratic."

Nothing about the MEK has changed in the last seventeen years, except that it has become more adept at getting Americans opposed to the Iranian government to work on its behalf. As Trita Parsi explains, the only thing that has made the decision to keep the MEK on the list remotely controversial is that the group's lobbying is much greater this time around:

The momentum to remove the terrorist status "is all about [the MEK's] ability to muster a political lobbying campaign," says Parsi. If the decision were based on "the merits of the case, this would be as uncontroversial as the four times that the Bush administration re-listed them. Four times. No controversy."

Put another way, not even the Bush administration was willing to accept the MEK's reinvention, and they were hardly interested in fostering good relations with Tehran. The Obama administration should likewise reject the appeals of these paid advocates for a terrorist group.



The New York Times

An Iranian Cult and Its American Friends

August 2011

Elizabeth Rubin is a contributor to The New York Times Magazine, where her article “The Cult of Rajavi” appeared in July 2003.

A FEW weeks ago I received an e-mail from an acquaintance with the subject line: Have you seen the video everyone is talking about?

I clicked play, and there was Howard Dean, on March 19 in Berlin, at his most impassioned, extolling the virtues of a woman named Maryam Rajavi and insisting that America should recognize her as the president of Iran.

Ms. Rajavi and her husband, Massoud, are the leaders of a militant Iranian opposition group called the Mujahedeen Khalq, or Warriors of God. The group’s forces have been based for the last 25 years in Iraq, where I visited them shortly after the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003.

Mr. Dean’s speech stunned me. But then came Rudolph W. Giuliani saying virtually the same thing. At a conference in Paris last December, an emotional Mr. Giuliani told Ms. Rajavi, “These are the most important yearnings of the human soul that you support, and for your organization to be described as a terrorist organization is just simply a disgrace.” I thought I was watching The Onion News Network. Did Mr. Giuliani know whom he was talking about?

MEK
Uncovered

308

An Iranian Cult and Its American Friends

By ELIZABETH HUNN AUG. 12, 2010



Evidently not. In fact, an unlikely chorus of the group's backers — some of whom have received speaking fees, others of whom are inspired by their conviction that the Iranian government must fall at any cost — have gathered around Mujahedeen Khalq at conferences in capitals across the globe.

This group of luminaries includes two former chairmen of the joint chiefs of staff, Gens. Hugh H. Shelton and Peter Pace; Wesley K. Clark, the former NATO commander; Gen. James L. Jones, who was President Obama's national security adviser; Louis J. Freeh, the former F.B.I. director; the former intelligence officials Dennis C. Blair and Michael V. Hayden; the former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson; the former attorney general Michael B. Mukasey, and Lee H. Hamilton, a former congressman who was co-chairman of the 9/11 Commission. Indeed, the Rajavis and Mujahedeen Khalq are spending millions in an attempt to persuade the Obama administration, and in particular Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, to take them off the national list of terrorist groups, where the group was listed in 1997. Delisting the group would enable it to lobby Congress for support in the same way that the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 allowed the Iraqi exile Ahmad Chalabi to do.

Mrs. Clinton should ignore their P.R. campaign. Mujahedeen Khalq is not only irrelevant to the cause of Iran's democratic activists, but a totalitarian cult that will come back to haunt us. When I arrived at Camp Ashraf, the base of the group's opera-

MEK
Uncovered

309



tions, in April 2003, I thought I'd entered a fictional world of female worker bees. Everywhere I saw women dressed exactly alike, in khaki uniforms and mud-colored head scarves, driving back and forth in white pickup trucks, staring ahead in a daze as if they were working at a factory in Maoist China. I met dozens of young women buried in the mouths of tanks, busily tinkering with the engines. One by one, the girls bounded up to me and my two minders to recite their transformations from human beings to acolytes of Ms. Rajavi. One said she had been suicidal in Iran until she found Ms. Rajavi on the Internet. At Camp Ashraf, 40 miles north of Baghdad, near the Iranian border, 3,400 members of the militant group reside in total isolation on a 14-square-mile tract of harsh desert land. Access to the Internet, phones and information about the outside world is prohibited. Posters of Ms. Rajavi and her smiling green eyes abound. Meanwhile, she lives in luxury in France; her husband has remained in hiding since the United States occupied Iraq in 2003.

During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the group served as Mr. Hussein's own private militia opposing the theocratic government in Tehran. For two decades, he gave the group money, weapons, jeeps and military bases along the border with Iran. In return, the Rajavis pledged their fealty.

In 1991, when Mr. Hussein crushed a Shiite uprising in the south and attempted to carry out a genocide against the Kurds in the north, the Rajavis and their army joined his forces in mowing down fleeing Kurds.

Ms. Rajavi told her disciples, "Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards." Many followers escaped in disgust.

So the Rajavis then began preying on Iranian refugees and asylum seekers in Europe to fill their ranks. The Rajavis promise them salaries, marriage, family, freedom and a great cause — fighting the Iranian government. Then the unwitting youths arrive in Iraq.

What is most disturbing is how the group treats its members. After the Iran-Iraq war, Mr. Rajavi orchestrated an ill-planned offensive, deploying thousands of young men and women into Iran on a mass martyrdom operation. Instead of capturing Iran, as they believed they would, thousands of them were slaughtered, including parents, husbands and wives of those I met in Iraq in 2003.

After my visit, I met and spoke to men and women who had escaped from the group's clutches. Many had to be deprogrammed. They recounted how people were locked up if they disagreed with the leadership or tried to escape; some were even killed.

Friendships and all emotional relationships are forbidden. From the time they are toddlers, boys and girls are not allowed to speak to each other. Each day at Camp Ashraf you had to report your dreams and thoughts.

If a man was turned on by the scent of a woman or a whiff of perfume, he had to confess. Members had to attend weekly ideological cleansings in which they publicly confessed their sexual desires. Members were even forced to divorce and take a vow of lifelong celibacy to ensure that all their energy and love would be directed toward Maryam and Massoud.

Mr. Hamilton and Generals Jones and Clark have been paid speakers' fees by front groups for Mujahedeen Khalq and have spoken in support of the group in public conferences. They claimed ignorance of how the group treated its members.

"I don't know a lot about the group," Mr. Hamilton told me over the phone last week. But in 1994, when he was chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr. Hamilton received a report describing the group as a violent cult with a distinct ideology synthesizing Marxism and messianic Shiism.

At a February conference in Paris, Mr. Dean praised the group's extraordinary "bill of rights." And General Jones said to Ms. Rajavi: "It is time for those of us from the United States who have come to know and admire you and your colleagues and your





goals to do what is required to recognize the legitimacy of your movement and your ideals.” When I asked General Jones last week if he knew that some considered the group a totalitarian cult, he replied, “This is the first time I’ve heard anything about this.”

He said he’d checked with military and F.B.I. officials. “I wanted to make sure we weren’t supporting a group that was doing nefarious things that I don’t know about,” he said. “Nobody brought it up, so I didn’t know what questions to ask.”

IN fact, a 2004 F.B.I. report on the group detailed a joint investigation by the American and German police, which revealed that the group’s cell in Cologne, Germany, had used money from a complex fraud scheme to buy military equipment. The group used children with multiple identities to claim multiple benefit checks from the German government. Evidence also showed that the group had obtained money in Los Angeles to purchase GPS units to increase the accuracy of planned mortar attacks on Tehran.

It is possible that such plots do not bother General Jones and other supporters of the group. But Iraq will no longer tolerate its presence. Its government wants the Mujahedeen Khalq out of the country by the end of the year. In April, Iraqi forces attacked Camp Ashraf. General Jones and other supporters of the group were outraged.

They are right that we should have compassion for those trapped inside the camp. A 2009 RAND Corporation study found that up to 70 percent of the group’s members there might have been held against their will. If the group’s American cheerleaders cared for those at the camp half as much as they did for the Rajavis, they would be insisting on private Red Cross visits with each man and woman at Camp Ashraf.

American officials who support the group like to quote the saying, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” By this logic, the group’s opposition to the Tehran theocracy justifies American backing. But there is another saying to consider: “The means

are the ends.”

By using the Mujahedeen Khalq to provoke Tehran, we will end up damaging our integrity and reputation, and weaken the legitimate democracy movement within Iran.

As a senior State Department official told me, “They are the best financed and organized, but they are so despised inside Iran that they have no traction.” Iranian democracy activists say the group, if it had had the chance, could have become the Khmer Rouge of Iran.

“They are considered traitors and killers of Iranian kids,” said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the Mujahedeen Khalq’s status on the terrorist list is under review. “They are so unpopular that we think any gesture of support to them would disqualify and discredit us as being interested in democratic reform.”

If the group is taken off the terrorist list, it will be able to freely lobby the American government under the guise of an Iranian democracy movement.

Recent history has shown that the United States often ends up misguidedly supporting not only the wrong exile groups in the Middle East, but the least relevant ones. We cannot afford to be so naive or misguided again.



MEK
Uncovered

313



THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Mujahedin Machine vs. The Iranian-American Community

August 2011

In the past few weeks, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) has been launching relentless attacks against the National Iranian American Council (NIAC). The immediate reason is the Iranian-American campaign spearheaded by NIAC to keep the MEK on the U.S.'s terrorist list. NIAC and others have launched this campaign because delisting the MEK would unleash a major force for a U.S.-Iran war, undermine the peaceful pro-democracy movement in Iran while empowering anti-democratic hardliners, and put the free voices of the Iranian-American community under threat.

The MEK's attacks are not new. The MEK and neo-conservative elements supporting them have for years been orchestrating attacks against prominent Iranian American individuals and institutions who do not subscribe to their views. The targets have included not just me and NIAC, but also individuals like Ramin Jahanbeglou, Vali Nasr, and Shirin Ebadi. Indeed, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has detailed how the MEK accuses any and all of its detractors of being agents of the Islamic Republic.

NIAC poses a threat to the MEK in many ways - because we give the Iranian-American community a voice in Washington that opposes war, opposes indiscriminate sanctions and sup-

MEK
Uncovered

314



ports human rights and indigenous democratization in Iran.

The MEK has a radically different agenda, and like some of its neoconservative counterparts, wants to silence independent voices opposing their pro-war agenda.

The MEK and these neo-conservatives sought hard to hide the true source and reasons for the attacks against prominent Iranian Americans and NIAC. The MEK knows very well how despised they are in the Iranian-American community. More often than not, their attack dogs pretend to be Monarchists or of some other denomination. Few, if any, admit their ties to the MEK. And these neo-conservatives know that the attacks will appear more credible if they have an Iranian face.

But recently, the MEK's desperation has shone through. Now, they no longer pretend to be disconnected from their campaigns against other Iranian Americans. Their attacks are posted on their own websites, and the attackers openly declare their dedication and loyalty to the MEK.

In this new desperation, they have also revealed their larger agenda. In a recent article, the MEK juxtaposed NIAC's current campaign to educate the public about the ramifications of delisting the MEK from terror list against an analysis I wrote in 2007 describing the likely consequences of the Bush administration's plan to include the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) on that same list.

The purpose of this comparison is to support the baseless



claims by the MEK and its network of supporters that NIAC supports the regime in Iran.

The comparison falls flat. The designation would have had no economic impact on the IRGC, which was already exhaustively sanctioned by the United States. Instead, the designation was intended to advance a cause for war before the Bush administration's term ended. Indeed, the entire issue seemed ripped straight out of the Iraq war playbook. This is why several leading U.S. policymakers opposed the measure, including the bipartisan leadership of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (led by now Vice-President Joseph Biden and Republican Senator Richard Lugar).

Senator Joe Lieberman, one of the strongest advocates for an Iran war in the Senate, later introduced the idea in legislative form and added language that explicitly gave a green light to conducting military action against Iran. The Kyl-Lieberman amendment stated the following:

(4) to support the prudent and calibrated use of all instruments of United States national power in Iraq, including diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military instruments, in support of the policy described in paragraph (3) with respect to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies.

The call for the "use of all instruments" including military instruments is what constituted a green light for war. In reality, the amendment had less to do with listing the IRGC as a terrorist organization than supporting military action against Iran before Bush's term came to an end.

The amendment caused a storm in the Senate - and even the Democratic primary debates - because it was rightly seen as an effort to start a war with Iran. Opposition from anti-war groups and Lieberman's colleagues in the eventually saw the above paragraph deleted from the amendment.

To suggest that my analysis, or Senator Biden and others' opposition to this move, was favorable to the IRGC is preposterous. Indeed, NIAC has been a key supporter of precision

sanctions targeting the IRGC and leaders of the Islamic Republic. These targeted sanctions hit the elements in the Islamic Republic responsible for crafting policy and for the human rights abuses, while sparing innocent civilians and allowing the nascent opposition movement room to grow and build their power.

And herein lies the difference between NIAC's approach and the tactics of the MEK and these neo-conservatives. Though they pretend to target the IRGC, their policies in reality pave the way for a war that would see hundreds of thousands dead. NIAC and the Iranian-American community as a whole, on the other hand, puts the well being of the peoples of the America and Iran at the center. We have consistently opposed war, and instead pursued policies that would target the IRGC and the leaders of the Islamic Republic without hurting the Iranian people or risking a war that would be disastrous for both countries.

The questions people should ask themselves is why the MEK and these neo-conservatives consistently support policies that on the surface appear to target the clerical regime, but in reality drive the US and Iran towards a military confrontation.

Our ability to give the Iranian-American community an opportunity to be heard in Washington DC is a threat both to the agenda of the MEK and that of these neo-conservatives. Therefore, the attacks against independent voices in the Iranian-American community and NIAC will continue. But as the community comes to understand the agenda of the MEK, it will no longer buy their conspiracy theories.



The Inside Story of America's Favorite Terrorist Group

August 2011

Ever since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Iranian MEK (short for Mujahedeen-e Khalge) has been a thorny spoil of war for the United States. Originally an armed anti-Shah movement, they came to fight the clerical regime they helped impose only to move on to supporting Iraq in its war against the ayatollah and his minions. Having targeted and killed several prominent Americans during their heyday in the 1970s, they are on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. Now, about three thousand members of the group—seasoned in fighting the Iranian regime and stationed by Saddam in a place called Camp Ashraf—are American captives in Iraq. In the last few years, their fate has been the subject of constant squabbles in Washington and between Washington and Baghdad. With an apparently endless supply of funds at their disposal, MEK members have repeatedly and unsuccessfully petitioned the federal government to have their names taken off the terrorist list. In a few days, Secretary Clinton will have to decide how to answer their pleas. And so their remarkably well-oiled machine of PR firms, powerful American politicians (all handsomely paid for services rendered) and other pressure groups is now at it again. These advocates repeat what the MEK and its many front organizations claim: The group has jettisoned its violent past and is

MEK
Uncovered

318



now, in its new incarnation, a key component of the democratic movement.

At the same time, another equally well-oiled machine, this one even including lobbyists paid for by the clerical regime in Tehran, is working against delisting MEK, calling the group a dangerous cult with Iranian, Iraqi and American blood on its hands. Many in Iraq (either taking their cues from the current leadership or with an eye toward the days when MEK was an enforcer for the Saddam regime) are opposed to the group's continued residence in their country.

MEK was formed in opposition to the Shah in the mid-sixties, and before long virtually its entire leadership was arrested and sent to the firing squad. The only early leader to survive was Masud Rajavi, who continues to rule the group to this day. In the seventies, the remaining members sent a representative to Najaf to work with Khomeini, then living in exile. Khomeini's supporters in Tehran, including Rafsanjani and Montazeri, convinced the ayatollah to allow the use of religious funds to support the families of those MEK members who had been imprisoned or executed. Yet Khomeini never fully trusted the group; its ideology seemed a dangerous combination of Marxism and its own interpretation of Shiism. As one Iranian critic put it, MEK is "Stalinism minus the vodka."

After the revolution, MEK was amongst the most stalwart supporters of the clerical regime. It grew in number and stature



rapidly, soon becoming the most formidable organization in the country. The MEK used its increasing power to pressure the government into increasingly radical action—from more summary trials and executions to the occupation of the American embassy. Simultaneously it adopted close ties with Moscow, and particularly with the KGB. One of its leaders, named Saadati, was arrested while passing to the KGB a counterespionage file the group had taken when it attacked the Shah’s secret-police offices. In return, the kgb promised to give the MEK a full list of CIA agents in Iran.

But eventually MEK fell afoul of the regime and began to fight the power holders in Tehran. Young men and women were sent in droves to armed street demonstrations. Khomeini’s regime responded with remarkable brutality, slaughtering thousands of the organization’s members. The group returned the favor and killed, by its own claims, more than two thousand regime leaders. MEK was in fact the first group in Iran (and arguably in the region) to use suicide bombers.

Eventually the group had no choice but to take its surviving cadres out of the country. On January 7, 1986, in a letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, the MEK requested the Soviets “give temporary asylum” to any member of the organization that fled across the border into the Soviet Union. Concurrent with the request for asylum, in another letter to the “Dear Comrades” of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, MEK asked for a loan of three hundred million dollars to continue their “revolutionary anti-imperialist” actions (see: anti-Americanism). This request came on the heels of a twelve-page letter from Rajavi to “Dear Comrade Gorbachev” in which he began by praising the Soviet Union’s efforts “against imperialist adventurism.” To support his organization’s loan application, Rajavi informed Gorbachev that the MEK “has faced the most concentrated efforts of officials from the United States” and offered supporting documents in an appendix.

It is not clear how the Soviets responded, but MEK soon settled in Iraq, helping Saddam Hussein in his war with Iran. In 1988, the group—lead by Rajavi and his wife, Maryam—engaged in three operations, conducted with the help of the Iraqi army, against Iranian forces. By all accounts, all three were badly bungled. Several thousands were killed on both sides. Moreover, in Iranian prisons, on Khomeini's direct order, about four thousand MEK prisoners, who were serving time on earlier charges, were summarily executed lest they help the invading MEK units.

When American forces attacked Iraq, according to Iraqi documents captured and declassified by the U.S. military, Rajavi met with Saddam's top intelligence operatives and agreed to use MEK forces against insurgents, freeing the Republican Guard to fight the Americans. The report of the meeting was sent directly to Saddam's son, Odey. It is little wonder that the current Iraqi regime is opposed to the MEK—a stance constantly fueled by the Iranian regime.

Throughout this bloody history, replete with tactical and strategic blunders, Rajavi and Maryam have remained the absolute leaders of MEK. They are worshipped by their adherents. The organization's members and their advocates tell the world they have jettisoned their past and are now dedicated to democracy. In cults, however, leaders remain unchanged.

The reality is that the MEK has fought the clerical regime more effectively than any other group. It is also true that throughout nearly all of its history, the same couple has ruled the organization, and there are many claims that they rule it with an iron fist. Only if there is free and fair discussion of the current leadership under democratic conditions (and under international supervision), and only after a new, fresh leadership is freely and democratically elected should the United States even consider the idea of removing the group from its terrorist list.



THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The Lobbying that Shouldn't be Happening

August 2011

The extraordinary lobbying campaign on behalf of the sometime Marxist/Islamist cult/terrorist group known as the Mujahed-in-e Khalq is getting waged on ever more fronts. The specific objective is to get the Obama administration to remove the MEK from the list of foreign terrorist organizations. Wherever the money to fund the campaign is coming from, some of the largest expenditures so far have been in the form of fat speaking fees to notables who are willing to accept the check and come out in favor of delisting the group. Some of these high-profile hired advocates later acknowledged they did not have all that much knowledge about the MEK.

Having purchased advocacy at the high end, the organizers of the campaign are now buying it at the low end. For a demonstration outside the State Department on Friday, demonstrators who, it is probably fair to say, know even less about the MEK than the big-name speakers were bussed in from as far as New York City. Many demonstrators were provided not only the transportation but also in some cases lodging and meals. One of the participants, a 23-year-old homeless man from Staten Island named Melvin Santiago, said he learned about the demonstration from a friend who in turn got word of it through a flyer distributed in front of a church—where the friend, said Santiago, “usually goes for the food pantry.”

MEK
Uncovered

322



Those who have sold their advocacy for big bucks deserve shame; those who have done so for a meal or two maybe deserve our pity. Those who have gotten mixed up in the campaign through a crude belief that Iran is an enemy and the enemy of my enemy is my friend need to realize that being an enemy's enemy does not make one a friend. Those who have some notion that the MEK can serve as a force for opposing authoritarianism in Iran are badly mistaken about the nature of the group—a good description of which is in a recent piece by Elizabeth Rubin in the New York Times. The most telling comments about the MEK are from leaders of the Green Movement in Iran, who point out that any rehabilitation of the MEK—which has almost no popular support within Iran, especially ever since it functioned as an arm of Saddam Hussein's security forces—would only serve to discredit pro-democracy forces in Iran.

Even setting all that aside, there is an important procedural issue involved. On this issue alone, the pro-MEK campaign is objectionable. The decision of the secretary of state that the campaign is attempting to influence is not some subjective act of crafting policy. It is supposed to be a straightforward application of the terms of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, which created the formal list of foreign terrorist organizations (creation of such a list having been necessitated by other provisions in the act, such as the criminal-

MEK
Uncovered

323



ization of material support to terrorist groups). The procedure for listing or recertifying FTOs, as they are called, involves not only the State Department but also the Justice Department and the intelligence community. It is a long legal and administrative procedure, as I can testify from having been involved in the creation of the initial list of FTOs after passage of the 1996 law. The criteria to be applied involve such things as involvement in terrorist activity and effects on U.S. interests (which is not to be equated with terrorist attacks being directed against U.S. targets). Having conducted an anti-U.S. terrorist attack recently is not one of the criteria; if it were, many current FTOs—such as Lebanese Hizballah—would not be on the list.

Abbas Milani, in an otherwise informative piece in these spaces about the MEK, unfortunately suggests an equivalence between the well-funded pro-MEK campaign and statements that have been critical of the campaign and the group. Milani even talks about Iranian regime funding of anti-MEK lobbyists. (That last point is a little puzzling. The regime assuredly hates the MEK as much as most Iranians do and, if the group were delisted, would get plenty of mileage from loudly proclaiming that this action shows how phony is any U.S. affirmation of supporting democracy in Iran. But precisely for that reason, and because of how the action would help to discredit the democratic opposition in Iran, the more strategically minded hardliners in the regime probably would quietly welcome delisting.) Whatever the Iranian regime may be doing, the statements critical of the pro-MEK campaign that I am familiar with (and have participated in myself) have nothing to do with the regime, and they are not an attempt to lobby the secretary of state. Instead, they are a calling to account of the large and illegitimate campaign that is trying to pressure the secretary. The calling to account would not be necessary if the pro-MEK campaign were not being waged. The MEK has been recertified as an FTO several times in the past with no noise about it in the street, on speakers' platforms or in opinion columns.

The secretary of state should pay no heed to what Melvin Santiago and the other hungry homeless outside her office window are saying, or to what the high-paid hired guns are saying, about the MEK. Nor does she need to pay any attention to what people like me are saying about the group. She should keep the windows closed and just pay attention to the terms of the law and to what officials in the departments and agencies involved say about whether the terms of the law still apply in this case.





Don't be fooled: MEK is a terrorist group

September 2011

(CNN) -- Is it possible that a terrorist organization that has killed Americans and tortures its own members could organize a massive lobbying campaign to manipulate U.S. national security decisions?

It's happening before our very eyes.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is due to decide soon whether the Iranian Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) should remain on the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations or be delisted and free to raise taxpayer support for their operations. The State Department says that throughout the 1970s, the MEK staged terrorist attacks inside Iran, and killed several U.S. military personnel and civilians working on defense projects in Tehran. It also says MEK members participated in the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

But while the MEK remains designated as a terrorist group, it has managed to leverage a caustic political environment in the United States, a humanitarian crisis in Iraq for which it bears significant responsibility and bundles of cash to pull off one of the most insidious pressure campaigns Washington has seen. Recently, it came to light that many of about 33 former U.S. officials who have advocated delisting the MEK have been paid to speak at events sponsored by Iranian groups that want it off the list. Some of the officials have since quietly backed away,

MEK
Uncovered

326



professing ignorance about the group that had presented itself innocuously as an “Iranian opposition movement.”

Others, like Michael Mukasey and Howard Dean, have redoubled their efforts in the midst of criticism and recalibrated their message to urge for delisting on humanitarian grounds. But while there is certainly a humanitarian crisis for MEK members, the organization’s leadership is directly culpable.

While the MEK’s core leadership is based comfortably in Paris, some 3,400 of its rank-and-file members are based in the organization’s Iraq compound, Camp Ashraf, along the Iranian border. There, they are held hostage to the MEK leadership’s efforts to gain international support.

MEK advocates who claim support for the group on humanitarian grounds have not answered key questions about the group’s inhumane practices, outlined by Human Rights Watch, including MEK’s repeated threats of suicide as a negotiating tactic, according to a RAND Corp. study.

The study, commissioned for the Pentagon, says that 70% of the people at Camp Ashraf joined after the group moved to Iraq, and a “substantial number of these MEK members were lured to Iraq under false pretenses or did not have a clear understanding of the group’s goals and methods of operation -- particularly with respect to its cult behavior -- and many have been forced to remain against their will.”

Human Rights Watch has documented torture by MEK of



members who have tried to flee. Those who have managed to escape report that the MEK prevents those in Ashraf from accessing telephones, television, Internet or any form of outside communication .

But the MEK leadership has cleverly leveraged its antagonism with the Iranian regime to exploit U.S.-Iran enmity and convince policymakers that the “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” In so doing, they have largely managed to deflect attention away from the MEK’s shadowy practices and human rights abuses in Ashraf.

The MEK leadership in Paris has seized on deplorable actions by the Iraqi government, which views the MEK warily because of its close ties it had with Saddam Hussein, to argue for delisting.

Under pressure from Iran, Iraq has waged incursions into Ashraf that have resulted in shameful losses of life -- up to 34 killed. But instead of pursuing a true humanitarian solution, MEK leadership cynically used these events as public relations tools while obstructing serious proposals, because they would likely address MEK’s own abuses.

The MEK has argued against any proposal that would let its members to leave the group. The New York Times reports that U.S. efforts to facilitate a humanitarian solution have been blocked by residents refusing to leave. The U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees has publicly offered to facilitate a refugee resettlement process but has stated that individuals at Ashraf have refused to renounce violence, a prerequisite to participating.

Ultimately, the driving force behind the MEK’s campaign in the U.S. has come from the same circles that championed supposed dissidents such as Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress to build a groundswell of support for the U.S. to invade Iraq. Like those Iraqi exiles, the MEK enjoys no domestic legitimacy, yet claims to be Iran’s “main opposition.” Most of the officials who repeat this have no idea that the MEK is

among the most reviled groups in Iran.

Kaleme, a publication closely associated with Iran's true "main opposition," the Green Movement, warned last week that delisting the MEK would be devastating to Iran's democracy and human rights movement. Such a move would bring back "bitter memories of anti-Iran policies, such as the 1953 coup" that toppled Iran's first democratically elected prime minister. A U.S. delisting of the MEK would also send a signal that we have turned our backs on the nonviolent democratic movement in order to back a violent group.

Many fear that a delisted MEK would help the regime taint the Green Movement while shifting competition with Iran's government from one of popular legitimacy -- where the nonviolent democracy movement is strong -- into a competition of violence, where the MEK prefers to operate but where the regime is strongest.

Any doubts about this violent agenda were dispelled last week at a pro-MEK conference that revealed in starkest terms yet how a delisted MEK would be used. "We need a very active tit-for-tat policy," said Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney. "So every time they kill Americans, they have an accident in Iran."

"I know that may sound too militaristic," agreed former CIA official John Sano, "but you have to go with what your enemy understands."

Clearly, delisting the MEK has little to do with humanitarian concern or support for a democratic Iran but is instead a push for another disastrous war of choice in the Middle East.



WikiLeaks Releases involving Mujahaddin e-Khalq (MEK)

September 2011

U.S. government cables revealed by Wikileaks include numerous references to the Mujahaddin e-Khalq (MEK). Details include:

- MEK threatens mass suicide as bargaining chip: “The group’s leadership at Camp Ashraf is prepared to order residents to kill themselves to protest any arrests of Ashraf residents...”
- Evidence of paramilitary activities: “They continue to practice small unit military tactics and maneuvers under cover of darkness.”
- Cases of forced detention at Ashraf: “The MEK was also violating human rights by holding residents at Ashraf against their will.”
- Examples of human rights abuses: “MEK defectors told stories of regular self-denunciations, intimidation, forced hysterectomies, brainwashing, and isolation from family members.”
- False public claims by MEK: “While publicly touting itself as a democratic alternative to the current regime in Tehran, the MEK’s cult-like pattern of psychological and physical abuse of its members suggests otherwise.”
- Repeated instances of cult-like practices: MEK is a “cult-like organization that thrives on maintaining control of its members and those lured to Ashraf under false pretenses.”
- Analysis of policymakers being fooled by MEK disinformation: U.S. on MEK: “The most powerful myth the MEK has been able to lodge in the minds of most supporters is that they are the democratic alternative to the current regime in Tehran... The majority of Iranians do not regard the MEK as a legitimate force for democratic change in Iran.”

MEK
Uncovered

330

Get ready.

The Times
Memorial Day Sale.

40% off
for one year.
Last chance.

SAVE NOW

By Staff, National Iranian American Council (NIAC)

U.S. government cables revealed by Wikileaks include numerous references to the Mujaheddin e-Khalq (MEK). Details include:

- MEK threatens mass suicide as bargaining chip: "The group's leadership at Camp Ashraf is prepared to order residents to kill themselves to protest any arrests of Ashraf residents."
- Evidence of paramilitary activities: "They continue to practice small unit military tactics and maneuvers under cover of darkness."
- Cases of forced detention at Ashraf: "The MEK was also violating human rights by holding residents at Ashraf against their will."
- Examples of human rights abuses: "MEK defectors told stories of regular self-denunciations, intimidation, forced hysterectomies, brainwashing, and isolation from family members."
- False public claims by MEK: "While publicly touting itself as a democratic alternative to the current regime in Tehran, the MEK's cult-like pattern of psychological and physical abuse of its members suggests otherwise."
- Repeated instances of cult-like practices: "MEK is a 'cult-like organization that thrives on maintaining control of its members and those held to Ashraf under false pretenses.'"
- Analysis of policymakers being fooled by MEK disinformation: U.S. on MEK: "The most powerful myth the MEK has been able to lodge in the minds of most supporters is that they are the democratic alternative to the current regime in Tehran. The majority of Iranians do not regard the MEK as a legitimate force for democratic change in Iran."

Below are the relevant excerpts, including details of the 2009 reaffirmation of the MEK's designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. All excerpts are direct quotes (emphases added):

MEK UPDATE: DEFECTOR CLAIMS MEK HAS CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR MASS SUICIDE (1/15/2009)

over 100,000
Iran's judiciary
99 judges was
Iran's 10th.
The new Iran
elections held

Below, are the relevant excerpts, including details of the 2009 reaffirmation of the MEK's designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. All excerpts are direct quotes (emphases added):

"A defector from Camp Ashraf, home to the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) in Iraq, says the group's leadership at Camp Ashraf is prepared to order residents to kill themselves to protest any arrests of Ashraf residents"

"They claim to have turned over all their arms to U.S. forces in 2003, and their camp 60 miles from Baghdad looks more like a relatively affluent Iraqi village than a military garrison. However, until the end of 2008, residents wore military-style uniforms and flew pre-revolution Iranian flags, and U.S. forces stationed at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Grizzly on the periphery of the camp report that they continue to practice small unit military tactics and maneuvers under cover of darkness."

Camp Ashraf in Iraq

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF NEA FELTMAN DISCUSSES MEK (12/15/2010)

"In a meeting on December 14 with NEA A/S Feltman, the Minister of Human Rights, Wijdan Selim...expressed frustration that she was caught in the middle of the GOI-MEK struggle because many in the GOI wanted to resettle the MEK regardless of the merits, but that the MEK was also violating human rights by holding residents at Ashraf against their will."



Ashraf residents “revealed psychological and physical harm experienced at the hands of MEK”, MEK is a “cult-like organization that thrives on maintaining control of its members and those lured to Ashraf under false pretenses”, they continue to practice small unit military tactics and maneuvers under cover of darkness”,

MEK DEFECTORS ON LIFE IN ASHRAF AND RESETTLEMENT (9/18/2009)

“Many revealed psychological and physical harm experienced at the hands of the MEK and reaffirmed existing perceptions of the MEK as a cult-like organization that thrives on maintaining control of its members and those lured to Ashraf under false pretenses.”

“In explaining their motivations for leaving Ashraf, nearly all the defectors felt betrayed by the MEK and dismayed by their psychological and physical degradation at the hands of the organization. One man asked for help in retrieving his confiscated papers and other personal documents, including passport and Iranian identification documents, including passport and Iranian identification cards, from Ashraf.”

“Many of the defectors alleged psychological and physical harm at the hands of the MEK, including solitary confinement in MEK jails in Ashraf. One man in a wheelchair spoke passionately about how the MEK “crushed our personalities” and threatened to turn them over to the Saddam regime if they refused to join the organization.”

“Twenty-year resident [of Ashraf]; self-declared freedom fighter opposed to Iran’s theocracy; left MEK after “their lies were revealed”; considers MEK “the most disgusting and devious organization in the world.”

MEK FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION (FTO) DESIGNATION MAINTAINED (1/8/2008)

“The Secretary [Rice] found that the MEK remains (1) a foreign organization, (2) that engages in terrorist activity or terrorism, or retains the capability and intent to engage in ter-

rorist activity or terrorism, as those terms are defined under relevant statutes, and (3) the terrorist activity or terrorism of the group threatens U.S. national security or the security of U.S. nationals. Further, the Secretary concluded that U.S. national security does not on its own warrant revocation. She therefore determined that the MEK's FTO designation will be maintained. The determination was effective upon signature on January 7, 2009."

"We do not view the MEK as a credible advocate for either democracy or human rights in Iran, given its record of terrorism and the abuse suffered by many of its the MEK,s own members. While we have serious concerns about the policies of the Iranian government, we do not condone acts of terrorism under any circumstances.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the MEK's advocacy, and our view that such advocacy is not credible, is not germane to the Secretary's determination"

"(C) While publicly touting itself as a democratic alternative to the current regime in Tehran, the MEK's cult-like pattern of psychological and physical abuse of its members suggests otherwise. Under the leadership of the husband-wife team of Maryam and Masud Rajavi, the MEK is a largely female-driven organization that promotes equal rights for women but fails to respect the basic human rights of its members, female or male. While Maryam and Massoud are married, MEK rank and file are forced to divorce and are forbidden from having normal male-female relationships or personal friendships of any kind. No children reside at Camp Ashraf. MEK defectors tell stories of regular self-denunciations, intimidation, forced hysterectomies, brainwashing, and isolation from family members."

"The most powerful myth the MEK has been able to lodge in the minds of most supporters is that they are the democratic alternative to the current regime in Tehran. While we have serious concerns about the policies of the Iranian government, the MEK's four-decade-long record of terrorism and cult-like



repression of its members demonstrates that the MEK is not a credible advocate for democracy or human rights. Furthermore, the majority of Iranians do not regard the MEK as a legitimate force for democratic change in Iran. The Secretary's decision to maintain the MEK's FTO designation sends a clear signal that the U.S. Government does not condone the organization's terrorist activity."

PM MALIKI, CODEL LEVIN DISCUSS FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN IRAQ, AUGUST 19 BOMBINGS (12/9/2010)

"Responding to Sen. Reed's question about how the GOI would deal with the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), Maliki said "We wish they would go in peace to any other state to eliminate the excuse for intervention that their presence here affords Iran." He stressed that the GOI does not want to force MEK members to return to Iran; however, he emphasized the threat the group posed and claimed an individual involved in the August 19 bombing of the Ministry of Finance was a MEK member."

EU LIFTS MEK SANCTIONS; SECRETARIAT REQUESTS USG ASSISTANCE (1/27/2009)

"France has an active request for the EU to re-list on a strengthened domestic investigation basis and is appealing the December 4 EU court ruling. Belgium, normally an outspoken human rights advocate in these decision-making circles, has raised security concerns in support of re-listing; thus France will not stand alone despite misgivings of UK or other countries."

"[EU Council Secretariat Director General Robert] Cooper then asserted that EU Member States actually do consider the MEK a terrorist group, but the EU still must refer to a decision by a "competent authority" to ground an EU designation of the MEK. Cooper proposed to USEU Charge that the USG request the EU to designate the MEK and relist it as a terrorist organization"

IRAN: MEK SUPPORTERS IN PLAN TO PRESS HMG, USG,

ICJ ON BEHALF OF CAMP ASHRAF RESIDENTS (3/2/2009)

“As always, the positions of the MEK and its supporters are characterized by hyperbole and distortion. London Iran Watcher has not attempted to engage with MEK supporters (and still less with members), but has kept FCO briefed on current USG public guidance on Camp Ashraf. The MEK, however, remains an issue on which HMG senior levels are fatigued and jumpy, and only too glad to shelter behind the tough line the USG has maintained on the MEK (ref).”

GOI TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR CAMP ASHRAF JANUARY 1; SECURITY TRANSITION BEGINS (12/22/2008)

U.S. Baghdad embassy says:

“No Delisting of MEK

While Washington considers whether to keep the MEK organization on the U.S. FTO list, as the Embassy deals with the MEK at Camp Ashraf it is our view that for our dealings it is important that the organization remain listed. Delisting the MEK could hinder our cooperation with the GOI (which considers the MEK to be a terrorist organization) and would encourage the [Camp Ashraf residents] to continue to stall the determination of their legal status in Iraq.”

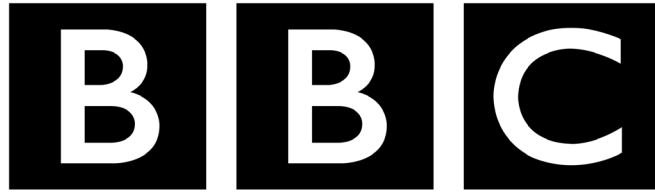
IRAN: UK GOVERNMENT APPEALS MEK DE-LISTING ORDER (12/4/2007)

“The suit had been brought by several of the MEK,s fervent sympathizers in Parliament seeking POAC’s review of the MEK listing. HMG: Leopard Has Not Changed Spots”

Delisting MEK “weakens UK counter terrorism efforts”

MEK
Uncovered

335



Iran exile group MEK seeks US terror de-listing

September 2011

Despite the release from a Tehran prison of two jailed American hikers, there remain very few issues on which the US and Iran agree.

One is the decision to label the controversial Iranian exile group, Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), as a terrorist organisation. Following a court order, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is now considering whether the group should be removed from the banned list.

Those backing the MEK are staging a very expensive campaign to call for the group to be removed - a move that would enable the MEK itself officially to lobby Congress.

The group's long list of detractors - and many Iran experts - warn against removing them from the terrorist list.

In a 2009 report, Rand, a non-profit Washington think-tank, called the group a "cult" and "skilled manipulators of public opinion".

Based inside Iraq, at a camp called Ashraf, north of Baghdad, the MEK has been on the US list of banned foreign terrorist organisations (FTO) since 1997.

Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)

- Also known as People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran
- Founded in 1965, adopted armed struggle in 1971
- Killed six US armed officers and civilian contractors in Iran and carried out attacks against the Iranian government

MEK
Uncovered

336



- Allied with Saddam Hussein’s efforts to crush Kurdish and Shia uprisings in Iraq in the 1990s
- 3,400 members now based at Camp Ashraf, Iraq
- Placed on US terrorist list in 1997

The group carried out many attacks inside Iran after the 1979 revolution, and allied itself with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq against Tehran’s clerical rulers during the 1980s.

In recent months, though, a series of heavyweight political and military figures in the US have spoken out in favour of the MEK, calling explicitly for the group to be taken off the list of banned organisations.

They include high-profile former US government officials, politicians and retired military officers, often hired to speak for fees beginning at \$20,000 a time.

The sources of funding for the pro-MEK campaign remain unclear, although paying former officials for public advocacy is commonplace in the US.

However, one US government official told the BBC that the MEK “trawls the halls of Congress” for support, something he described as “highly unusual” for a banned organisation.

‘No terror evidence’

MEK supporters operate through dozens of groups, some of which have placed costly full-page advertisements in The New York Times and Washington Post, and hired powerful Washington DC lobbying firms.

MEK
Uncovered

337



A spokesman for one firm, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, denied that the company represented the MEK, but said it does lobby on behalf of a group called the Iranian-American Community of Northern California.

Image caption John Bolton says the decision to keep the MEK banned is a “political act”

The spokesman described the group as “an independent US citizen’s group that advocates for a democratic Iran.”

But the group is the organiser of at least two events in support of the MEK and its website is focused on the de-listing campaign.

Ahmad Moein, a member of the group, recently told the Financial Times there was no justification for keeping the group on the banned list. He said the MEK was seeking a “democratic, secular, non-nuclear” Iran and “has halted all military activity since 2001”.

Among those who have spoken out in favour of the MEK include former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former UN ambassador John Bolton and former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge.

Everyone is free to debate whether MEK should or should not come off the list, but as we speak they are still on the terrorist list Elliot Abrams, Former White House adviser

Gen James Jones, President Obama’s first National Security Adviser and former New York Mayor Rudy Guliani have also called for the MEK to be de-listed.

Howard Dean, a former Democratic presidential hopeful, has gone further, calling on the US government to recognise Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the group, as the legitimate president of Iran.

Speaking to the BBC, Mr Mukasey defended his position, saying there was “no evidence of [the MEK] being involved in any terrorist activity in the last 10 years”.

Mr Bolton took a similar line, describing the decision to keep the MEK on the banned list as “a political act” and saying that

taking payment for speaking was absolutely normal in the US. “They should come off the list because when I was in the government, I saw no information that showed they are a terrorist organisation.”

‘Held against their will’

However, not everyone in Washington is as relaxed about the MEK’s lobbying.

Elliot Abrams, an adviser to the White House under former President George W Bush, was also invited to speak at an MEK event, but chose not to attend.

“Everyone is free to debate whether MEK should or should not come off the list, but as we speak they are still on the terrorist list. So frankly, taking money from them to speak in support is worrying,” he told the BBC.

Image caption Some want MEK joint-leader Maryam Rajavi named Iran’s legitimate leader

Reza Marashi, a former state department official, told the BBC he doubted that the group had any support within the US government.

“There is ample classified information that shows the group remains a terrorist organisation. De-listing them would signal that the US does not have a consistent policy towards terrorism,” he said.

The Iraqi government wants the group out of Iraq and has recently clashed with the inhabitants of the camp. MEK supporters say the US troop withdrawal from Iraq is leaving the group defenceless in a hostile country.

But many blame the leadership of the MEK for the predicament facing the residents of Camp Ashraf.

In 2005 a Human Rights Watch Report reported that 70% of Ashraf residents were held there against their will, and accused the MEK of torturing its own members.

Ali Safavi, a member of the political wing of the MEK, has admitted to the BBC that all the members in the camp have ended their marriages and are staying celibate.



Opponents of the MEK warn of the possible fallout if the group is de-listed.

Iran's "Green" opposition figures in the US see the possible de-listing as a propaganda gift to the Iranian regime.

"By attempting to claim credit for Iran's democracy movement, the MEK has aided the Iranian government's attempts to discredit the Green Movement and justify its crackdown on peaceful protesters by associating them with this widely detested group," 37 Iranian-American experts wrote in a recent letter to the US government.

But supporters of the MEK disagree entirely.

Ali Jafarzadeh, a key figure in the de-listing campaign, added: "Continuing the terrorist designation sends the signal that the outside world is prepared to preserve the regime."

Inside the US government, officials contend that the MEK does not have popular support and cannot bring democratic change to the country.

The European Union removed the MEK from its list of banned terrorist organisations in 2009.

Faced with a powerful lobbying force, state department officials will spend the coming weeks thinking about the ramifications of following in their footsteps.



Why Is There Such Widespread Support in DC for a Former Terrorist Group?

October 2011

Glancing over the invitations to briefings and rallies from organizations with names like the Iranian-American Community of Kansas, and the Iranian-American Community of North Texas—which include broad references to the “Iranian opposition” and looming “humanitarian catastrophes”—it’s fair to assume that these organizations represent a broad set of issues that face Iranians living here in the United States and back in their native country.

However, attending these events reveals that all of these groups have one primary, and rather narrow, aim: removing an organization known as the as the Mujahedin el-Khalq (MEK) or People’s Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI) from the State Department’s foreign terrorist organization list, where it was placed in 1997. While advocacy groups that support the MEK assiduously cultivate an image as both the face of the Iranian émigré community in the United States and of the opposition to Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini back in Iran, a range of Iran experts and members of the Iranian American community in the United States say they are neither. In fact, other Iranian Americans have felt compelled to launch a counter-campaign

MEK
Uncovered

341



to oppose the MEK’s removal from the State Department’s list. Thanks to an appeals court ruling, the State Department has been required to review the MEK’s inclusion on that list, and both sides anticipate a ruling by year’s end. But while the review has attracted a flurry of recent news coverage of the MEK and its alleged terrorist ties, what has been less examined is the impact this whole debate has had on American policy towards Iran and its people. MEK allies’ remarkably sophisticated and well-connected lobbying effort has sown confusion in Washington about the interests of the Iranian-American community as well as of the current generation of dissidents back in Iran. One expert on Iran—who declined to be quoted on the record given the heated nature of the current debate—told me that MEK lobbying efforts had managed only to produce “a distraction.”

Indeed, MEK supporters—including current and former U.S. government officials—often refer to the group as “the Iranian opposition,” or a symbol of “an uprising for the freedom of the Iranian people,” to quote recent statements by lawmakers, but that’s a very questionable assumption. And it prompts a set of policies that, however much they benefit the MEK, are at odds with what many experts say can best help the people of Iran. THE MEK FORMED in the 1960s as one of a number of opposition groups that supported the overthrow of the Shah. Its early ideology was heavily influenced by Marxism, as well as the

anti-colonial fervor then sweeping the globe. The MEK initially supported the Iranian Revolution in 1979 but soon had a falling out with the new regime under Ayatollah Khomeini, after which most of its supporters were either massacred or fled Iran in the 1980s. Many members of the group went to Iraq, and their cooperation with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war has since alienated much of the population in their native country. Like the dissidents in Iran and its many expatriates, MEK members oppose the current regime in Tehran led by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. And the plight of MEK members since fleeing Iran in the 1980s certainly raises ongoing human rights concerns, particularly for the more than 3,000 members living as refugees in Iraq's Camp Ashraf. Just this year, Amnesty International called on the Iraqi government to launch an investigation after violent clashes between Iraqi security forces and MEK members in Ashraf left more than 30 MEK exiles dead.

But according to a range of U.S. experts on Iran and Iranian Americans without personal ties to MEK members overseas, neither activists in Tehran nor the average Iranian American share MEK supporters' top priorities. As Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow Ray Takeyh put it flatly to a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee in July, "Despite its activism in Western capitals, the MEK commands very little support within Iran," due, in particular, he said, to the past alliance with Saddam.

In justifying its foreign terrorist organization listing, the State Department cited terrorist attacks MEK members committed in the 1970s, which included the murder of Americans, as well as attacks within Iran in the 1990s. MEK supporters argue the listing was politically motivated and that the group's members have since renounced violence. They also say the Khamenei regime and its allies are behind much of the negative portrayals of their movement.

Despite their designation, the backers of the MEK have long





enjoyed an elevated status largely by virtue of being the best organized and, for a while, the sole Iranian-American group involved in national politics. While Iranian Americans have some of the highest rates of education and voting participation of any immigrant community, their fragmentation, as well as a general skepticism about government among first-generation Iranian Americans, allowed allies of the MEK to long have the run of Washington.

In the last decade, however, a second generation of Iranian Americans has begun to take a keen interest in the policy-making process, particularly on issues that affect their community and their relatives back in Iran. That was what generated the impetus for the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), an Iranian-American advocacy group that was founded nine years ago. The NIAC now boasts 4,000 dues-paying members and a mailing list of over 40,000. But Abdi and his colleagues have found that one of their challenges has been breaking through the monopoly MEK activists have enjoyed for so long, particularly on Capitol Hill. “The only interactions with the Iranian-American community” many in Congress had ever had before NIAC, Abdi recalled, “was with these MEK activists.” When it first began reaching out to congressional staffers, its members were surprised by how much confusion they encountered over their agenda and identity. Some staffers would cut them off mid-pitch, saying they had just spoken to their members in weeks prior, or they made assumptions about the sort of issues the group wanted to discuss.

Longevity alone does not fully explain the reach of the MEK’s allies—then and now. The group’s activists have also conducted what even their critics readily acknowledge has been a tremendously savvy and effective lobbying and grassroots campaign, driven in part by the sheer dedication of their members and in part by significant amounts of money from undisclosed sources. One Senate staffer recounted to me how, for a period of about five months, his office “heard from people in the

state all the time, and I do mean all the time,” about the human rights abuses suffered by MEK members. “It was clear they were traveling the entire state trying to meet with every state leader trying to plead their case in order to get a meeting with the senator,” the aide recounted. Other congressional staffers have told me about similarly persistent outreach to their Washington and district offices.

Despite these anecdotes, it is very hard to measure the exact scope of grassroots and financial support the MEK and its de-listing campaign enjoy in the United States. The group’s supporters have had a presence on Capitol Hill for years, but it was only in 2010 that lobbying registration reports began to appear for groups advocating the removal of the MEK from the State Department’s terror list. The Iranian-American Community of Northern California, for example, paid the lobbying firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP \$100,000 for that purpose through the first half of 2011. Various other groups, meanwhile—with monikers like the Iranian-American Community of Kansas, the California Society for Democracy and Human Rights, and Democracy International—have organized Capitol Hill briefings and other roundtables featuring high-profile paid speakers; rallied at the State Department and across the country; and taken out full page print ads in The Washington Post and banner ads on The New York Times website.

The press contact for a number of those organizations, however, could not provide any details on how the various groups are related, who their leadership is, or how many members they have, explaining he was just a summer intern. No one else at these organizations responded to my inquiries. Past conversations I’ve had with MEK activists have yielded similarly vague explanations of their membership and financing. But they consistently maintain, as the intern said in an e-mail, that “of the active Iranian Americans in this country, the largest number support the cause of Camp Ashraf.”

What is quantifiable is the impact their outreach has had. 51





Democrats and 45 Republicans have signed onto a House resolution introduced this year calling on the State Department to remove the MEK from its list of foreign terrorist organizations. As has been widely reported, the group has also attracted a long list of high-ranking former officials and politicians—including former FBI Director Louis Freeh, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, and former Democratic National Committee Chairman and Vermont Governor Howard Dean—to their cause. Many, like Dean, retired Gen. Wesley Clark, and former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, have acknowledged being paid substantial speaker fees to appear at MEK events, but they maintain that their support for the de-listing campaign is independent of financial considerations.

Thus a large cadre of American public figures regularly takes to the floor of Congress, the airwaves, and the op-ed pages to draw attention to the human rights concerns at Camp Ashraf and the reasons for removing the MEK from the foreign terrorist organization’s list, as Freeh did just this week in *The New York Times*.

UPSTART GROUPS LIKE NIAC have sought to expand the number of Iranian Americans participating in national political advocacy, as well as the range of issues they bring before policymakers. But increasingly, they have spent their time pushing back against the MEK, rather than advocating for a more robust dialogue with Iran, for example, or opposing broad-based sanctions that hurt average Iranian citizens, which top their list of priorities.

In the past nine months, the group has launched its own full-on campaign to oppose lifting the MEK’s terrorist designation, including a series of briefings, grassroots outreach, and a media blitz. “We would love to sidestep it,” Abdi said of the issues raised by the MEK, “and for a long time we did.” But, he said, the group’s leaders became worried this year that the State Department would give into the pressure to remove the

MEK from its terror list, which they believe would send the wrong signal to Iranian citizens and would make it easier for the Khamenei regime to taint the Green Movement as kin of the MEK.

Regardless of where they stand on the MEK's terror listing, U.S. public officials across the political spectrum profess a desire to support the Iranian people and their democratic aspirations, even as relations with the Iranian government sink to a new low. They would be better able to pursue that agenda if they distinguish between different segments of Iranian Americans, recognize the limits of the MEK's reach, and determine how best to promote dialogue with the Iranian people, accordingly.



The New York Times

For Obscure Iranian Exile Group, Broad Support in U.S.

November 2011

WASHINGTON — At a time of partisan gridlock in the capital, one obscure cause has drawn a stellar list of supporters from both parties and the last two administrations, including a dozen former top national security officials.

That alone would be unusual. What makes it astonishing is the object of their attention: a fringe Iranian opposition group, long an ally of Saddam Hussein, that is designated as a terrorist organization under United States law and described by State Department officials as a repressive cult despised by most Iranians and Iraqis.

The extraordinary lobbying effort to reverse the terrorist designation of the group, the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Mujahedeen, has won the support of two former C.I.A. directors, R. James Woolsey and Porter J. Goss; a former F.B.I. director, Louis J. Freeh; a former attorney general, Michael B. Mukasey; President George W. Bush's first homeland security chief, Tom Ridge; President Obama's first national security adviser, Gen. James L. Jones; big-name Republicans like the former New York mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani and Democrats like the former Vermont governor Howard Dean; and even the former top counterterrorism official of the State Department, Dell L. Dailey, who argued unsuccessfully for ending the terrorist la-

MEK
Uncovered

348



bel while in office.

The American advocates have been well paid, hired through their speaking agencies and collecting fees of \$10,000 to \$50,000 for speeches on behalf of the Iranian group. Some have been flown to Paris, Berlin and Brussels for appearances. But they insist that their motive is humanitarian — to protect and resettle about 3,400 members of the group, known as the M.E.K., now confined in a camp in Iraq. They say the terrorist label, which dates to 1997 and then reflected decades of violence that included the killing of some Americans in the 1970s, is now outdated, unjustified and dangerous.

Emotions are running high as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton completes a review of the terrorist designation. The government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq has said it plans to close the camp, Camp Ashraf, by Dec. 31 and move the people elsewhere in Iraq in order to reassert Iraqi sovereignty over the land where it is located, 40 miles north of Baghdad.

Two earlier incursions by Iraqi troops into Camp Ashraf led to bloody confrontations, with 11 residents killed in July 2009 and at least 34 in April of this year. The M.E.K. and its American supporters say that they believe the Maliki government, with close ties to Iran, may soon carry out a mass slaughter on the pretext of regaining control of the camp.

If that happens, the supporters say, the United States — which





disarmed the M.E.K. and guaranteed the security of the camp after the invasion of Iraq — will bear responsibility.

“We made a promise,” said Mr. Ridge, a former congressman and governor of Pennsylvania. “Our credibility is on the line. They’ve been attacked twice. How can we possibly accept assurances from the Maliki government?”

Mr. Ridge suggested that the M.E.K.’s implacable hostility to the rulers of Iran should be a point in their favor.

“In my view, if you’re a threat to Ahmadinejad,” — Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran’s president — “well, the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” Mr. Ridge said. He noted that the M.E.K. had provided information on Iran’s nuclear program during the Bush administration.

The M.E.K. advocacy campaign has included full-page newspaper advertisements identifying the group as “Iran’s Main Opposition” — an absurd distortion in the view of most Iran specialists; leaders of Iran’s broad opposition, known as the Green Movement, have denounced the group. The M.E.K. has hired high-priced lobbyists like the Washington firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld. Its lawyers in Europe won a long fight to persuade the European Union to drop its own listing of the M.E.K. as a terrorist group in 2009.

The group’s spending, certainly in the millions of dollars, has inevitably raised questions about funding sources.

Ali Safavi, who runs a pro-M.E.K. group in Washington called Near East Policy Research, says the money comes from wealthy Iranian expatriates in the United States and Europe. Because “material support” to a designated terrorist group is a crime, advocates insist that the money goes only to sympathizers and not to the M.E.K. itself.

Congress has taken note of the campaign. A House resolution for dropping the terrorist listing has 97 co-sponsors, including the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Mike Rogers, Republican of Michigan. At a hearing this month, senators pressed the defense secretary, Leon E. Panetta, about the

threat to Camp Ashraf.

A State Department spokesman, Mark Toner, said officials there were “working as quickly as possible” to complete a review of the M.E.K.’s terrorist designation. American officials are supporting an effort by the United Nations to resettle Camp Ashraf residents voluntarily to other countries, a process that is making slow progress.

Other State Department officials, addressing the issue on the condition of anonymity because it is still under deliberation, said that they did believe the 3,400 residents of Camp Ashraf were in danger as the Dec. 31 deadline approaches.

“We’re in constant talks with the Iraqis and the Ashraf leadership to show maximum flexibility on the closure of the camp,” one official said.

But the officials expressed frustration at what they described as the American supporters’ credulous acceptance of the M.E.K.’s claims of representing the Iranian opposition and of embracing democratic values.

In years of observation, the official said, Americans have seen that the camp’s leaders “exert total control over the lives of Ashraf’s residents, much like we would see in a totalitarian cult,” requiring fawning devotion to the M.E.K.’s leaders, Maryam Rajavi, who lives in France, and her husband, Masoud, whose whereabouts are unknown.

Moreover, the official said, the group is “hated almost universally by the Iranian population,” in part for siding with Mr. Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. A State Department cable this year concluded that any indication of United States support for the M.E.K. “would fuel anti-American sentiment” in Iran and would “likely empower Iranian hardliners.”

In Iraq, the M.E.K. is also widely despised, especially by the country’s Shiite majority, because it is accused of helping the Iraqi dictator crush a Shiite revolt in 1991 — a charge the group denies. Because of deep Iraqi hostility, American officials argue that merely dropping the terrorist designation would not



end the danger of attacks on the group.

While the M.E.K. carried out a campaign of attacks from the 1970s to the 1990s, mostly targeting Iranian officials, supporters say it has renounced violence and has not engaged in terrorist acts for a decade. The designation law, however, allows Mrs. Clinton to keep the label for a group that “retains the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism.” Such a decision would outrage the American advocates of reversing the terrorist label.

Mr. Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee from 2005 to 2009, said the administration’s failure to act decisively threatened a “humanitarian catastrophe.” Mr. Mukasey said he did not believe the claim that the M.E.K. was a cult, but even if true, it was no reason to keep the terrorist listing. “These people are sitting in the camp, completely harmless,” he said.

Like other advocates, Mr. Mukasey said he had been paid his standard speaking fee — \$15,000 to \$20,000, according to the Web site of his speakers’ agency — to talk at M.E.K.-related events. But he insisted that the money was not a factor for him or other former officials who had taken up the cause. “There’s no way I would compromise my standing by expressing views I don’t believe in,” he said.





2012





Romney Tied to Terrorism

January 2012

GOP presidential hopeful Mitt Romney looked like a deer caught in the headlights when he was asked if he supported an international, anti-American terrorist organization with a bloody record for killing innocent civilians thousands of times worse than al Qaeda. This “expert on international affairs” claimed he never had heard of them. Then, like a lying politician, he promised: “I’ll take a look at the issue.” Video taken at a town hall meeting in New Hampshire shows Romney quickly waving the issue aside and hurrying on to another question. Romney’s campaign counts on the fact that the public never hears of this group or his campaign’s covert connections to them. Few Americans—besides AFP readers who read about this in the Dec. 16, 2011, edition—have even heard of the fanatical, terrorist group, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (People’s Mujahedin of Iran; MEK or MKO). This is thanks to the big media’s general cover-up, and largely because it is an Israeli asset. For months independent investigative journalists have asked Romney about his campaign’s ties to the MEK—but he never responds. No wonder, because if the American people ever found out about MEK, and the Romney campaign’s ties to it, they would demand he be tried for treason. One of Romney’s chief advisers is neocon Mitchell Reiss. Reiss not only heads the 50-plus top neocons that lied America into the Iraq war—but he is also a leader in the stealth campaign for quietly removing MEK from the “Foreign Terrorist Organizations” (FTOs) list.

MEK
Uncovered

354



MEK was one of the first to be put on the FTO list because of its boasting of assassinations of U.S. servicemen, attacks on U.S. diplomats, murders of American citizens and suicide bombings. MEK was the only faction of Iranians who wanted to kill the American hostages in 1979. After the release of the Americans, the MEK went on a rampage and murdered possibly tens of thousands of Iranians in a decade-long terror campaign.

When George H.W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and other neocons gave germ warfare technology, poison gas and other chemical weapons to former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein so he would invade Iran, MEK joined Saddam in slaughtering its fellow Iranians. After Saddam fell, Washington ordered U.S. troops to protect MEK from the wrath of the Iraqis. George W. Bush gave MEK hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars to commit terrorism in Iraq. Much of that money was spent on luxuries by MEK leaders in London and Paris. MEK has bribed congressmen and other high officials with hundreds of thousands of dollars in speaker's fees. Aiding and abetting MEK is still illegal. They get around this by using front groups and shells, laundering the money through speaker bureaus, high-dollar public relations outfits and law firms.

Another reason they want off the FTO list is they have thousands of followers in camps in Iraq and are no longer protected by U.S. troops, so they want to bring these trained killers

Former U.S. base opened to Iranian terrorist group

February 2012

Camp Liberty, which housed U.S. troops in Iraq up until a few months ago, is now open to house members of the State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization known as the Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK). But MEK leaders haven't decided they're ready to move in just yet.

"The U.S. has and continues to welcome and support the peaceful temporary relocation and eventual permanent resettlement of the residents of Camp Ashraf in Iraq," said Ambassador Dan Fried, the State Department's special advisor on Camp Ashraf, currently home to several thousand MEK members. "Our purpose is humanitarian. We welcomed the signing of the [Memorandum of Understanding] last Christmas Day between the Iraqi government and the U.N. This MOU charts a peaceful way forward."

The document set into writing the Iraqi government's decision to delay the closure of Camp Ashraf, where up to 3,200 members of the MEK have been living for years. The Iraqi government had promised to close Camp Ashraf in December but agreed to push back that date for six months.

Baghdad also agreed to ensure the safe treatment of the MEK members, who fear and distrust the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

"At this new location, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees will be able to conduct refugee status determinations for the



residents of Ashraf — a necessary first step toward resettlement to third countries,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Dec. 25. “We are encouraged by the Iraqi government’s willingness to commit to this plan, and expect it to fulfill all its responsibilities, especially the elements of the MOU that provide for the safety and security of Ashraf’s residents.”

The facility has now been officially renamed Camp Hurriya (Arabic for “freedom”) and the first MEK members can now go there, Fried said. The United Nations announced on Jan. 31 that the facilities at Camp Liberty now meet international humanitarian standards and are ready to receive Camp Ashraf’s residents.

“In any move of this kind and in the early days, once people are settling into Hurriya, problems may arise, of course,” he said. “Patience, goodwill, and willingness to resolve logistical issues in a practical way will be critical.”

But no members of the MEK have yet made the move, despite the extensive efforts of the United States and the United Nations to get their new home ready and to convince the Iraqi government to support the move.

“The residents of Camp Ashraf must make the decision to start this relocation process. Camp Ashraf is no longer a viable home for them. They have no secure future there,” said Fried. The Marxist-Islamist group, which was formed in 1965, was used by deposed Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein to attack the

MEK
Uncovered

357

Iranian government during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, and has been implicated in the deaths of U.S. military personnel and civilians.

The new Iraqi government has been trying to evict them from Camp Ashraf since the United States toppled Saddam in 2003. The U.S. military guarded the outside of the camp until handing over external security to the Iraqis in 2009. The Iraqi Army has since tried twice to enter Camp Ashraf, resulting in bloody clashes with the MEK.

Camp Hurriya is only meant to be a temporary home for the MEK. From there, its members could elect to go back to Iran — where they risk persecution — or move on to a third country, if they have residency there. The United States will help certain MEK members apply for refugee status on a case by case basis.

Fried urged the MEK to make the decision to move to Camp Hurriya, and he asked the group's many supporters in Washington to convey that message directly to the MEK.

The MEK's list of advocates, most who have admitted being paid, includes Congressman John Lewis (D-GA), former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, former FBI Director Louis Freeh, former Sen. Robert Torricelli, Rep. Patrick Kennedy, former CIA Deputy Director of Clandestine Operations John Sano, former National Security Advisor James Jones, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, former Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Richard Myers, former White House Chief of Staff Andy Card, Gen. Wesley Clark, former Rep. Lee Hamilton, former CIA Director Porter Goss, senior advisor to the Romney campaign Mitchell Reiss, Gen. Anthony Zinni, former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, former Sen. Evan Bayh, and many others.

"All those who wish the residents of Ashraf a peaceful future outside of Iraq can help by encouraging the MEK to make the decision it needs to make," Fried said. "The responsibility for the next decision rests with the MEK... A peaceful solution is

US Officials: Israel Works With Terror Group to Kill Iranian Scientists

February 2012

The Mujahedeen e-Khalq is being trained, armed, and funded by Israel to carry out terrorist attacks on Iran

by John Glaser, February 09, 2012

Israel has financed, trained, and armed Iranian dissident groups in order to carry out terrorist attacks on Iranian soil, according to top U.S. officials.

The group, Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK), is designated as a terrorist group by the United States and is accused of carrying out terrorist attacks in the past, including on American citizens. With the help of Israel, MEK has carried out five assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists since 2007 and may have destroyed a missile research and development site.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Obama administration knows of the assassination campaign but has no direct involvement. However, there has been a big money push by many influential people in Washington to get MEK removed from the State Department's terrorist list, presumably to make them eligible for U.S. funding.

The Iranians have made these allegations of Israeli terrorist attacks carried out by MEK for quite a while, but only now does it have confirmation from U.S. officials. Mohammad Javad Larijani, a senior aide to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali

MEK
Uncovered

359



Khamenei, in a recent interview with NBC News claimed they knew Israel was funding MEK, sharing intelligence, and training them inside Israel in the use of motorcycles and bombs.

The Iranians say much of their intelligence on this matter has come from interrogations with an MEK member that carried out one of the assassination attempts. The MEK has denied these allegations, issuing a statement calling them “absolutely false.”

Even if its true, as U.S. officials insist, that Washington has no involvement in these terrorist attacks, they do support Israel through unmatched economic aid, arms sales, and diplomatic support. As Larijani recently told NBC News, if America, Israel’s closest ally, is aware of this terrorism, “the United States has an obligation...to push Israel not to do it” and “to pursue it, like pursuing us, at the United Nations with different resolutions.”



NBC NEWS

Israel teams with terror group to kill Iran's nuclear scientists, U.S. officials tell NBC News

February 2012

A car that was bombed by two assailants on a motorcycle in Tehran on Jan. 11, killing Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahamdi Roshan, is removed by a mobile crane. The photo was distributed by the semi-official Iranian photo agency Fars.

Updated: 11:14 a.m. ET -- Deadly attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists are being carried out by an Iranian dissident group that is financed, trained and armed by Israel's secret service, U.S. officials tell NBC News, confirming charges leveled by Iran's leaders.

The group, the People's Mujahedin of Iran, has long been designated as a terrorist group by the United States, accused of killing American servicemen and contractors in the 1970s and supporting the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran before breaking with the Iranian mullahs in 1980.

The attacks, which have killed five Iranian nuclear scientists since 2007 and may have destroyed a missile research and development site, have been carried out in dramatic fashion, with motorcycle-borne assailants often attaching small magnetic bombs to the exterior of the victims' cars.

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the

MEK
Uncovered

361



Obama administration is aware of the assassination campaign but has no direct involvement.

The Iranians have no doubt who is responsible – Israel and the People’s Mujahedin of Iran, known by various acronyms, including MEK, MKO and PMI.

“The relation is very intricate and close,” said Mohammad Javad Larijani, a senior aide to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader, speaking of the MEK and Israel. “They (Israelis) are paying ... the Mujahedin. Some of their (MEK) agents ... (are) providing Israel with information. And they recruit and also manage logistical support.”

Moreover, he said, the Mossad, the Israeli secret service, is training MEK members in Israel on the use of motorcycles and small bombs. In one case, he said, Mossad agents built a replica of the home of an Iranian nuclear scientist so that the assassins could familiarize themselves with the layout prior to the attack.

Much of what the Iranian government knows of the attacks and the links between Israel and MEK comes from interrogation of an assassin who failed to carry out an attack in late 2010 and the materials found on him, Larijani said. (Click here to see a video report of the interrogation shown on Iranian television.)

The U.S.-educated Larijani, whose two younger brothers run the legislative and judicial branches of the Iranian government, said the Israelis’ rationale is simple. “Israel does not have di-



rect access to our society. Mujahedin, being Iranian and being part of Iranian society, they have ... a good number of ... places to get into the touch with people. So I think they are working hand-to-hand very close. And we do have very concrete documents.”

Two senior U.S. officials confirmed for NBC News the MEK’s role in the assassinations, with one senior official saying, “All your inclinations are correct.” A third official would not confirm or deny the relationship, saying only, “It hasn’t been clearly confirmed yet.” All the officials denied any U.S. involvement in the assassinations.

As it has in the past, Israel’s Foreign Ministry declined comment. Said a spokesman, “As long as we can’t see all the evidence being claimed by NBC, the Foreign Ministry won’t react to every gossip and report being published worldwide.”

For its part, the MEK pointed to a statement calling the allegations “absolutely false.”

Ali Safavi, a long-time representative of the MEK, underscored the denial after publication of this article,

“There has never been and there is no MEK member in Israel, period,” he said. “The MEK has categorically denied any involvement. The idea that Israel is training MEK members on its soil borders on perversity. It is absolutely and completely false.”

The sophistication of the attacks supports the Iranian claims that an experienced intelligence service is involved, experts say.

In the most recent attack, on Jan. 11, 2012, Mostafa Ahamdi Roshan died in a blast in Tehran moments after two assailants on a motorcycle placed a small magnetic bomb on his vehicle. Roshan was a deputy director at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility and was reportedly involved in procurement for the nuclear program, which Iran insists is not a weapons program.

Previous attacks include the assassination of Massoud Ali-Mo-



hammad, killed by a bomb outside his Tehran home in January 2010, and an explosion in November of that year that took the life of Majid Shahriari and wounded Fereydoun Abbasi-Davani, who is now the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization.

In the case of Roshan, the bomb appears to have been a shaped charge that directed all the explosive power inside the vehicle, killing him and his bodyguard driver but leaving nearby traffic unaffected.

Although Roshan was directly involved in the nuclear program, working at the huge centrifuge facility between Tehran and Qom, Iran's religious center, at least one other scientist who was killed wasn't linked to the Iranian nuclear program, according to Larijani.

Speaking of bombing victim Ali-Mohammadi, whom he described as a friend, Larijani told NBC News, "In fact this guy who was assassinated was not involved in the nitty-gritty of the situation. He was a scientist, a physicist, working on the theoretical parts of nuclear energy, which you can teach it in every university. You can find it in every text."

"This is an Israeli plot. A dirty plot," Larijani added angrily. He also claimed the assassinations are not having an effect on the program and have only made scientists more resolute in carrying out their mission.

Not so, said Ronen Bergman, an Israeli commentator and author of "Israel's Secret War with Iran" and an upcoming book tentatively titled, "Mossad and the Art of Assassination."

Bergman said the attacks have three purposes, the most obvious being the removal of high-ranking scientists and their knowledge. The others: forcing Iran to increase security for its scientists and facilities and to spur "white defections."

He explained the latter this way: "Scientists leaving the project, afraid that they are going to be next on the assassination list, and say, 'We don't want this. Indeed, we get good money, we are promoted, we are honored by everybody, but we might get

killed. It isn't worth it. Maybe we should go back to teach ... in a university."

There are unconfirmed reports in the Israeli press and elsewhere that Israel and the MEK were involved in a Nov. 12 explosion that destroyed the Iranian missile research and development site at Bin Kaneh, 30 miles outside Tehran. Among those killed was Maj. Gen. Hassan Moghaddam, director of missile development for the Revolutionary Guard, and a dozen other researchers. So important was Moghaddam that Ayatollah Khamenei attended his funeral.

Unlike the assassinations, Iran claims the missile site explosion was an accident; the MEK, meanwhile, trumpeted it but denied any involvement.

Indeed, there may be other covert operations carried out either by Israel acting alone or in concert with others, according to Bergman.

"Two labs caught fire," said Bergman, enumerating the attacks. "Scientists got blown up or disappeared. A missile base and the R&D base of the Revolutionary Guard exploded some time ago, with the director of the R&D division of the Revolutionary Guard being killed along with ... his soldiers."

Bergman added, "So, a long series of ... something that was termed by an Israeli (Cabinet) minister ... as 'mysterious mishaps' happening and reappearing to the project. Then the Iranians claim, 'This is Israeli Mossad trying to sabotage our attempts to be a nuclear superpower.'"

Dr. Uzi Rabi, director of the Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, said the supposed accidents could all be part of "psychological warfare" conducted against Iran. "It seems logical. It makes sense," he said of possible MEK involvement, "and it's been done before."

Rabi, who regularly briefs Israel's parliament, the Knesset, on Iran also said the ultimate goal of the range of covert operations being carried out by Israel is "to damage the politics of survivability ... to send a message that could strike fear into

the rulers of Iran.”

For the United States, the alleged role of the MEK is particularly troublesome. In 1997, the State Department designated it a terrorist group, justifying it with an unclassified 40-page summary of the organization’s activities going back more than 25 years. The paper, sent to Congress in 1994, was written by Wendy Sherman, now undersecretary of state for political affairs and then an aide to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

The report, which was obtained by NBC News, was unsparing in its assessment. “The Mujahedin (MEK) collaborated with Ayatollah Khomeini to overthrow the former shah of Iran,” it said. “As part of that struggle, they assassinated at least six American citizens, supported the takeover of the U.S. embassy, and opposed the release of the American hostages.” In each case, the paper noted, “Bombs were the Mujahedin’s weapon of choice, which they frequently employed against American targets.”

“In the post-revolutionary political chaos, however, the Mujahedin lost political power to Iran’s Islamic clergy. They then applied their dedication to armed struggle and the use of propaganda against the new Iranian government, launching a violent and polemical cycle of attack and reprisal.”

U.S. officials have said publicly that the information contained in the report was limited to unclassified material, but that it also drew on classified material in making its determination to add the MEK to the U.S. list of terrorist organizations.

The MEK and its sister organizations have since the beginning been run by Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, a husband-wife team who have maintained tight control despite assassination threats and internal dissent. Massoud Rajavi, 63, founded the MEK, but since the U.S. invasion of Iraq has taken a backseat to his wife.

The State Department report describes the Rajavis as “fundamentally undemocratic” and “not a viable alternative to the

current government of Iran.”

One reason for that is the MEK’s close relationship with Saddam Hussein, as demonstrated by this 1986 video showing the late Iraqi dictator meeting with Massoud Rajavi. Saddam recruited the MEK in much the same way the Israelis allegedly have, using them to fight Iranian forces during the Iran-Iraq War, a role they took on proudly. So proudly, they invited NBC News to one of their military camps outside Baghdad in 1991. “The National Liberation Army (MLA), the military wing of the Mujahedin, conducted raids into Iran during the latter years of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War,” according to the State Department report. The NLA’s last major offensive reportedly was conducted against Iraqi Kurds in 1991, when it joined Saddam Hussein’s brutal repression of the Kurdish rebellion. In addition to occasional acts of sabotage, the Mujahedin are responsible for violent attacks in Iran that victimize civilians.”

“Internally, the Mujahedin run their organization autocratically, suppressing dissent and eschewing tolerance of differing viewpoints,” it said. “Rajavi, who heads the Mojahedin’s political and military wings, has fostered a cult of personality around himself.”

The U.S. suspicion of the MEK doesn’t end there. Law enforcement officials have told NBC News that in 1994, the MEK made a pact with terrorist Ramzi Yousef a year after he masterminded the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. According to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, Yousef built an 11-pound bomb that MEK agents placed inside one of Shia Islam’s greatest shrines in Mashad, Iran, on June 20, 1994. At least 26 people, mostly women and children, were killed and 200 wounded in the attack.

That connection between Yousef, nephew of 9-11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, and the MEK was first reported in a book, “The New Jackals,” by Simon Reeve. NBC News confirmed that Yousef told U.S. law enforcement that he had worked with the MEK on the bombing.





In recent years, the MEK has said it has renounced violence, but Iranian officials say that is not true, that killings of Iranians continue. Still, through some deft lobbying, the group has been able to get the United Kingdom and the European Union to remove it from their lists of terrorist groups.

The alleged involvement of the MEK in the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists provides the U.S. with a cloak of deniability regarding the clandestine killings. Because the U.S. has designated the MEK as a terrorist organization, neither military nor intelligence units of the U.S. government, can work with them. “We cannot deal with them,” said one senior U.S. official. “We would not deal with them because of the designation.”

Iranian officials initially accused the Israelis and MEK of being behind the attacks, but they have since added the CIA to the list. Three days after the Jan. 11, 2012, bombing in Tehran that killed Roshan, the state news agency IRNA reported that Iran’s Foreign Ministry had sent a diplomatic letter to the U.S. claiming to have “evidence and reliable information” that the CIA provided “guidance, support and planning” to assassins directly involved in the attack.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton immediately denied any connection to the killings. “I want to categorically deny any United States involvement in any kind of act of violence inside Iran,” Clinton told reporters on the day of the attack.

But at least two GOP presidential candidates have no problem with the targeting of nuclear scientists. In a November debate, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich endorsed “taking out their scientists,” and former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum called it, “a wonderful thing.”

The MEK’s opposition to the Iranian government also has recently earned it both plaudits and support from an odd mix of political bedfellows.

A group of former Cabinet-level officials have joined together to support the MEK’s removal from the official U.S. Foreign

Terrorist Organization list, even taking out a full-page ad last year in the New York Times calling for the removal of the MEK from the U.S. terrorist list. Former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, former U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton; former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former FBI Director Louis Freeh and former Rep. Patrick Kennedy were among those whose signatures were on the ad.

“There’s an extraordinary group of bipartisan or even apolitical leaders, military leaders, diplomats, the United States ... the United Kingdom, the European Union, even a U.S. District Court in Washington, said that this group that was put on the foreign terrorist organization watch list in 1997 doesn’t deserve to be there,” Ridge said in November on “The Andrea Mitchell Show” on MSNBC TV.

U.S. politicians also have been pushing the U.S. government to protect the 3,400 MEK members and their families at Camp Ashraf in Iraq, about 35 miles north of Baghdad. With the departure of U.S. troops, the MEK feared that Iraqi forces, with encouragement from Iran, would attack the camp, leading to a bloodbath. At the last minute, however, agreement was brokered with the United Nations that would permit the MEK members’ departure for resettlement in unspecified democratic countries. As of this week, there’s been little movement on the planned resettlement.

The Iranians see what’s happening as terrorism and hypocrisy by the United States. They have forwarded documents and other evidence to the United Nations – and directly to the United States, they say.

“I think this is very cynical plan. This is unacceptable,” said Larijani. “This is a bad trend in the world. Unprecedented. We should kill scientists ... to block a scientific program? I mean this is disaster!”

Daniel Byman, a professor in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and also a senior fellow with the Saban





Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, said that if the accounts of the Israeli-MEK assassinations are accurate, the operation borders on terrorism.

“In theory, states cannot be terrorist, but if they hire locals to do assassinations, that would be state sponsorship,” said Byman, author of the recent book, “A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism.” “You could argue that they took action not to terrorize the public, the purpose of terrorism, but only the nuclear community. An argument could also be made that degrading the program means that you don’t have to take military action and thus, this is a lower level of violence and that really these are military targets, where normally terrorist targets are civilians.”

But ultimately, Byman said, there is a “spectrum of responsibility” and that Israel is ultimately responsible.

Ronen Bergman, while not speaking on behalf of the Israeli government, suggests that there is a justification, citing an oft-repeated but disputed quote in which Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s said that Israel should be wiped off the face of the earth.

“Meir Degan, the chief of Mossad, when he was in office, hung a photograph behind him, behind the chair of the chief of Mossad,” notes the Israeli commentator. “And in that photograph you see -- an ultra-orthodox Jew -- long beard, standing on his knees with his-- hands up in the air, and two Gestapo soldiers standing -- beside him with guns pointed at him. One of -- one of them is smiling.

“And Degan used to say to his people and the people coming to visit him from CIA, NSA, et cetera, ‘Look at this guy in the picture. This is my grandfather just seconds before he was killed by the SS,’” Bergman said. “... We are here to prevent this from happening again.”

Richard Engel is NBC News’ chief foreign correspondent; Robert Windrem is a senior investigative producer.

How Terrorism Becomes “Entirely Defensible”

February 2012

I would have expected some “pro-Israel” hard-liners to complain that the NBC report about the Israeli support for MEK terrorism inside Iran was untrue or unproven. Jonathan Tobin skips past all of that and argues that Israel is compelled to work with a terrorist group:

The MEK are allies of convenience and, just like many war-time allies in other conflicts, share only a common enemy with Israel. But however nasty they may be, Israel need not blush about using them. For a democracy at war, the only truly immoral thing to do would be to let totalitarian Islamists like those in Tehran triumph.

In other words, Israeli state sponsorship of a terrorist group is acceptable because it's in a good cause. Tobin assures us that this is not just any old cynical “ends justify the means” argument. No, according to him this is “an entirely defensible strategy in which a vicious and tyrannical government's foes become legitimate allies in what is for all intents and purposes a war.” Never mind that it is “for all intents and purposes a war” because the Israeli government is supporting acts of terrorism against Iranian civilians. Tobin is saying that it would be “immoral” not to partner with a terrorist group to kill Iranian scientists.

Because Israel is overreacting to a perceived threat from Iran,

MEK
Uncovered

371



Tobin believes it is entirely defensible for Israel to partner with a recognized terrorist group. In other words, Tobin believes that terrorism is “entirely defensible” so long as it is committed by the right people and directed at the right targets. It’s as if he is going out of his way to vindicate Glenn Greenwald.



Report: U.S. Officials Tie Controversial Iranian Exile Group To Scientist Assassinations

February 2012

An exclusive report by NBC News cites two U.S. officials confirming links between an assassination campaign against Iranian scientists and an Iranian exile group designated as a foreign terror organization by the State Department since 1997. Two officials confirmed to NBC that the group, the Paris- and Iraq-based Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK), was involved in the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists.

The State Department designates the MEK as a “foreign terrorist organization,” though the group’s supporters have mounted an aggressive lobbying effort aimed at getting delisted through claims it laid down arms in the early 2000s.

The NBC story cited two U.S. officials linking the MEK to the recent spate of assassinations, and a third who neither confirmed nor denied the allegation:

Two senior U.S. officials confirmed for NBC News the MEK’s role in the assassinations, with one senior official saying, “All your inclinations are correct.” A third official would not confirm or deny the relationship, saying only, “It hasn’t been clearly confirmed yet.” All the officials denied any U.S. involvement in the assassinations.

The group, through its political wing (which was also added to

MEK
Uncovered

373



the State designation), denied any involvement in the latest attacks. A “representative” of the group in Washington also denied involvement.

The NBC report also claimed that Israeli intelligence services “financed, trained and armed” the MEK, though the story did not go on to substantiate any direct links between the Israeli government and the assassination campaign.

The U.S. denial of involvement last month, after the latest killing by a bomb blast in Tehran, was unequivocal: “I want to categorically deny any United States involvement in any kind of act of violence inside Iran,” said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, condemning the attacks.

Founded in the mid-1960s as an armed revolutionary group, the MEK fought against the Shah and his U.S. backers — allegedly killing Americans — in the 1970s, but then split with Iran’s clerical leadership in the early 1980s. Eventually, the group ended up based in Paris and Iraq, where, from the latter location, it was helped by Saddam Hussein to raise arms against Iran during the war between the two countries. Since 1997, when such designations were introduced, the MEK has been considered a “foreign terrorist organization” by the State Department. As many as 3,400 members of the group, which it claims are former fighters who laid down their arms in the early 2000s, are still based in Iraq.

NBC Report: Israel and the MEK Responsible for Deaths of Iranian Nuclear Scientists

February 2012

NBC News reports that Israel and the MEK have been working together to kill Iranian nuclear scientists:

Deadly attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists are being carried out by an Iranian dissident group that is financed, trained and armed by Israel's secret service, U.S. officials tell NBC News, confirming charges leveled by Iran's leaders.

The group, the People's Mujahedin of Iran, has long been designated as a terrorist group by the United States, accused of killing American servicemen and contractors in the 1970s and supporting the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran before breaking with the Iranian mullahs in 1980.

I had seen claims to this effect made earlier this year, but I believe this is the first time they have been corroborated by U.S. government sources. If true, the murders of Iranian nuclear scientists with bombs have been committed by a recognized terrorist group. Can everyone acknowledge at this point that these attacks were acts of terrorism?

It's not in the least surprising that the perpetrators of anti-regime terrorist attacks inside Iran belong to an anti-regime terrorist group. This is a good example of why the MEK is on

MEK
Uncovered

375



the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list and why it should remain on it until the group ceases to have the capacity and intent to commit terrorist acts. It makes a certain amount of sense that Israel would use anti-regime terrorists to carry out these killings, but Israel isn't doing itself any favors by working with a group as widely and deeply loathed in Iran as this one. For its part, the MEK continues its old habit of killing Iranians in the service of foreign governments. Is it any wonder that the vast majority of Iranians and the legitimate Iranian opposition want nothing to do with them?

I hope the many American politicians and retired military officers who have mistakenly lent any support to the MEK will now stop doing so, but I have a feeling that quite a few of them will continue to speak on their behalf.

Israel, MEK and state sponsor of Terror groups

February 2012

One of the most under-reported political stories of the last year is the devoted advocacy of numerous prominent American political figures on behalf of an Iranian group long formally designated as a Terrorist organization under U.S. law. A large bipartisan cast has received substantial fees from that group, the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), and has then become their passionate defenders. The group of MEK shills includes former top Bush officials and other Republicans (Michael Mukasey, Fran Townsend, Andy Card, Tom Ridge, Rudy Giuliani) as well as prominent Democrats (Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Bill Richardson, Wesley Clark). As The Christian Science Monitor reported last August, those individuals “have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to speak in support of the MEK.” No matter what one thinks of this group — here is a summary of its activities — it is formally designated as a Terrorist group and it is thus a felony under U.S. law to provide it with any “material support.”

There are several remarkable aspects to this story. The first is that there are numerous Muslims inside the U.S. who have been prosecuted for providing “material support for Terrorism” for doing far less than these American politicians are publicly doing on behalf of a designated Terrorist group. A Staten Island satellite TV salesman in 2009 was sentenced to five years in federal prison merely for including a Hezbollah TV

A teal circular logo with the text "MEK Uncovered" inside. The word "MEK" is in a larger, bold font, and "Uncovered" is in a smaller font below it.

MEK
Uncovered

377



channel as part of the satellite package he sold to customers; a Massachusetts resident, Tarek Mehanna, is being prosecuted now “for posting pro-jihadist material on the internet”; a 24-year-old Pakistani legal resident living in Virginia, Jubair Ahmad, was indicted last September for uploading a 5-minute video to YouTube that was highly critical of U.S. actions in the Muslim world, an allegedly criminal act simply because prosecutors claim he discussed the video in advance with the son of a leader of a designated Terrorist organization (Lashkar-e-Tayyiba); a Saudi Arabian graduate student, Sami Omar al-Hussayen, was prosecuted simply for maintaining a website with links “to groups that praised suicide bombings in Chechnya and in Israel” and “jihadist” sites that solicited donations for extremist groups (he was ultimately acquitted); and last July, a 22-year-old former Penn State student and son of an instructor at the school, Emerson Winfield Begolly, was indicted for — in the FBI’s words — “repeatedly using the Internet to promote violent jihad against Americans” by posting comments on a “jihadist” Internet forum including “a comment online that praised the shootings” at a Marine Corps base, action which former Obama lawyer Marty Lederman said “does not at first glance appear to be different from the sort of advocacy of uN-LAWful conduct that is entitled to substantial First Amendment protection.”

Yet here we have numerous American political figures receiv-

ing substantial fees from a group which is legally designated under American law as a Terrorist organization. Beyond that, they are meeting with the Terrorist leaders of that group repeatedly (Howard Dean told NPR last year about the group's leader, Maryam Rajavi: "I have actually had dinner with Mrs. Rajavi on numerous occasions. I do not find her very terrorist-like" and has even insisted that she should be recognized as Iran's President, while Rudy Giuliani publicly told her at a Paris conference in December: "These are the most important yearnings of the human soul that you support, and for your organization to be described as a terrorist organization is just simply a disgrace"). And, after receiving fees from the Terrorist group and meeting with its Terror leaders, these American political figures are going forth and disseminating pro-MEK messages on its behalf and working to have it removed from the Terrorist list.

Given all the prosecutions of politically powerless Muslims for far fewer connections to Terrorist groups than the actions of these powerful (paid) political figures, what conceivable argument is there for not prosecuting Dean, Giuliani, and the rest of them for providing "material support for Terrorism"? What they are providing to MEK is the definitive "material support." Although these activities (along with those of the above-listed prosecuted Muslims) should be protected free speech, the U.S. Government has repeatedly imprisoned people for it. Indeed, as Georgetown Law Professor David Cole noted, these activities on behalf of MEK are clearly prosecutable as "material support for Terrorism" under the standard advocated by the Bush and Obama DOJs and accepted by the Supreme Court in the *Holder v. Humanitarian Law* case of 2009, which held that even peaceful advocacy on behalf of a Terrorist group can be prosecuted if done in coordination with the group (ironically, many of these paid MEK supporters have long been advocates of broad application of "material support" statutes (when applied to Muslims, that is) and have even praised the Human-





itarian Law case). If we had anything even remotely approaching equal application of the law, Dean, Giuliani, Townsend and the others would be facing prosecution as Terrorist-helpers. Then there's long been the baffling question of where MEK was getting all of this money to pay these American officials. Indeed, the pro-MEK campaign has been lavishly funded. As the CSM noted: "Besides the string of well-attended events at prestigious American hotels and locations, and in Paris, Brussels, and Berlin, the campaign has included full-page advertisements in The New York Times and Washington Post — which can cost \$175,000 apiece." MEK is basically little more than a nomadic cult: after they sided with Saddam Hussein in his war with Iran, they were widely loathed in Iran and their 3,400 members long lived in camps in Iraq, but the Malaki government no longer wants them there. How has this rag-tag Terrorist cult of Iranian dissidents, who are largely despised in Iran, able to fund such expensive campaigns and to keep U.S. officials on its dole?

All of these mysteries received substantial clarity from an NBC News report by Richard Engel and Robert Windrem yesterday. Citing two anonymous "senior U.S. officials," that report makes two amazing claims: (1) that it was MEK which perpetrated the string of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists and (2) the Terrorist group "is financed, trained and armed by Israel's secret service." These senior officials also admitted that "the Obama administration is aware of the assassination campaign" but claims it "has no direct involvement." Iran has long insisted the Israel and the U.S. are using MEK to carry out Terrorist attacks on its soil, including the murder of its scientists, and NBC notes that these acknowledgments "confirm charges leveled by Iran's leaders" (MEK issued a statement denying the report).

If these senior U.S. officials are telling the truth, there are a number of vital questions and conclusions raised by this. First, it would mean that the assurances by MEK's paid American

shills such as Howard Dean that “they are unarmed” are totally false: whoever murdered these scientists is obviously well-armed. Second, this should completely gut the effort to remove MEK from the list of designated Terrorist groups; after all, murdering Iran’s scientists through the use of bombs and guns is a defining act of a Terror group, at least as U.S. law attempts to define the term. Third, this should forever resolve the debate in which I was involved last month about whether the attack on these Iranian scientists constitutes Terrorism; as Daniel Larison put it yesterday: “If true, the murders of Iranian nuclear scientists with bombs have been committed by a recognized terrorist group. Can everyone acknowledge at this point that these attacks were acts of terrorism?”

Fourth, and most important: if this report is true, is this not definitive proof that Israel is, by definition, a so-called state sponsor of Terrorism? Leaving everything else aside, if Israel, as NBC reports, has “financed, trained and armed” a group officially designated by the U.S. Government as a Terrorist organization, isn’t that the definitive act of how one becomes an official “state sponsor of Terrorism”? Amazingly, as Daniel Larison notes, one of the people who most vocally attacked me for labeling the murder of Iranian scientists as “Terrorism” and for generally arguing that Terrorism is a meaningless, cynically applied term — Commentary’s Jonathan Tobin — yesterday issued a justification for why Israel should be working with Terrorist groups like MEK. As Larison wrote about Tobin’s article: In other words, Israeli state sponsorship of a terrorist group is acceptable because it’s in a good cause. . . . Because Israel is overreacting to a perceived threat from Iran, Tobin believes it is entirely defensible for Israel to partner with a recognized terrorist group. In other words, Tobin believes that terrorism is “entirely defensible” so long as it is committed by the right people and directed at the right targets. It’s as if he is going out of his way to vindicate Glenn Greenwald.

Of course, as I documented in my last book, those who are





politically and financially well-connected are free to commit even the most egregious crimes; for that reason, the very idea of prosecuting Giuliani, Rendell, Ridge, Townsend, Dean and friends for their paid labor on behalf of a Terrorist group is unthinkable, a suggestion not fit for decent company, even though powerless Muslims have been viciously prosecuted for far less egregious connections to such groups. But this incident also underscores the specific point that the term Terrorism is so completely meaningless, manipulated and mischievous: it's just a cynical term designed to delegitimize violence and even political acts undertaken by America's enemies while shielding from criticism the actual Terrorism undertaken by itself and its allies. The spectacle whereby a designated Terrorist group can pay top American politicians to advocate for them even as they engage in violent Terrorist acts, all while being trained, funded and aided by America's top client state, should forever end the controversy over that glaringly obvious proposition.

Four notes: (1) The book event I did with Noam Chomsky last November in Boston will be broadcast several times this weekend on C-SPAN; the schedule is here; (2) The New Zealand political journal Listener has an interview and profile of me and With Liberty and Justice for Some; (3) the video for two of the civil liberties events I did this week are now online: this one at Indiana University/Purdue and this one from Columbia University; and (4) I'll be the keynote speaker at the annual dinner of the ACLU in Idaho tomorrow night; ticket information is here. According to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, a NATO airstrike yesterday in Afghanistan killed 8 children. Meanwhile, the Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar yesterday patiently explained that drone strikes — which Americans widely support, including American liberals — are “completely illegal and uNLAWful” and “counterproductive” because they “fuel terrorism,” since people tend to become quite angry at the foreign power which slaughters their children, their spouses, their parents, their neighbors, etc., i.e., for every Terrorist the U.S. allegedly kills, it creates five more people wanting to attack the U.S. (see her answers to the two questions beginning at 4:30):

Why Are Some Americans Defending an Iranian Terrorist Group?

February 2012

The People's Mujahedin of Iran is generating fans in the U.S. for their alleged role in killing Iranian nuclear scientists.

The most powerful word in American politics is terrorist. For the first time since the Cold War ended, America has a consensus enemy (never mind that terrorism is a tactic rather than an ideology). Huge majorities support indefinitely detaining accused terrorists without charges, or killing them without due process. So you'd think that a Muslim terrorist group with Marxist roots would be anathema, especially if it was on the official American and Canadian lists of terror sponsoring organizations. But the People's Mujahedin of Iran, commonly referred to as MEK, has its American defenders.

For them, MEK's history of anti-American violence is forgivable. The important thing is that the group is hostile to the regime in Iran. According to NBC News, MEK fighters are assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists and are being "financed, trained and armed by Israel's secret service." The group has also waged a sophisticated lobbying effort to be struck from America's terrorist list, paying politicians as diverse as Howard Dean, Rudy Giuliani, and Wesley Clark who vouch for it. Ja-

MEK
Uncovered

383



mie Kirchick says whoever is responsible for terrorizing Iranian nuclear scientists deserves a Nobel Peace Prize. Jonathan Toobin names MEK, acknowledges their terrorist past, and argues in favor of collaborating with them. “The MEK may be an unattractive ally,” he writes, “but with its Iranian members and infrastructure of support inside the country, it is an ideal weapon to use against the ayatollahs. This is not just the standard and cynical argument about the ends justifying the means but rather an entirely defensible strategy in which a vicious and tyrannical government’s foes become legitimate allies in what is for all intents and purposes a war.”

Anti-interventionists like Daniel Larison and Global War on Terror critics like Glenn Greenwald are understandably bothered by the hypocrisy in all this. If people are thrown in jail for donating money to terrorist organizations, how can prominent politicians be on the payroll of one without facing arrest? Isn’t it hypocritical to decry terrorism as irredeemably evil, only to embrace the tactic when it is used against an unfriendly regime? If Israel is funding MEK assassinations aren’t they a state sponsor of terrorism? Aren’t these double standards corrosive to the rule of law?

I’d ask MEK enthusiasts a different question.

In your telling, MEK doesn’t belong on the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations; Rudy Giuliani shouldn’t be arrested for taking their money and speaking out on their behalf; Israel

shouldn't be declared a State Sponsor of Terror for funding their operations; and President Obama shouldn't send drones to assassinate MEK leaders. By your logic, America's list of terrorist organizations is therefore overly broad; by your logic, patriotic Americans who've done nothing wrong are nonetheless vulnerable to arrest and imprisonment for giving material support to MEK; by your logic, President Obama could unilaterally order the assassination of valuable allies engaged in righteous behavior.

So why aren't MEK enthusiasts alarmed? If you think our list of terrorist organizations is fallible, shouldn't you be calling for it to be reviewed? If you think American citizens are subject to arrest and imprisonment under laws designed to weaken our enemies, even when they're speaking out on behalf of what is actually an ally, shouldn't you be calling for material support laws to be reformed? If President Obama is empowered under U.S. law to order the assassination of certain foreigners, even as you affirm that they're acting righteously, shouldn't you want to curtail his power?

There is no way to be a conventionally hawkish MEK apologist without revealing part of your world view to be deeply wrongheaded. Either you are supporting a terrorist organization -- something you deem cause for assassination without due process -- or else the extraordinary measures you favor to fight terrorists can be legally applied to people who aren't deserving of it.

Update, Feb. 14: The national security reporter Eli Lake draws my attention to a problem with this post. One of my arguments is that MEK supporters should be alarmed by the over-broadness of our terrorism laws if, according to their own analysis, a benign or even righteous group has been labeled an official terrorist organization. That point stands. Being on the official list of terrorist organizations has all sorts of awful consequences for designated groups and their supporters. Contrary to what's implied above, however, being on the list of terrorist or-



ganizations doesn't automatically subject a group's members to death by drone strike. To be targeted for assassination, a group or individual must be covered by the 2001 Authorization to Use Military Force, and although it's been stretched to cover a dubious array of aggressive actions abroad, it hasn't yet been stretched so far that it would include the targeted killing of MEK members. For a detailed discussion of related law, go [here](#).



Right Wing Praises MEK For Conducting Acts Of Terrorism In Iran

February 2012

Last Thursday, NBC News reported that the Mujahedeen-e Khalq (MEK), an exiled Iranian opposition group designated a “foreign terrorist organization” by the State Department, conducted a series of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists. Former CIA official and visiting Georgetown professor Paul Pillar, citing the U.S. government’s definition of terrorism, observed that “with or without confirmation of details of this story, the assassinations are terrorism.” But numerous right-wing pundits and politicians here in the United States — many of whom regularly decry the use of terrorism as a means to political ends — have celebrated the MEK’s alleged attacks.

Appearing on Fox News on Sunday, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani declared that the MEK should be the Time Magazine “person of the year” if they were behind assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists.

An editorial in Rupert Murdoch’s New York Post said on Friday that the MEK deserves a Nobel Peace Prize:

Let’s be frank: Were the MEK to play the critical role in derailing an Iranian bomb, it would be far more deserving of a Nobel Peace Prize than a certain president of the United States we could mention.

And Commentary’s Jonathan Tobin justified the MEK’s action

MEK
Uncovered

387



and Israel's alleged role in financing, arming and training the group:



To those who say it is immoral to use those who have employed terrorism, the only reply can be that it would be far worse for Israel's government to allow such scruples to prevent them from carrying out actions that might stop the Iranians from going nuclear.

Noticeably, the MEK's defenders chose not to address the NBC report's other major disclosure. The MEK reportedly worked with Ramzi Yousef, the terrorist behind the first attack on the World Trade Center, to bomb an Iranian shrine, killing at least 26 people.

The NBC report did not go on to substantiate any direct links between the Israeli government and the assassination campaign, and the MEK denied any involvement in the attacks.

Indeed, the MEK's American supporters find themselves in the increasingly difficult position of lobbying to remove the organization from the State Department's terror list while openly celebrating the group's involvement in terrorist attacks.

UPDATE

American Enterprise Institute fellow Michael Rubin responded to Jonathan Tobin's defense of alleged Israeli cooperation with the MEK. Rubin writes:

By utilizing the MEK—a group which Iranians view in the same way Americans see John Walker Lindh, the American

convicted of aiding the Taliban—the Israelis risk winning some short-term gain at the tremendous expense of rallying Iranians around the regime’s flag. A far better strategy would be to facilitate regime change. Not only would the MEK be incapable of that mission, but involving them even cursorily would set the goal back years.



Thai Muslim Leader: Mossad's MEK Responsible for Diplomat Attack

February 2012

As officials in Thailand paraded suspects accused of attacking Israeli diplomats in Bangkok before the corporate media, new details emerged about the attack and the group responsible for them.

Syedsulaiman Husaini, the Shia leader of Thailand, said on Sunday that the inept bomb plot targeting Israeli diplomats was the work of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, also known as MEK. He said Thai officials are not familiar with the terrorist group.

According to Husaini, the attack was a false flag designed to implicate Iran in terror attacks against Israel.

MEK works hand-in-hand with the Israeli Mossad and is responsible for killing Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahamdi Roshan in January. MEK terrorists killed American contractors and U.S. soldiers in the 1970s and is listed as a terrorist group by the State Department.

A sizable contingent of neocons and Republicans enthusiastically support the formerly Marxist group despite the fact it attempted to kidnap the U.S. ambassador to Iran, wounded a USAF Brigadier General in a 1972 assassination attempt, murdered U.S. Air Force officers and employees of Rockwell International in 1976.

"The group of MEK shills includes former top Bush officials and other Republicans (Michael Mukasey, Fran Townsend,

MEK
Uncovered

390



Andy Card, Tom Ridge, Rudy Giuliani) as well as prominent Democrats (Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Bill Richardson, Wesley Clark),” writes Glenn Greenwald.

Earlier this month the establishment media confirmed that Israeli intelligence armed and trained MEK. “U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Obama administration is aware of the assassination campaign but has no direct involvement,” NBC News reported on February 9.





Suspected assassins: We're no longer terrorists

February 2012

Editor's Note: The following report is excerpted from Joseph Farah's G2 Bulletin, the premium online newsletter published by the founder of WIND. Subscriptions are \$99 a year or, for monthly trials, just \$9.95 per month for credit card users, and provide instant access for the complete reports.

WASHINGTON – A virulently anti-Iranian terrorist group has been credited by U.S. intelligence sources for the recent killings of Iranian nuclear scientists and Iran's major missile developer, even while the organization is promoting a public relations effort – with the support of prominent Americans – to be removed from the U.S. State Department's terrorist list, according to a report from Joseph Farah's G2 Bulletin.

Sources confirm that the Mujahedin-e-Khalq organization, which also is referred to as MEK or MKO, was involved with Israel in the current round of assassinations of two Iranian nuclear scientists and Iran's top missile designer. To date, some five Iranian nuclear scientists have been targeted.

Separately, Britain's Daily Mail reports that U.S. officials have confirmed that Israel has been funding and training Iranian dissidents to assassinate nuclear scientists involved in Iran's nuclear program.

MEK
Uncovered

392



U.S. officials also confirmed similar information to NBC News but quickly added that the United States isn't involved in the assassinations of the Iranian nuclear scientists, although it apparently is aware of the alleged connection between the Israeli intelligence service Mossad and the MEK.

The assassinations also have resulted in what G2Bulletin has reported is a tit-for-tat by Iran, which reportedly assassinated a chemical scientist in Israel in reprisal for the killings of the Iranian scientists. Sources say this development constitutes a proxy war between Israel and Iran.

U.S. sources confirm the close relationship between Israel's Mossad and the MEK. The association hasn't gone unnoticed by Iranian officials.

"The relation is very intricate and close," according to Mohammad Javad Larijani, who is a senior aide to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's current supreme leader. "They (Israelis) are paying the mujahedin. Some of their (MEK) agents are providing Israel with information. And they recruit and also manage logistical support.

"Israel does not have direct access to our society," Larijani added. "Mujahedin, being Iranian and being part of Iranian society, they have a good number of places to get in touch with





people. So, I think they are working hand-to-hand very close. And we do have very concrete documents.”

Larijani apparently was referring to an interrogation of an MEK member in a failed assassination attempt in 2010 in which such documentation reportedly was found on him.

Despite confirmation by U.S. intelligence sources of MEK involvement in continued assassinations, the MEK seeks to be removed from the U.S. terrorism list – a goal which has the backing from notable Americans, several members of Congress and a prominent Washington-based law firm.

The effort to delist the MEK is led by groups on both the left and right of the American political spectrum because of its anti-Iranian position and opposition to the Muslim clerics that lead the Islamic republic.

With deep financial pockets, however, the MEK has begun a major public relations campaign in the United States to be removed from the State Department’s U.S. terrorist list, formally known as the Foreign Terrorist Organization list.

The MEK has enlisted the help of former U.S. cabinet members and other former American officials. It also has legal representation for its delisting activities from a highly expensive Washington-based law firm, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP.

The campaign to get delisted began in earnest last year with a kickoff event at the swanky Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C. Notable Washington insiders who have been tapped to speak on MEK’s behalf include Louis Freeh, former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Hugh Shelton; former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean; John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; Gen. Wesley Clark, retired former NATO supreme

allied commander; Ed Rendell, former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania; Rudolph Giuliani, former mayor of New York City; Porter Goss, former director of Central Intelligence; Lee Hamilton, former co-chairman of the 9/11 Commission; retired Gen. Michael Hayden, former director of Central Intelligence; and Bill Richardson, former governor of New Mexico.



Are the MEK's U.S. friends its worst enemies?

March 2012

For years, a slew of advocates – many of whom have been paid for their services — have flooded U.S. airwaves on behalf of the Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK), a State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization opposed to the Iranian regime.

After months of difficult negotiations, the MEK has finally begun moving out of its secretive Iraqi home near the Iranian border, called Camp Ashraf. But the group's American advocates have now become a major obstacle in the international effort to move the MEK to a new home in Iraq and avoid a bloody clash with the Iraqi military, officials say.

U.N. special representative in Iraq Martin Kobler, with help from the U.S. Embassy in Iraq and the State Department, has organized efforts to relocate the MEK to Camp Liberty, a former U.S. military base near the Baghdad airport. The first convoy of about 400 MEK members arrived there last month. The second convoy of about 400 MEK members arrived Thursday at Camp Liberty, Reuters reported.

The United Nations and the U.S. government have worked tirelessly in recent months to avoid a violent clash between the MEK and the Shiite-led Iraqi government, which is determined

MEK
Uncovered

396



to oust the MEK from Camp Ashraf, where more than 3,000 members of the group, many of them suspected to be armed, have lived for years. Two previous attempts by the Iraqi government to enter the camp resulted in bloody confrontations. But the U.N. and the State Department's efforts have been made exponentially more difficult due to the MEK's surprisingly strong base of support in Washington. In recent weeks, retired U.S. officials and politicians — many of whom admit to being paid by the MEK or one of its many affiliates — have mounted a sophisticated media campaign accusing the U.N. and the U.S. government of forcing the group to live in subhuman conditions against its will at Camp Liberty, an accusation U.S. officials say is as inaccurate as it is unhelpful.

“This is tough enough without paid advocates making it worse,” one official told *The Cable*.

“Camp Liberty: A Prison For Iranian Dissidents in Iraq,” reads a March 3 full-page ad in the *New York Times*, leveling the surprising accusation that the former U.S. military base is unfit for human occupation. The ad quotes former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani calling Camp Liberty “a concentration camp” — a charge Giuliani made at an MEK-sponsored conference late last month in Paris. The ad also quotes former Democratic National Committee chairman and Vermont Governor Howard Dean, former Homeland Security secretary and Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge, and Harvard Law Professor Alan Der-

MEK
Uncovered

397



showitz trashing Camp Liberty.

However, according to an Obama administration official who works on the issue, it's actually the MEK that is trashing Camp Liberty — literally. According to this official, the U.N. has reported that MEK members at Camp Liberty have been sabotaging the camp, littering garbage and manipulating the utilities to make things look worse than they really are. While there are some legitimate problems at the camp, the official admitted, the U.N. has been monitoring Camp Liberty's water, sewage, and food systems on a daily basis and the conditions are better than the MEK is portraying.

The New York Times ad is only the latest in a years-long, multi-million dollar campaign by the MEK and its supporters to enlist famous U.S. politicians and policymakers in their efforts to get the group removed from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations and resist Iraqi attempts to close Camp Ashraf, which the new government sees as a militarized cult compound on its sovereign territory.

The campaign has included huge rallies outside the State Department, massive sit-ins at congressional hearings, and an ongoing vigil outside the State Department's C Street entrance. MEK supporters there tout the support of a long list of officials, including Congressman John Lewis (D-GA), former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, former FBI Director Louis Freeh, former Sen. Robert Torricelli, former Rep. Patrick Kennedy, former National Security Advisor Gen. James Jones, former Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Richard Myers, former White House Chief of Staff Andy Card, retired Gen. Wesley Clark, former Rep. Lee Hamilton, former CIA Director Porter Goss, senior advisor to the Romney campaign Mitchell Reiss, retired Gen. Anthony Zinni, and former Sen. Evan Bayh.

The administration official told The Cable that, as delicate negotiations between the U.N., the United States, the Iraqis, and the MEK continue, the role of these often paid advocates is becoming even more unhelpful and potentially dangerous.

“The Americans who ought to know better and claim to be on the side of good solutions are really damaging it. Either they are too lazy or too arrogant to actually do their homework. They don’t spend the time to learn facts, they just pop off. They accept the MEK line without question and then they posture,” the official said. “We have a plan that has a chance to work and the Iraqis want it to work. The MEK ... it’s not clear. And in this situation they are being badly advised by the people whose names appear in these ads.”

“Whether the MEK wants a resolution or wants a confrontation is something we’re still debating. It’s that bad,” the official said. The relationship between the American advocates and the MEK leadership, led by the Paris-based Maryam Rajavi, has led both to pursue strategies that neglect the dire risks of sabotaging the move from Camp Liberty to Camp Ashraf, the official said. Rajavi is said to have created a cult of personality around herself and to rule the MEK as a unchallenged monarch.

“The not-too-stable Queen [Rajavi] hired a bunch of court flatterers to tell her that she’s great, which is fine, except that she has now forgotten that these are hired court flatterers. She thinks they are actual advisors,” the official said. “Meanwhile her wise counselors are being marginalized by those who are saying ‘Oh Queen, your magnificence will cause your enemies to fall on their knees.’ And she’s beginning to believe them.”

“By enabling Rajavi to indulge her worst instincts and encouraging her to think she has more power and leverage she does, they may precipitate a crisis, which is exactly what we are trying to avoid,” the official said.

Another example of the American advisors’ unhelpfulness was the MEK’s recent public call to be relocated en masse to Jordan, an idea the U.S. official said came from the group’s American friends. There was just one problem: Nobody had asked the Jordanians.

“To announce it publicly as a demand without checking with



the Jordanians is the sort of thing you do to destroy it,” the official said. “Why the hell should the Jordanians buy trouble like this by giving these people an autonomous militarized camp?” U.N. and U.S. officials had been hoping to keep discussions open with Jordan about the possibility of hosting some MEK members in the event of an emergency, such as a renewed outbreak of violence. But U.S. officials now think that the MEK’s actions have made that much more difficult.

“Whoever advised them has done actual demonstrable damage to a possible humanitarian solution. They’re not helping. It’s remarkable,” the official said.

The arrival at Camp Liberty Thursday of the second convoy may signal that the MEK is coming around to the realization that the Iraqi government will never allow it to stay at Camp Ashraf. But the U.S. official warned that the group may have more tricks up its sleeve.

“The MEK will delay, confuse, deny, and spin until faced with an imminent disaster, and then they give only enough to avoid that disaster,” the official said. “And the problem is: If you play chicken enough, eventually you will get into a head-on collision.”



Treasury Dept Probes Former Pennsylvania Governor's Terror Ties

March 2012

Rendell Insists He 'Did Nothing Wrong' in Backing MEK

Former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell's second term in office may have come to an end in early 2011, but he's back in the headlines today, confirming that the Treasury Department has subpoenaed records of payments received at speaking engagements, with particular interest in a number of speeches he gave on behalf of a terrorist organization.

Rendell repeatedly spoke on behalf of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, a State Department listed terrorist organization, though it is not yet apparent from the investigation whether he was paid directly for those speeches. The former governor insists he "did nothing wrong" and promised to cooperate with the probe. Taking funds to work on behalf of a terrorist organization is generally illegal, the State Department noted, though it refused to comment on the specifics of the Rendell case. Even if Rendell wasn't paid, the 2010 Holder v. Humanitarian Law ruling would seem to criminalize speeches on their behalf.

Rendell is hardly alone in this regard, however, as the MEK has bought off a large number of national security officials, offering them as much as \$20,000 for a 20 minute speech endorsing the group and demanding that it be removed from the terrorist list.

MEK
Uncovered

401

Historically the MEK has launched a number of attacks against US targets, and the group has been on the State Department’s list of terrorists since the list was first created. The group’s deep pockets and recent ties to terror attacks inside Iran have made it the darling of a certain segment of hawks, and some have argued in favor of delisting them for the sheer benefit of it constituting a “provocative” action against Iran.





THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Ed Rendell, Investigated In Mujahideen-e Khalq Speaker Fees, Backs 'Terrorist' Group

March 2012

WASHINGTON — Former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell acknowledged this week that the Treasury Department is investigating payments he accepted to speak in support of an Iranian exile group on the U.S. government's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Groups in the U.S. related to Iran's Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) have spent millions on highly paid American speakers, including Rendell, as part of a lobbying campaign to remove the group from the foreign terrorist organizations list. It's illegal for U.S. citizens to accept payment from foreign terrorist organizations.

Rendell, a Democrat, defended his acceptance of payments from MEK-related groups, even after the Washington Times reported that federal agents subpoenaed financial records last month from his agent, William Morris Endeavor.

Rendell said his support of the MEK was an issue of conscience, not simply a chance for him to make easy money. "I did my research extensively on this issue before I ever agreed to speak on it," he told the Washington Times. "And I am 100 percent convinced that the MEK shouldn't be on the foreign

MEK
Uncovered

403



terrorist organization list.” Rendell left office in January 2011 after two terms as Pennsylvania governor. He has since joined a number of investment groups and appears regularly on MSNBC. Before he was elected governor, he was chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He couldn’t be reached Monday by The Huffington Post.

Rendell’s “extensive research” claim appears to contradict what he told the audience at his very first MEK-related speaking engagement — a July 16 conference at the Willard Hotel in Washington attended by this reporter. There, on a bipartisan panel of former administration officials, all receiving at least \$20,000 for their appearances, Rendell said he had received the speaking invitation only five days before. Typically, top-tier speakers like Rendell are booked months in advance.

When he first read the offer, Rendell said he told his representative to turn it down because, as he said, “I don’t know hardly anything about this subject.” Rendell said he instructed his agent to send the message, “I would have loved to come, but I don’t think I’m qualified to come.”

To Rendell’s surprise, sponsors of the MEK conference weren’t concerned with his lack of knowledge. Rendell said he was “compelled and interested by the level” of the other panelists, including Howard Dean, the former Vermont governor, and Anita McBride, the former chief of staff to Laura Bush. This, Rendell said, was why “I decided to come down” to Washing-

ton.

In the four days between Rendell's acceptance of the engagement and his appearance, he told the audience he had received information from at least four sources. "Firstly, from your representatives over the phone," he said. "Secondly, from the materials you sent me. Thirdly from a discussion [Howard Dean and I] had with some of your representatives earlier this morning. And fourthly, from listening to these panelists."

Since July, Rendell has received payment for at least six pro-MEK speeches in the U.S. and Europe — money he said comes from "citizens, both American citizens here and Iranian expats in Europe who believe in the cause."

The MEK was founded in Iran in 1963, loosely based on Marxist principles. The group carried out bombings in Iran in the 1970s and 1980s, killing some Americans and prompting its inclusion on the U.S. foreign terrorist organizations list when it was first released in 1997.

Asked recently about the origins of the large payments the pro-MEK groups make for high-ranking former officials including himself, Rendell told the Washington Times he doesn't actually know where the money originates, except that "there's a very significant group of American citizens" who support the MEK. "How they pledge their money and send it in and aggregate it to pay us, I don't know," he told the newspaper.





UN & Obama Supporting Islam-Marxist Terror Group in Iraq

March 2012

The Obama administration and top former officials are reportedly violating federal law by offering support to the Iranian Mujahedin-e Khalq (emblem at left), a notorious Islamic-Communist terror group that has murdered senior American personnel and is officially designated a “foreign terrorist organization” by the U.S. State Department.

The U.S. government is, among other support measures, currently helping to relocate members of the MEK to a former American military base in Iraq. It is also assisting the group to settle around the world as refugees in a controversial deal brokered with help from the new Iraqi regime and the United Nations.

Outraged critics called the administration’s support for the terrorist group an act of “high treason” and “overt criminality.” But paid lobbyists, including politicians and top U.S. officials, have been waging an intense propaganda campaign on behalf of the MEK.

Incredibly, the organization’s supporters claim the transfer of MEK members to the former American base is unacceptable. The terror group’s leadership and its allies are demanding that members either be allowed to stay where they are or be relo-

MEK
Uncovered

406



cated near the Jordanian border instead.

Several thousand members of the group had been living for decades near the Iranian border in Iraq's "Camp Ashraf," which analysts and officials have described as a militarized "cult" compound. And from 2003 until recently, the terror group was there under the protection of American forces.

The protection agreement with the U.S. government came after the group lost its former protector, Saddam Hussein, in the wake of the American invasion. Now, however, U.S. forces are officially out of Iraq and the new regime is supposed to be in charge.

Iraqi officials have recently tried — unsuccessfully — to evict the terror organization's members from the camp. The efforts resulted in bloodshed, according to news reports. But the process of moving them finally began last month and is now well underway.

In an alleged bid to avoid further confrontations between the terror group and the new regime ruling Iraq, months of negotiations between the UN and American and Iraqi officials resulted in a plan to transfer the MEK members temporarily to "Camp Liberty," a former U.S. military base near Baghdad.

The terror group and its prominent American lobbyists, however, are crying foul, describing the former American installation — which was certified by the UN — as a sort of "substandard"



prison. And an international controversy of sorts about the issue is growing.

The MEK, also known as the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI), was founded in a bizarre effort to blend economic Marxism with the values and beliefs of Islam — and impose the system by force. The group also helped Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini during the Islamic revolution that overthrew the U.S. government-backed Shah of Iran. But the warm relations soured soon after that.

America and capitalism have historically been the organization's primary enemies. Violence and terror, meanwhile, were the means used to wage war. But after a series of terror attacks within Iran left top officials and hundreds of others dead, the Iranian regime unleashed a brutal crackdown — attempting to dismantle the terrorist network once and for all.

The MEK was eventually designated a foreign terrorist organization in 1997 under the Clinton administration. But in recent years, the terror group has toned down its anti-American rhetoric and adopted a friendlier public-relations approach — spending millions of dollars on lobbyists and even dabbling in politics. Supporters hope to have the U.S. terror designation dropped eventually.

The group's history, however, includes assassinations of more than a few senior U.S. military personnel, terror attacks on American installations, murder of civilians, and much more. Iranians and Iraqis have been victimized even more frequently. The designated terrorist organization once fought alongside Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's forces too, collaborating with the tyrant against the Iranian regime in the Iran-Iraq war. It even helped Hussein to quash domestic dissidents within Iraq as well.

Iraqis and Iranians, of course, remember the MEK's partnership with the former despot in suppressing uprisings by rebel groups and slaughtering Iranians. And the bitter memories have led to growing hostility against the terror group among

Iraq's new rulers.

Since Hussein was overthrown by U.S. forces, the new government in Iraq has also become increasingly close to the Islamic regime in Iran. So, a conflict has erupted over the status of MEK members living inside Iraq as officials demand that Camp Ashraf be permanently shut down.

In recent weeks, convoys comprised of several hundred MEK members each have started arriving at Camp Liberty from the group's previous paramilitary compound near Iran. The second group of about 400 arrived last week. And thousands more are expected in the not-too-distant future.

Meanwhile, U.S. taxpayers are reportedly paying to improve the terror organization's new temporary residence while the UN works to shuttle them out the country. According to news reports, the MEK members are supposed to be processed at Camp Liberty as they await UN-sponsored relocation to other countries as refugees.

But the group's leaders and their well-paid Western lobbyists have asked for Iraqi law enforcement and security personnel to be expelled from the camp while demanding upgrades to the facilities. And they have found sympathetic supporters around the world.

The Islamo-Marxist terror organization — which much of the press now identifies as a group of “dissidents,” “exiles,” and “refugees” — has especially found favor among advocates of war and regime change in Iran. Numerous reports and experts say the U.S. and Israeli governments have actually been working directly with the group for years, in violation of federal laws, to assassinate Iranian scientists, gather intelligence, and even carry out terror attacks on various targets.

But of course, Obama administration officials would hardly be the first to violate U.S. laws — which the Supreme Court upheld at the government's request — by supporting the designated terror organization. Top neo-conservatives such as former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and ex-Attorney



MEK
Uncovered

409



General Michael Mukasey have been lobbying feverishly on behalf of the group too, along with a broad roster of former politicians and U.S. officials.

Former Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean, ex-Homeland Security boss Tom Ridge, former FBI chief Louis Freeh, ex-CIA Director Porter Goss, former National Security Advisor Gen. James Jones, former White House Chief of Staff Andy Card, and many other prominent Americans have joined the battle to aid the MEK as well. So have officials throughout Europe.

And over the last few months, a strange brouhaha has erupted between the Obama administration and the MEK's highly placed roster of vocal lobbyists. Instead of focusing on the fact that it is a serious breach of federal law to provide virtually any form of support to a designated terrorist organization, former U.S. officials are alleging — very loudly, even purchasing full page ads in major newspapers — that the federal government is not doing enough to coddle the terrorists.

An article in *Foreign Policy*, citing an anonymous Obama administration official working on the issue, reported that the terror group is actually trashing Camp Liberty itself in a bid to make conditions appear worse than they are. The official also said the MEK's high-profile U.S. lobbying activities are making it more difficult — potentially even dangerous — for the Obama administration to properly help the terrorists reach “good solutions.”

“We have a plan that has a chance to work and the Iraqis want it to work,” the administration source was quoted as saying. “Whether the MEK wants a resolution or wants a confrontation is something we’re still debating. It’s that bad.”

Apparently investigators with the U.S. Treasury Department's terror branch have started to probe at least one former official for accepting the terrorist group's money in exchange for lobbying. Former Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Rendell said recently that he received a subpoena seeking documents related to

his ties with the MEK.

A Treasury spokesman refused to either confirm or deny that the department was investigating. “But the MEK is a designated terrorist group, therefore U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with or providing services to this group,” the spokesman was quoted as saying by the Washington Times, which broke the story on March 9.

As part of the covert war on Iran, the U.S. and Israeli governments have reportedly been arming, training, and funding the MEK for years — as well as other known terror groups such as the al-Qaeda affiliate known as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) during the recent “regime change” in Libya. And providing support to a designated foreign terrorist organization remains a serious crime, punishable by steep fines and long prison sentences. Whether anyone will be held accountable, however, remains to be seen.



The New York Times

U.S. Supporters of Iranian Group Face Scrutiny

March 2012

WASHINGTON — For more than a year, prominent former American officials have been giving well-paid speeches in support of an Iranian opposition group that is fighting to reverse its 15-year-old designation by the State Department as a terrorist organization.

Now the Treasury Department appears to have begun an inquiry to see whether the speaking fees were being paid by the group, the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Mujahedeen, known as the M.E.K. Americans are prohibited by law from doing business with designated terrorist groups.

Edward G. Rendell, the former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania and an outspoken supporter of the M.E.K., said on Monday that William Morris Endeavor, which handles his speaking engagements, received a subpoena last week seeking information on fees he had received for M.E.K.-related speeches.

The Treasury Department declined to comment on whether it is conducting an investigation. But the subpoena to Mr. Rendell, earlier reported by The Washington Times, raises the possibility that a long list of former officials who have accepted fees to speak on behalf of the M.E.K., including former directors of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau

MEK
Uncovered

412



of Investigation, could come under scrutiny for any payments traced to the group.

Mr. Rendell, a former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, said he had given seven or eight speeches since July calling for the M.E.K. to be taken off the terrorist list and estimated that he had been paid a total of \$150,000 or \$160,000. Mr. Rendell said he had been told that his fees came from Iranian-American supporters of the M.E.K., not from the group itself.

The M.E.K. has a history of carrying out terrorist acts against both the Islamic government of Iran and the shah's government that preceded it, and at least six Americans died in such attacks in the 1970s, according to a Rand Corporation study of the group. But Mr. Rendell and other American supporters say the group ceased such violent acts many years ago and should no longer be on the terrorist list.

Mr. Rendell expressed puzzlement that a subpoena would be issued now, more than a year after former high-ranking American officials began giving paid speeches on behalf of the group.

Even as the Treasury Department inquires about his fees, he said, the State Department has asked him and several other former American officials to act as informal envoys between the State Department and the M.E.K. in tense negotiations after the Iraqi government ordered the group to vacate its camp

MEK
Uncovered

413

north of Baghdad.

Former Gov. Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania at a rally last year for the Mujahedeen Khalq. Credit Jose Luis Magana/Associated Press

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton has urged the group to move more than 3,000 supporters from Camp Ashraf, where they have lived for many years, to a site near Baghdad's international airport, as a first step toward leaving Iraq. She said last month that the group's cooperation in the move would be a factor in the State Department's forthcoming decision on its request to have the terrorist label dropped.

In recent weeks, about 800 of the M.E.K. supporters have made the move. But the group's leaders, based in Paris, have repeatedly complained about conditions in the new location, and both United States and United Nations officials are concerned that the group might not complete the relocation, possibly provoking Iraqi officials.

The M.E.K., which supported Saddam Hussein and is described by critics as a cult, has faced open hostility from the current Iraqi government, which has close relations to Iran. Iraqi security forces clashed last year with M.E.K. supporters at Camp Ashraf, resulting in the death of at least 36 of the camp residents.

Mr. Rendell said he thought it was a "disgrace" that M.E.K. supporters had been killed with weapons supplied by the United States and despite promises of security for the camp from the Bush administration. He said he agreed to speak up for the group in part because he was dismayed by the violence and never would have spoken for the money alone.

"I made a lot of money last year," Mr. Rendell said. "I don't need the money. I would never sacrifice my reputation for any amount of money."

A spokesman for the Treasury Department, John Sullivan, said that while he could not discuss any "potential investigation," American citizens and legal residents were "generally prohib-

ited from engaging in transactions with or providing services” to the M.E.K. or any other terrorist group.

“The Treasury Department takes sanctions enforcement seriously and routinely investigates potential violations of sanctions laws,” Mr. Sullivan said.

Other former officials who have accepted fees for speaking in support of the M.E.K. said on Monday that they and their agents had not received subpoenas. Some did not respond to inquiries. The fees have ranged from \$15,000 to \$30,000 for a brief speech, though some invitees have spoken free.

Among former officials who have spoken for the M.E.K. at conferences are two former C.I.A. directors, R. James Woolsey and Porter J. Goss; a former F.B.I. director, Louis J. Freeh; a former attorney general, Michael B. Mukasey; President George W. Bush’s first homeland security secretary, Tom Ridge; President Obama’s first national security adviser, Gen. James L. Jones; as well as prominent Republicans, including Rudolph W. Giuliani, the former New York City mayor, and Democrats like Howard Dean, a former governor of Vermont.

The conferences, as well as newspaper and television advertisements, have been organized by advocacy groups in the United States, including the Iranian-American Community of Northern California. That group did not immediately return a request for comment, but Mr. Rendell said he had met numerous well-to-do Iranian Americans at the group’s events and believed that their donations covered the costs.





THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Money vs. Facts: The Mujahedin-e Khalq Is a Terrorist Organization

March 2012

The foreign policy and national security challenges posed by Iran have perplexed consecutive U.S. presidential administrations for decades. From the hostage crisis to state sponsorship of terrorism to nuclear programs, the myriad challenges have rarely provided any easy answers. One of the few clear issues pertaining to America's Iran policy has been its designation of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) as a terrorist organization.

For nearly two decades and four presidential administrations, yearly reviews of the MEK's terrorist designation have reconfirmed its rightful place on this dubious list of 50 unsavory groups — most recently in January of this year.

Despite this, a massive lobbying push to delist the MEK has been raging inside the beltway for the past year, producing two troubling results. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told U.S. lawmakers that a decision on the MEK's terrorist designation is pending in part to see if the group peacefully relocates to a new, less contentious location in Iraq. Shortly thereafter, the Washington, D.C. court of appeals ordered the U.S. government to respond to a petition on the MEK's terrorist designation by March 26 — less than two weeks from today.

My organization, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), has been at the forefront of a diverse, uncompensated

MEK
Uncovered

416



coalition of former government officials, analysts and scholars calling for the MEK to remain a designated foreign terrorist organization.

To date, I have personally remained silent on the issue in my public commentary in an effort to protect my former colleagues serving in the State Department's Office of Iranian Affairs. My views are identical to theirs.

However, I can no longer remain silent. We are fast approaching a point of no return regarding the MEK's terrorist designation, and my government is running the risk of making a disastrous mistake.

Allow me to explain.

Not one of my former State Department colleagues — zero — support de-listing the MEK. Their determination is not based on personal preference or policy ramifications. Rather, the facts of the case are indisputable.

Since NIAC launched its information campaign on the MEK nearly one year ago, I have been in close and continuing contact with the State Department. They are bewildered by the freedom of movement that a designated terrorist organization enjoys on Capitol Hill; disgusted by former U.S. government officials willing to make a quick buck by shilling for the MEK; and exasperated by senior-level political appointees who have allowed partisan politics to trump making an otherwise obvious decision that was not controversial a few short years ago.





A bit of context tells the real story.

In both 2006 and 2007, I helped review the MEK's terrorist designation. I worked with my colleagues in government to review documentation dating from the 1970s to the present, and it was swiftly determined that the MEK's terrorist designation remained warranted. This was during the Bush administration — which had an openly stated policy of regime change — and before neoconservative political appointees began jumping ship en masse toward late 2007.

The facts were so indisputable that nearly zero debate took place inside the State Department. Only a few neoconservatives pushed to use the MEK as a pressure point against the Iranian government. Yet despite their countless Iran policy blunders, most neoconservatives in the Bush administration were unequivocal that a terrorist group is a terrorist group.

When presidential administrations change, political appointees cycle in and out of government. Career public servants — which constitute the vast majority of State Department officials — transcend elections. Many of the same officials I worked with to reconfirm the MEK's terrorist designation in 2006 and 2007 continue to serve in the Obama administration. The same evidence also remains in place.

If anything, the U.S. government now has more evidence to warrant a swift confirmation of the MEK's terrorist designation. Obama administration officials recently confirmed to NBC News that the MEK is being armed, trained and funded by the Israeli government to murder Iranian scientists. This type of activity — politically motivated assassinations — is squarely within the U.S. government definition of terrorism that is used when designating foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs).

So, why we have reached this critical stage Because even in the post-September 11th era, there has been lax enforcement of existing laws pertaining to FTOs. An illegal presence on Capitol Hill has allowed the MEK to build a disconcerting degree of political pressure vis- -vis the Obama administration.

Consistent inaction by the administration has exacerbated the problem. Only recently have they started to enforce the law, with former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell subpoenaed by the Treasury Department for his paid speeches in support of the MEK. This is a step in the right direction, and more subpoenas will surely follow — but is it too little too late

It doesn't have to be. Let me be clear The requisite evidence to legally maintain the MEK's terrorist designation is both ample and indisputable.

As one of the appeals court judges wrote in her ruling, “the classified portion of the administrative record provides “substantial support” for [the Secretary of State's] determination that the PMOI [MEK] either continues to engage in terrorism or terrorist activity or retains the capability and intent to do so.” The reasoning why the Obama administration has not publicly released this evidence is simple releasing such information could compromise and damages sources; hamper future intelligence gathering; and jeopardize legal proceedings against alleged criminals involved in the case. This runs the risk of rendering U.S. national security less effective. A similar justification was used by the Obama administration when it withheld much of its collected evidence in the alleged Iranian government plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to Washington.

Secretary Clinton telling lawmakers that a decision on the MEK's terrorist designation is pending in part to see if the group relocates is tantamount to an admission that the decision has nothing to do with whether or not the MEK is a terrorist organization. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Simply put, it is unacceptable to delist a designated FTO in return for them agreeing to relocate. So long as the MEK's organizational structure remains in place, it legally remains a terrorist organization — regardless of where its base is located. Furthermore, the precedent set by such a mistake would be an unmitigated disaster for the U.S. Does America want to



open the door for other terrorist organizations to spend millions of dollars on lobbying to get off the terrorist list. It's time for the Obama administration to stop playing politics and start enforcing the law. Secretary Clinton and other senior-level officials may not hold their positions one year from now, but many of my former colleagues at the State Department will be left to clean up the mess. Political appointees and Congress must stop politicizing the MEK's terrorist designation, and instead let career public servants do their job. This is how they can best uphold the law in pursuit of America's national security interests.



420

Are Israel, US Secretly Paying Terrorists To Destabilize Iran?

March 2012

On one side is an Iranian group officially listed as a terrorist organization -- anti-government activists linked to kidnapping and assassinations of Iranians and Americans over several decades.

On the other are Americans and Israelis, saber-rattling in a bid to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons but who have stopped short of supporting a military strike on the country's uranium-enrichment facilities.

Could the terrorists be the advance guard for the West -- the proxy in-country soldiers who will do the dirty work for the United States and its ally Israel?

The People's Mujahedin of Iran -- known variously as the PMOI, Mujahedin-e-Khalq and MEK -- was a left-wing militant group before Iran's Islamic revolution and overthrow of the shah in 1979. Now it's an exiled political entity based in neighboring Iraq whose stated mission is to topple the regime of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

MEK has been getting publicity of late, with numerous American politicians, liberals and conservatives alike beating the drum for its removal from the State Department list of terrorist organizations. In practice, the designation means no U.S. companies or citizens can give MEK money or do business with the group. The argument most supporters give is that MEK has reformed into a democratic organization and is no longer a threat to U.S. interests.

Some MEK backers may be motivated by money. Former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell and a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Hugh Shelton, are under investigation by the Treasury Department for accepting as much as



421



\$150,000 from MEK to lobby for delisting in speaking engagements.

Other prominent politicians and officials, including former homeland-security chief Tom Ridge, ex-New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former NATO commander Gen. Wesley Clark have also participated in events or written articles supporting MEK's removal from the terrorist list. These activities were paid for by the group's political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, and various Iranian-American cultural organizations.

But throughout the ongoing discussion about MEK and its motives and political ties, one possibility has flown under the radar: that the United States and Israel may already be paying clandestine MEK operatives to destabilize Iran's nuclear program.

On the premise that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, funding, arming or training MEK is an important strategic tool for Israel and the U.S., said Dilshod Achilov, assistant professor of Middle East politics at East Tennessee State University. The operatives of MEK and PJAK [Party of Free Life of Kurdistan] are seen as invaluable agents for [Israeli and U.S. spy agencies] Mossad and CIA because they can work covertly inside Iran and carry out various tactical missions rather discreetly. There is little doubt that MEK is actively involved in sabotaging, either directly or indirectly, the Iranian nuclear pro-



gram, he said.

In what experts say is the most likely scenario, MEK has played a key role in the assassination of four Iranian nuclear scientists. The latest of these occurred in January when Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, a university chemistry professor who doubled as a director of Iran's Natanz uranium-enrichment facility, was killed after two assailants on a motorcycle attached a magnetic bomb to his Peugeot 405.

Roshan's killing was nearly identical to a November 2010 attack in Tehran in which nuclear engineer Majid Shahriari died and Fereydoon Abbasi Davani, head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, was wounded.

In addition, intelligence specialists have linked MEK and Mossad to an explosion at a Revolutionary Guard base about 30 miles west of Tehran last November; the blast killed 17 people including Maj. Gen. Hassan Tehrani Moqaddam, Iran's most senior missile commander. Also in 2011, Iranian uranium-enrichment facilities were attacked by a highly sophisticated computer virus called Stuxnet that reportedly disrupted and spied on Iran's nuclear program.

MEK is a gun for hire, said Trita Parsi, founder of the National Iranian American Council, a nonpartisan community organization based in Washington. They continue to exist as long as they have a patron to pay for them to do what they do best ... and there seems to be that desire in Israel.

They will do almost anything that they are being paid to do, Parsi said. Not too long ago this organization was conducting terrorism for Saddam Hussein.

In February, two anonymous Pentagon officials told NBC News that Israel's Mossad has been funding MEK for at least five years and training the group's operatives to carry out assassinations of nuclear scientists. Confirming statements made by Mohammed Javad Larijani, a senior aide to Iran's Khamenei, the officials said the United States is aware of but not involved in the relationship between Israel and MEK.

MEK
Uncovered

423



Israel does not have direct access to our society, Larijani told NBC News in conjunction with that February report. Mujahedin, being Iranian and being part of Iranian society, they have ... a good number of ... places to get into touch with people. So I think [Israel] is working hand-to-hand very close. And we do have very concrete documents.

Israel's Foreign Ministry, which has yet to deny responsibility for the recent assassinations, dismissed the alleged MEK connection as gossip, and MEK, which was stripped of its weapons after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, has denied any involvement in the killings.

Attributing murder of the mullahs regime nuclear scientist to the PMOI is absolutely false, the group said in a statement.

Instead, MEK asserts that the Iranian regime is guilty of killing its own scientists. There is a special unit of the Revolutionary Guard, the group claims, that's responsible for killing any nuclear expert who tries to break with the program or leave Iran. MEK, Israel and the United States are then framed for the crime, the conspiracy goes.

However, Richard Silverstein, a longtime journalist in the Middle East with sources in the Israeli intelligence community, calls MEK's relations with Mossad one of the worst-kept secrets of the war between Israel and Iran.

It is widely known within intelligence circles that the Israelis use MEK for varied acts of espionage and terror ... [including] assassinations of nuclear scientists and bombings of sensitive military installations, Silverstein claimed on his Israeli-security blog Tikun Olam.

According to Silverstein, the alleged Mossad-MEK relationship is directly tied to the Iran strategy of the CIA, which is funneling money to MEK through Mossad. As an example of this arrangement, Silverstein points to \$400 million allocated by President George W. Bush in 2007 for CIA and Special Forces operations to undermine Iran's nuclear program and leadership. Other experts agree and see the value that Amer-

icans are getting for this money in the effectiveness of MEK's alleged subterfuge in Iran.

The level of sophistication of the attacks suggests that the perpetrators are well-equipped, well-informed and thus have not been acting alone, said Achilov, the Middle East scholar.

Even if the United States isn't secretly backing MEK, whether it should provide direct support to the group is moot, geopolitical experts say.

Here is an organization that opposes the autocratic regime and calls for a secular Iran, said Rachel Ehrenfeld, director of the right-wing American Center for Democracy. It's incredible that they are still around, and we should use everyone who can undermine the regime.

To some, this is a dangerous stance to take, particularly because for all its recent pronouncements about establishing a secular democracy in Iran, MEK was founded as an Islamist-Marxist organization and is historically anti-Western. In the early 1970s, MEK was allegedly complicit in the failed kidnapping of U.S. Ambassador to Iran Douglas MacArthur II in 1971 and the killing of the U.S. Army's comptroller, Lt. Col. Louis Lee Hawkins, in Tehran. In 1979, the group supported the takeover of the U.S. Embassy during Iran's Islamic revolution.

They always pursue their own specific interest, said Masoud Banisadr, a former U.S. spokesman for MEK. Banisadr left the group in 1996, or as he put it, escaped. He regards MEK as more a dangerous cult than a terrorist organization and fears the United States will ultimately be hurt by cozying up to it.

They might be useful in one occasion or another, but as a whole as they are not loyal toward any norms, ethics, principles or mutual agreement, Banisadr said. Like al Qaeda, they cannot be trusted.

Considering how dangerous, complex, sensitive and fraught with potential failure a direct attack by Israeli or U.S. forces on Iran would be, Banisadr's warning could fall on deaf ears:



MEK
Uncovered

425

Good or evil, MEK may turn out to be the West's best option for avoiding all-out war.



426

MEK and its material supporters in Washington

March 2012

Why are so many prominent Washington officials supporting a designated Terrorist group?

Jeremiah Goulka worked as a lawyer in the Bush Justice Department, and then went to work as an analyst with the RAND Corporation, where he was sent to Iraq to analyze, among other things, the Iranian dissident group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), publishing an oft-cited study on the group. MEK has been in the news of late because a high-powered bipartisan cast of former Washington officials have established close ties with the group and have been vocally advocating on its behalf, often in exchange for large payments, despite MEK's having been formally designated by the U.S. Government as a Terrorist organization. That close association on the part of numerous Washington officials with a Terrorist organization has led to a formal federal investigation of those officials. Goulka has written and supplied to me two superb Op-Eds on the MEK controversy — one about the group itself and the other explaining why so many prominent Washington officials are openly providing material support to this designated Terror group — and I'm publishing the two Op-Eds below with his consent (as you read them, remember that paid MEK shill Howard Dean actually called on its leader to be recognized as President of Iran while paid MEK shill Rudy Giuliani has continuously hailed the group's benevolence).

MEK
Uncovered

427



Before posting those Op-Eds, I want to note one update on this matter: supporters of MEK have filed a lawsuit asking a federal court to force the State Department to decide within 30 days whether to remove MEK from the list of designated Terrorist organizations (State Department officials have previously indicated they are considering doing so). In response, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has told the court that (1) it has no role to play in directing the timing of this decision (“Any interference by a court with the Secretary’s ability to carry out these absolutely critical duties would set a seriously troubling precedent”); and (2) the U.S. Government is currently attempting to force MEK to move from its current base in Camp Ashraf to another location in Iraq (something MEK does not want to do), and whether MEK cooperates with the U.S. Government’s directives will play a large role in determining whether the group is removed from the Terrorist list.

With regard to that second argument: in determining whether MEK belongs on the Terrorist list, what conceivable difference should it make whether MEK is cooperative in moving from Camp Ashraf as the U.S. Government wants? What does their cooperation or lack thereof have to do with whether they are a Terrorist organization? The answer, of course, is that the U.S. list of Terrorist organizations (like its list of state sponsors of Terrorism) has little or nothing to do with who are and are not actually Terrorists; it is, instead, simply an instrument

used to reward those who comply with U.S. dictates (you're no longer a Terrorist) and to punish those who refuse (you are hereby deemed Terrorists). The scholarship of Remi Brulin documents how Terrorism, from its prominent introduction into world affairs, has been manipulated that way. Andrew Exum of the Center for a New American Security yesterday objected to my argument that the field of "Terrorism expertise" is basically fraudulent because the concept of "Terrorism" itself is largely propagandistic and ideological, rather than being some meaningful term with a fixed, coherent definition. His commenters have very effectively addressed his claims, but this game-playing with MEK is yet another example underscoring what I mean.

THE IRAN WAR HAWKS' FAVORITE CULT GROUP

Despite the flurry of support by some prominent politicians as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton scrutinizes its case, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a dissident Iranian group based in Iraq with a propaganda arm in Paris, is no enigma.

The U.S. declared the MEK a terrorist organization 13 years ago partly because the group is thought to have assassinated three U.S. Army officers and three U.S. civilian contractors in Tehran in the 1970s. The group's pep rallies feature U.S. politicians lured with high fees to come speak on its behalf. The MEK wants the U.S. government to take the group off its terrorist list – as the E.U. and U.K. have already done. But before that happens the group requires close scrutiny.

I studied the MEK for the U.S. military and visited Camp Ashraf, the MEK facility 40 miles north of Baghdad. I also interviewed former MEK members. As Human Rights Watch also concluded, I saw that the MEK is a cult. It uses brainwashing, sleep deprivation, and forced labor to indoctrinate members. It segregates men from women, mandates celibacy, forces married members to divorce (except for its leaders), and separates families and friends who must seek permission just to converse.





MEK members must report their private sexual thoughts at group meetings and endure public shaming. In a Catch-22, those who deny having sexual thoughts are accused of hiding them and shamed, too. The cult has but one purpose: to put itself in charge in Iran.

A brief history lesson illuminates how the MEK transformed from a radical student group in 1965 to what it is today. When the MEK was founded it embraced both Marxism and Islam and dedicated itself to the violent overthrow of the Shah of Iran. All this is reflected in its name, the “People’s Holy Warriors.” By 1979 the MEK evolved into a major movement that threatened Ayatollah Khomeini’s dominance after the Iranian Revolution. He suppressed the group, executing some leaders and imprisoning others. In 1981 some MEK leaders escaped in a stolen plane. Among these was Masoud Rajavi. Exiled to Paris, he established the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella organization of Iranian dissident groups opposed to Khomeini. The NCRI soon became the propaganda arm of the MEK. Rajavi’s wife, Maryam, runs the NCRI, which is also on the U.S. terror list. She calls herself “president-elect” of the NCRI’s “parliament-in-exile.”

When Saddam Hussein waged war against Iran, Rajavi moved the MEK from Paris to Iraq. His alliance with Saddam in a brutally violent war cost the MEK credibility and its font of recruits. Isolated in Iraq’s desert, Rajavi instituted authoritarian control over his decimated army and confiscated his troops’ assets. He encouraged Saddam to send Iranian POWs to MEK’s Camp Ashraf rather than repatriate them. With promises of asylum for POWs and family reunions with the new MEK members, Rajavi duped Iranian visitors to come to the camp and stole their passports so they couldn’t leave.

Human Rights Watch reports that those who tried to escape endured confinement or torture. After the U.S. invaded Iraq, the MEK ejected its most “difficult” members and used guards and concertina wire to entrap the rest. Members must swear

allegiance to Masoud and Maryam, whose pictures are in every building at Camp Ashraf. But these days Maryam's is the public face of the NCRI. Masoud Rajavi mysteriously disappeared in 2003.

Maryam trumpets the dangers of Iran's nuclear program and gives the NCRI credit for discovering Iran's Natanz nuclear facility. That self-serving claim is doubtful, as is the NCRI's posture as a democratic government-in-waiting. While its propaganda arm espouses Western values to Western audiences, the MEK continues to force-feed its doctrine to members who may not criticize the Rajavis and are not free to leave the Ashraf compound.

While many people would like to see a change of regime in Tehran, no one should believe that the MEK would provide Iran with a government based on liberty and justice for all. Indeed, based upon its treatment of its own adherents in Iraq, a MEK regime might not be much improvement over the current one.





Giuliani claims ‘terrorist’ MEK only chance for regime change in Iran

March 2012

Mujahedin-e Khalq, also known as MEK, is a former radical Islamic-Marxist movement, labeled a “cult” by Human Rights Watch and listed by the US State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, alongside Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.

It is also embroiled in a US political scandal for allegedly making illegal payments to retired US politicians.

Yet Giuliani believes the US government should put its might behind MEK, which is currently based in Iraq.

“I have a feeling that the only thing that will stop [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] and the only thing that will stop Ahmadinejad is if they see strength, if they see power, if they see determination, if they see an America that is willing to support the people that want to overthrow the regime of Iran,” Giuliani told the audience at an international conference in Paris, reports the International Business Times.

Although officials in Washington have openly accused Iran of trying to acquire nuclear weapons, President Obama has so far called for a diplomatic resolution. And while some in Israel and the US have advocated limited military action to disable Iran’s uranium enrichment facilities, Republican Presidential candidates Newt Gingrich, Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum have all called for the Islamic theocracy to be overthrown.



432



But none of them have campaigned for MEK to lead the revolution.

The MEK has forsaken its anti-Western and radical Islamist roots, and promotes itself as a secular, democratic government-in-waiting – to its Western backers. But at its base in a refugee camp in Iraq it enforces strict discipline – celibacy, limited sleep, no electronic communication, forced divorce for married members, and a personality cult surrounding its leader Zohreh Akhyani. Human Rights Watch has accused it of severe human rights violations.

Meanwhile, the US first placed it on the terrorist list in 1997 over fears that it might attack American citizens, and as recently as 2007 it claimed MEK was a terrorist organization despite its formal renunciation of violence against civilians.

Cash for credibility

But despite its dubious credentials, MEK has proved almost irresistible to a whole slew of nominally respectable US politicians. Among them former UN ambassador John Bolton, presidential candidate Howard Dean, and former Homeland Security chief Tom Ridge, who've all made speeches in favor of the MEK.

But a recent investigation initiated by the US Treasury Department discovered that the MEK was paying its supporters lavish speech fees in the tens of thousands for several minute-long

talks extolling its virtues. It has already subpoenaed several former officials including former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell.

If it turns out that they received money from MEK, they will be in contravention of US legislation prohibiting anyone – never mind top political figures – from receiving funding from terrorist organizations.

Considering Giuliani's long history of ostentatious support for the MEK, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that he is next to be investigated. Aware of this, in his Paris speech he brushed off the investigators, saying they "don't frighten me, won't stop me."

Nonetheless, MEK have launched legal action in US courts, to be taken off the terrorist list, provoking an angry reaction from the State Department, which doesn't want the courts to dictate who it considers a potential national threat. In his speech Giuliani accused "cowardly sources in the State Department or elsewhere" of "unknowingly doing the bidding of the mullahs [the current regime in Tehran]."

If as expected, the MEK legal campaign fails, and Giuliani's long-rumored financial links with the MEK are exposed, the nation will wonder how the man considered a national hero for his response to 9/11 has become closely associated with a terrorist organization.



THE NEW YORKER

Our Men in Iran?

April 2012

From the air, the terrain of the Department of Energy's Nevada National Security Site, with its arid high plains and remote mountain peaks, has the look of northwest Iran. The site, some sixty-five miles northwest of Las Vegas, was once used for nuclear testing, and now includes a counterintelligence training facility and a private airport capable of handling Boeing 737 aircraft. It's a restricted area, and inhospitable—in certain sections, the curious are warned that the site's security personnel are authorized to use deadly force, if necessary, against intruders.

It was here that the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) conducted training, beginning in 2005, for members of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, a dissident Iranian opposition group known in the West as the M.E.K. The M.E.K. had its beginnings as a Marxist-Islamist student-led group and, in the nineteen-seventies, it was linked to the assassination of six American citizens. It was initially part of the broad-based revolution that led to the 1979 overthrow of the Shah of Iran. But, within a few years, the group was waging a bloody internal war with the ruling clerics, and, in 1997, it was listed as a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department. In 2002, the M.E.K. earned some international credibility by publicly revealing—accurately—that Iran had begun enriching uranium at a secret underground location. Mohamed ElBaradei, who at the time was the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations'

MEK
Uncovered

435



nuclear monitoring agency, told me later that he had been informed that the information was supplied by the Mossad. The M.E.K.'s ties with Western intelligence deepened after the fall of the Iraqi regime in 2003, and JSOC began operating inside Iran in an effort to substantiate the Bush Administration's fears that Iran was building the bomb at one or more secret underground locations. Funds were covertly passed to a number of dissident organizations, for intelligence collection and, ultimately, for anti-regime terrorist activities. Directly, or indirectly, the M.E.K. ended up with resources like arms and intelligence. Some American-supported covert operations continue in Iran today, according to past and present intelligence officials and military consultants.

Despite the growing ties, and a much-intensified lobbying effort organized by its advocates, M.E.K. has remained on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations—which meant that secrecy was essential in the Nevada training. "We did train them here, and washed them through the Energy Department because the D.O.E. owns all this land in southern Nevada," a former senior American intelligence official told me. "We were deploying them over long distances in the desert and mountains, and building their capacity in communications—coördinating commo is a big deal." (A spokesman for J.S.O.C. said that "U.S. Special Operations Forces were neither aware of nor involved in the training of M.E.K. members.")

The training ended sometime before President Obama took office, the former official said. In a separate interview, a retired four-star general, who has advised the Bush and Obama Administrations on national-security issues, said that he had been privately briefed in 2005 about the training of Iranians associated with the M.E.K. in Nevada by an American involved in the program. They got “the standard training,” he said, “in com-mo, crypto [cryptography], small-unit tactics, and weaponry—that went on for six months,” the retired general said. “They were kept in little pods.” He also was told, he said, that the men doing the training were from JSOC, which, by 2005, had become a major instrument in the Bush Administration’s global war on terror. “The JSOC trainers were not front-line guys who had been in the field, but second- and third-tier guys—trainers and the like—and they started going off the reservation. ‘If we’re going to teach you tactics, let me show you some really sexy stuff...’”

It was the ad-hoc training that provoked the worried telephone calls to him, the former general said. “I told one of the guys who called me that they were all in over their heads, and all of them could end up trouble unless they got something in writing. The Iranians are very, very good at counterintelligence, and stuff like this is just too hard to contain.” The site in Nevada was being utilized at the same time, he said, for advanced training of elite Iraqi combat units. (The retired general said he only knew of the one M.E.K.-affiliated group that went through the training course; the former senior intelligence official said that he was aware of training that went on through 2007.)

Allan Gerson, a Washington attorney for the M.E.K., notes that the M.E.K. has publicly and repeatedly renounced terror. Gerson said he would not comment on the alleged training in Nevada. But such training, if true, he said, would be “especially incongruent with the State Department’s decision to continue to maintain the M.E.K. on the terrorist list. How can the U.S. train those on State’s foreign terrorist list, when others face



criminal penalties for providing a nickel to the same organization?”

Robert Baer, a retired C.I.A. agent who is fluent in Arabic and had worked under cover in Kurdistan and throughout the Middle East in his career, initially had told me in early 2004 of being recruited by a private American company—working, so he believed, on behalf of the Bush Administration—to return to Iraq. “They wanted me to help the M.E.K. collect intelligence on Iran’s nuclear program,” Baer recalled. “They thought I knew Farsi, which I did not. I said I’d get back to them, but never did.” Baer, now living in California, recalled that it was made clear to him at the time that the operation was “a long-term thing—not just a one-shot deal.”

Massoud Khodabandeh, an I.T. expert now living in England who consults for the Iraqi government, was an official with the M.E.K. before defecting in 1996. In a telephone interview, he acknowledged that he is an avowed enemy of the M.E.K., and has advocated against the group. Khodabandeh said that he had been with the group since before the fall of the Shah and, as a computer expert, was deeply involved in intelligence activities as well as providing security for the M.E.K. leadership. For the past decade, he and his English wife have run a support program for other defectors. Khodabandeh told me that he had heard from more recent defectors about the training in Nevada. He was told that the communications training in Nevada involved more than teaching how to keep in contact during attacks—it also involved communication intercepts. The United States, he said, at one point found a way to penetrate some major Iranian communications systems. At the time, he said, the U.S. provided M.E.K. operatives with the ability to intercept telephone calls and text messages inside Iran—which M.E.K. operatives translated and shared with American signals intelligence experts. He does not know whether this activity is ongoing.

Five Iranian nuclear scientists have been assassinated since

2007. M.E.K. spokesmen have denied any involvement in the killings, but early last month NBC News quoted two senior Obama Administration officials as confirming that the attacks were carried out by M.E.K. units that were financed and trained by Mossad, the Israeli secret service. NBC further quoted the Administration officials as denying any American involvement in the M.E.K. activities. The former senior intelligence official I spoke with seconded the NBC report that the Israelis were working with the M.E.K., adding that the operations benefitted from American intelligence. He said that the targets were not “Einsteins”; “The goal is to affect Iranian psychology and morale,” he said, and to “demoralize the whole system—nuclear delivery vehicles, nuclear enrichment facilities, power plants.” Attacks have also been carried out on pipelines. He added that the operations are “primarily being done by M.E.K. through liaison with the Israelis, but the United States is now providing the intelligence.” An adviser to the special-operations community told me that the links between the United States and M.E.K. activities inside Iran had been long-standing. “Everything being done inside Iran now is being done with surrogates,” he said.

The sources I spoke to were unable to say whether the people trained in Nevada were now involved in operations in Iran or elsewhere. But they pointed to the general benefit of American support. “The M.E.K. was a total joke,” the senior Pentagon consultant said, “and now it’s a real network inside Iran. How did the M.E.K. get so much more efficient?” he asked rhetorically. “Part of it is the training in Nevada. Part of it is logistical support in Kurdistan, and part of it is inside Iran. M.E.K. now has a capacity for efficient operations that it never had before.” In mid-January, a few days after an assassination by car bomb of an Iranian nuclear scientist in Tehran, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, at a town-hall meeting of soldiers at Fort Bliss, Texas, acknowledged that the U.S. government has “some ideas as to who might be involved, but we don’t know exactly



who was involved.” He added, “But I can tell you one thing: the United States was not involved in that kind of effort. That’s not what the United States does.”



440



Training Terrorists in Nevada: Seymour Hersh on U.S. Aid to Iranian Group Tied to Scientist Killings

April 2012

Journalist Seymour Hersh has revealed that the Bush administration secretly trained an Iranian opposition group on the State Department's list of foreign terrorists. Hersh reports the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command trained operatives from Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK, at a secret site in Nevada beginning in 2005. According to Hersh, MEK members were trained in intercepting communications, cryptography, weaponry and small unit tactics at the Nevada site up until President Obama took office. The MEK has been listed as a foreign terrorist groups since 1997 and is linked to a number of attacks, spanning from the murders of six U.S. citizens in the 1970s to the recent wave of assassinations targeting Iranian nuclear scientists. Hersh also discusses the role of Israeli intelligence and notes the Obama administration knew about the training, "because they have access to what was going on in the previous administration in this area in terms of the MEK, in terms of operations inside Iran." His new report for The New

MEK
Uncovered

441



Yorker blog, “Our Men in Iran?,” comes as nuclear talks are set to resume this week between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency. [includes rush transcript]



TRANSCRIPT

This is a rush transcript. Copy may not be in its final form.

AMY GOODMAN: In what appears to be a first for U.S. foreign policy, new revelations have emerged that the Bush administration secretly trained an Iranian opposition group despite its inclusion on the State Department’s list of foreign terrorists. Writing for The New Yorker magazine, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh reports U.S. Joint Special Operations Command trained operatives from Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK, at a secret site in Nevada beginning in 2005. According to Hersh, MEK members were trained in intercepting communications, cryptography, weaponry and small unit tactics at the Nevada site up until President Obama took office. The MEK has been included on the State Department’s list of foreign terrorist groups since 1997. It’s been linked to a number of attacks, spanning from the murders of six U.S. citizens in the ’70s to the recent wave of assassinations targeting Iranian nuclear scientists.

Although the revelation that the U.S. government directly trained the MEK comes as a surprise, it’s no secret the group has prominent backers across the political spectrum. Despite its designation as a “terrorist” organization by the State Depart-

ment for 15 years, a number of prominent former U.S. officials have been paid to speak in support of the MEK. The bipartisan list includes two former CIA directors, James Woolsey and Porter Goss; former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge; New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani; former Vermont Governor Howard Dean; former Attorney General Michael Mukasey; former FBI Director Louis Freeh; former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton; and former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell. Last month, Rendell and other unnamed officials were subpoenaed by the Treasury Department over their ties to MEK. Mukasey and Freeh have retained former Clinton administration Solicitor General Seth Waxman in response to the Treasury Department probe. Rendell, meanwhile, has shrugged off the scrutiny. Speaking at a public event in support of the MEK Friday in Washington, he told the crowd, quote, “I never knew obtaining a subpoena from your own government would be so much fun.”

Well, for more on the U.S. and its ties to the MEK, we're joined by Seymour Hersh in Washington, D.C. His new piece for *The New Yorker* is called “Our Men in Iran?”

Welcome to Democracy Now!, Sy Hersh. Oh, and happy birthday.

SEYMOUR HERSH: Oh, yes, that's right. It's great to be older.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, we'll focus on the wiser part. Tell us what you have learned. Who are, as you call it, “our men in Iran”?

SEYMOUR HERSH: They are as you said. The MEK—and by the way, once again, Amy, the piece was on *The New Yorker* blog, not in the magazine; it's a shorter piece. But anyway, the point is, it went through the same sort of intense checking as anything in *The New Yorker*, of course.

Simply, they're just the Khalq, the MEK. We began to—I learned about this many years ago. It's just one of those things that it never quite occurred to me how important it was. And what is important about also the—they did stop, there's no question,



MEK
Uncovered

443



this sort of training that was going on. It was going on at a place called the Nevada Nuclear Security or National Security Test Site. It's a former site for World War—post-World War II nuclear testing of weapons, testing of nuclear weapons. And it's off-limits to people. And it's—there's an air base there. God knows what went on there. My own guess is rendition flights also flew into that air base in '02, '03. There's some evidence for it. But certainly, the groups of MEK were flown in secretly by, I presume, the Joint Special Operations Command. This is this new high-powered group that's been doing all the night raids in Afghanistan, that also came up in your news broadcast.

What's important to me about it is not only that it did end, this kind of direct training of this group that is, as you said, a terrorist group; it's also very clear that the United States is still involved, as is Israel and as was, for many years, England, in using the MEK and other dissident groups inside Iran as surrogates for the continued pressure we're putting covertly on inside of Iran. And that is, as you said, there are assassinations done by the MEK. And let me make it clear, the MEK has been in a virtual war with the mullahs in Iran since the fall of the Shah, and you don't have to—you don't have to urge them to kill anybody. They're very eager to do it themselves inside that country. But still, nonetheless, we provide intelligence. We, the Americans, have continued to provide intelligence and other kinds of material support for the MEK. Don't forget, they speak Farsi, which is a great asset to us. These are people who are able to translate intercepted communications inside Iran for us very quickly and very—with great skill. And so, we have a lot of reason to rely on them, as we rely on other dissident groups inside Iran—the Kurds, the Azeris and others—to cause—basically, to try and keep some sort of internal chaos and mayhem going inside the country.

AMY GOODMAN: Is it believed the MEK were involved in the assassinations of the Iranian nuclear scientists?

SEYMOUR HERSH: Well, nobody has a video of it, but that seems clear that one of their goals, obviously, is to prevent the Iranians from developing nuclear weapons. And it's not clear who they're really assassinating, whether they're—I know they're—at one time, my government—I wrote about this in *The New Yorker* many years ago, in '05 or '06. We've been actively involved, beginning in the Cheney-Bush days, of encouraging insurrection inside Iran—whether it's aimed at regime change or not isn't clear; I doubt that—but basically, blowing up things, etc. We did have a list at one time we created here in Washington of people we'd like to see gone, captured perhaps, turned over or turned into our agents, you know, double agents inside Iran. We tried to do that, too. But certainly, the Israelis are pawing the ground as if they are directly responsible or deeply involved with the MEK in the recent assassination of a 32-year-old scientist whose role in terms of—there's not much evidence he was involved in making weapons, because there's no evidence that Iranians are making weapons.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk about the bombs that were used in the assassinations?

SEYMOUR HERSH: Well, they're most interesting bombs. They're limpet bombs, Marine limpet bombs. They're designed—they have a special charge, and they're designed to go inside. They blow inside. And they're, of course, of great use by the Navy SEALs. And the Navy SEALs, if you're going to do an underwater demolition, if you're going to blow up a ship from underwater, which as the SEALs traditionally were trained to do—most of them are involved in day-to-day combat in Afghanistan, etc., and much different from their initial role of underwater stuff. But if you want to blow up something underwater, you have to have a charge that explodes inward to cause water to rush in, etc. And these kind of very sophisticated charges have been used by the MEK in the assassinations. And the reason we know it is that the car that was hit, for example, in January in Tehran that killed the young scientist, or



MEK
Uncovered

445

the nuclear physicist or whatever he was, exploded inward. You can argue this is also good because it avoids non-combatant deaths. You know, you don't want to kill a lot of people other than the one you're trying to kill. It is also useful because you make sure anybody in that car gets it, because it does blow inside. It's a very sophisticated shape charge. And there's no question that some of the best mines in the Navy mine-making business were—some of that information was obviously passed on, whether directly to the MEK or through Israeli assets, or explicitly how. But it's not an accident that these kinds of sophisticated weapons can be traced to the Navy SEALs, who are a major element of the Joint Special Operations Command.



AMY GOODMAN: Interestingly, you end your piece by quoting Defense Secretary Leon Panetta at Fort Bliss in Texas acknowledging the U.S. has some ideas as to who might have been involved, but we don't know exactly who was involved, you know, being questioned about—this was the day after—a few days after the assassination of the Iranian nuclear scientists. He said, "I can tell you one thing: the [United States] was not involved in that kind of effort. That's not what the United States does."

SEYMOUR HERSH: Well, I think that's technically correct. I don't think there's any other way to read that comment as—the use of that last graph as an ironic statement, perhaps. I think it's correct that—also, it's to my knowledge—this isn't in the piece, because only one particular source about it, but I do understand that we really don't know what's going to happen 'til after it happens, and then we are put on notice. We do get notice that something has happened before it's released to the public. We have that kind of communication, essentially through Israel. Israel is obviously a little closer to everything that's going on than we are. But we're certainly—we're not picking targets. I doubt that now. At least I don't have any evidence we are. But we're providing general intelligence.

And it's not an accident that the first units of the MEK to show up in Nevada, late '04, early '05—and it was months and months of training. It's not—the first word used by two different people about it was “commo,” communications, and “crypto.” The point is that—there was a story in the Washington Post just the other day here describing how America has been using drones to overfly Iran for at least three years. I would argue that, long before that, we've been using American satellites flying high that can't be detected. And obviously, you can uplink and downlink communications to satellites. You can—if you're on the ground and you find out something very useful tactically—by training the MEK in communications and how to use encrypt communications, you're also enabling them to become an asset on the ground for us.

There was a period, I would say, in the Bush administration—I also think it stopped under Obama—when our boys, our Joint Special Operations Command guys, were directly inside Iran. We came in through Herat in Afghanistan. We also—that was one of—what we call a rat line. There are other rat lines through Balochistan in Pakistan, and etc. There are ways to get inside Iran clandestinely that we've been using for at least since, I'd say, late '04 until probably right before Obama got in. So we were there—look, it's been a huge, big internal game designed to destabilize.

And as somebody said to me in one of the pieces, one of the quotes in the pieces, “We're not necessarily looking for Einsteins.” That suggests to me that the scientists who are really the most deeply involved in the enrichment. And by the way, let me say again, there is no evidence that our intelligence community or even the Israeli intelligence community has—and I know that firsthand—suggesting that there's an ongoing bomb program. So we are now—the United States is now in the position of increasing sanctions and pressuring all sorts of economic pressure on the Iranians to stop—the whole purpose of the economic sanctions is to stop the Iranians from making



a bomb that we know they're not making. Once again, I don't know how we get into this convoluted position. And then, as readers of the major newspapers know, we are now also entering new talks with Iran with new preconditions, and basically telling them that they must stop doing enriching, what they are legally entitled to do as members of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Iran may be secretly wanting a bomb, and they may have that passion, and they maybe, you know, dream about it at night, but we haven't a shred of evidence that they've done anything, concretely, physically, to create a facility for making a weapon.

AMY GOODMAN: We're talking to Seymour Hersh. We're going to come back to him in 30 seconds, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who has written a piece for The New Yorker online called "Our Men in Iran?" Stay with us.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: We're talking to Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh. His latest piece is online at The New Yorker magazine's "News Desk" blog; it's called "Our Men in Iran?" And it tells the story of a group still designated as terrorist by the State Department, the MEK, which was trained at the Department of Energy's Nevada National Site, with its arid high plains and remote mountain peaks, has a look of northwest Iran. Sy Hersh, why the Department of Energy? And again, this is under the Bush administration. They're labeled terrorists, but they are training them, not only in communications, you point out.

SEYMOUR HERSH: They've had—there is a secret site. It's about 60-some-odd miles out of Las Vegas, deep in no-man's land in southern Nevada, where we've been doing an awful lot of stuff for many years. There's a—it's called "Site 12." That particular site, it's—our CIA and other agencies have been training foreign troops. It's where, I would guess, when we do joint training with the special units of the Israeli army and other units that we train, we do train foreign soldiers. We can fly

to this base. It's got a long landing strip, 7,500 feet, concrete landing strip. And for a long time it had yellow crosses on it, which meant, for even aircraft, commercial aircraft, in trouble, do not land here. And this is a strip that you come in and you—I presume, you come in in a military plane. You can turn off the transponder. Nobody—no FAA is checking anything. Nobody is going to get a tail number. You can land. And there's a facility there. There's barracks and other work, other facilities, in Site 12 for—and a food hall. It's all—you could actually find it online if you go through the Department of Energy's annual—they provide annual environmental impact reports, and they describe what's going on in each site in terms of the environment. And there you get a pretty good description. In fact, they actually use the word—there's a training facility used for other government agencies. An “OGA,” other government agencies, is a longstanding phrase that means the CIA, essentially—actually specifically to people on the inside. So there's been training there forever.

And it just so happens, if you take a look at northwest Iran and take a look at the topography in that part of the desert in Nevada, it's a very arid area, I think 15 inches of rain, or something like that, a year. It's got a desert. It's got valleys. It's got mountain ranges. And it really is similar. I'll tell you what the most frightening thing was. When they first began the training, one very senior four-star officer was called by somebody who knew about the training in Nevada, very worried about it, and because the Joint Special Operations Command people were training in—not only in communications and cryptography, small unit tactics, but other cute things, which, to me, of course, and to my friend, meant interrogation tactics, you know, how to—you know, I don't know this, but I presume included the standard sort of horrible stuff that we know American intelligence agencies have and CIA and other personnel have done to various prisoners of war since 9/11, waterboarding and the like. It was very troubling, that message, that this kind of train-



ing is being done on a group that's listed as a terrorist group.

AMY GOODMAN: Meanwhile—

SEYMOUR HERSH: But so it goes. They—

AMY GOODMAN: And yet, so many public officials, Bush and Republican and Democrats, are calling for them to be taken off the list. Among the U.S. officials to speak in support of MEK is former Vermont Governor Howard Dean. Speaking to CNN last year, he said the U.S. should lift the terror group designation to help protect MEK members living in Iraq.

HOWARD DEAN: The FBI screened all these people. The FBI counterterrorist folks screened all these people in 2006. Not one of them is a terrorist, according to our FBI. This is outrageous, what's going on. It's an outrageous behavior by the State Department. And frankly, the administration has direct responsibility for making sure that the promises were kept. We kept one promise. That is, we kept George Bush's promise to get out by the end of 2011. We need to keep the promise of the people at Ashraf. We ought not to be complicit in human rights massacres.

AMY GOODMAN: Among those appearing at the public event in Washington on Friday in support of the MEK was Michael—was Mitchell Reiss, a former policy—a foreign policy adviser to Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney. He acknowledged to the crowd that the Treasury Department considers MEK supporters, quote, “potential criminals.” At a campaign stop in New Hampshire last year, an audience member asked Romney about Reiss's support for the MEK.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Have you heard of or do you support the MEK, the People's Mujahideen of Iran?

MITT ROMNEY: I have not heard about the MEK, and I—so I can't possibly tell you whether I support the MEK. But I can—all right? But what is—what is the MEK? Why would you think that I supported it? Because you said it's a terrorist group?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: There's been—there's a terrorist group in Iran which is variably violent. It's attacked civilians before.

It's called the MEK, the People's Mujahideen of Iran. And if you look into it, some of your staff members, I believe, have made statements to lobby the executive branch to remove them from the terrorist list.

MITT ROMNEY: I'll take a look at the issue. I'm not familiar with that particular group or that effort on the part of any of my team.

AMY GOODMAN: That was Mitt Romney being questioned about his foreign policy adviser Mitchell Reiss's support for the MEK. Seymour Hersh, your response?

SEYMOUR HERSH: Well, I would say that the Obama administration has even more trouble than Mr. Romney does. It's clear he didn't know much about it. This administration knows an awful lot about it, because they have access to what was going on in the previous administration in this area in terms of the MEK, in terms of operations inside Iran, and they're still going on. And so, the question then becomes—I'm amazed that we've had nothing from the White House about this story. And there's also been sort of a—I shouldn't complain about it, because I understand it. You know, it's "not invented here" syndrome. But I'm a little amazed that more reporters aren't asking more questions about this, because it seems to be so egregious. This is—right now, our Treasury Department is actually asking questions, because no matter how you cut it, it's a terrorist group, and if you're aiding and supporting a terrorist group, under the law of the United States—as you know, there's been some prosecutions in this area of people of Middle East descent supporting groups that we consider to be terrorists, and they get put away in jail. There certainly seems to be a double standard here at work. And yeah, Romney seems lost in space on this issue, but I can assure you right now, there are people in this White House who are not.

AMY GOODMAN: Is the Obama administration still training MEK?

SEYMOUR HERSH: I don't think the word is "training" any-





more, because are we directly training them down in Nevada? No, I don't—there's no reason to believe that. I don't know that. I've been told that there is more stuff going on than we know of, of course, and that's also possible. You know, one of the things that I've learned—I've been doing a book about Cheney for a number of years. It's just amazing how many things we really don't know about what our government can do. There are amazing things out there that happened that we just don't know about. And so, they can keep secrets. Of course the government would like to keep pressure on Iran as much as it can. And I don't think we can totally walk away from responsibility in terms of—at the minimum, we've been providing intelligence that we know goes to the MEK and also to other dissident groups inside, inside Iran. Does that mean we're aiding and abetting in the specific killing of somebody? No, I have no reason to believe that anybody can make that case. But what the hell are we doing in there? Why are we putting so much pressure? Why do we take so much pleasure in bombings and explosions that take place inside Iran, which may be linked to us? And I just don't quite understand the policy. It's certainly not one that's conducive to having good negotiations in good faith.

AMY GOODMAN: The latest news that nuclear talks in Turkey are taking place—talk about how the International Atomic Energy Agency, the IAEA, has found—what they have found in relation to the nuclear program and also Mohamed ElBaradei. In a minute, we're going to be speaking to Sharif Abdel Koudous. Mohamed ElBaradei, who was the Nobel Prize-winning head of the IAEA, was going to run for president of Egypt, then pulled out. But what he had to do with information that came from the MEK?

SEYMOUR HERSH: Well, very early, the MEK was the first group to announce that the—that they had discovered—in 2002, they had a news conference. And by the way, at that point, they were considered—the MEK were always consid-

ered a cult group, very fringe, marginal, irrational group. They had been involved in the '70s, so we believe, in the killing of some Americans inside Iran. And they were a Marxist, leftist group in opposition to the Shah that couldn't connect with the mullahs, the religious mullahs that took over, Khomeini in those days. They couldn't connect with them, and they began a protracted struggle in which murder, murder, murder was all over the place, both sides killing each other, very brutal stuff. And so they were always considered to be outside the normal realm of groups.

And suddenly in 2002, they get a lot of street cred, credibility, because they announce that they, the Iranians, are building a nuclear facility. They didn't say they were enriching uranium there, but it was clear, from the import of what they said, the only reason they're getting involved in building a facility for nuclear production was for weaponization. And I learned—I was told at the time that Israel was behind that intelligence, that it really didn't come from the MEK themselves. Israel, as you know—there are what, something like a million-and-a-half Iranian Jews, many of whom fled the country when the Shah fell. And Israel still has a pretty good net of—intelligence net inside Iran, so it wasn't illogical.

And I began to see Mr. ElBaradei, the director general of the IAEA, pretty regularly, certainly at least once a year, and talked to a lot of people there in Vienna about what was going on in terms of nuclear development around the world. And this is a wise man. We didn't like him because he's Egyptian, but that was a big mistake. He turned out to be—he was enraged at Iran when I first began to talk to him about it. He thought they cheated. He was quite angry. But he also told me—I told him—we talked about the fact that I had heard that the Israelis were involved in providing that intelligence, and he also had heard the same thing. And in fact, before this article was published online for The New Yorker, the fact checkers went back to his office to his secretary and once again reminded him of

that conversation and got his permission to say something he wouldn't let me say earlier, which is that he had provided me with that information, too.

So Israel has had a tremendous role in supporting the MEK. I wouldn't be surprised if Israel was also deeply involved in helping us or abetting with the training inside—in Nevada. That would make a lot of sense. And Israel certainly is a key player right now in the MEK activities, along with us, and for many years along with the Brits, who were also involved in providing signals intelligence inside Iran or collecting intelligence. The good thing about having Britain around is they're actually more hated than we are in the Middle East because of their long history of exploitation. That's always a plus.

But having said that, Baradei's been—he's been a very neutral arbiter of what was going on, very critical of Iran for many years. He eventually turned—his position turned, as he learned more, as the Iranians trusted him more, began to talk more to him and his people. And what we now have is—he left a few years back—we have a new director general, a Japanese sort of center-right politician named Amano, who is different. He's much closer to us. There's been WikiLeaks cables released by Julian Assange that show very clearly that we helped him get elected as director general. There was a—it's a U.N. agency, the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, that ElBaradei headed for so many years. It's U.N. And the new leader was voted—I think there were seven ballots, and it was our ability to swing some votes that got Amano the job, and he immediately told us how he would be different about Iran, etc. There's a whole series of WikiLeaks cables about this that Julian's group released that are pretty devastating, that aren't enough in the American currency. They're there. They were published widely in the British press, but not here. We really need to take a look at this relationship, because it raises a lot of questions just about—I'll be honest: I'm not sure we come into negotiations with very clean hands on this. And we be-

gin negotiations really behind the eight ball with the Iranians, because they are very deeply involved. They have very good intelligence. They know what we've been doing. Despite all this talk you have about Iranians being involved inside Afghanistan right now and all this talk about Iranians being involved inside Iraq and killing Americans, there's never been much of a case for that.

And I will tell you right now, after 9/11, the Iranians were absolutely willing to work with us, particularly against al-Qaeda. Don't forget, Iran is Shia, and al-Qaeda are mostly Sunni, Sunni fanatics, and there was no love lost. And they actually, in the first few—six months or so after 9/11, they closed their borders and captured a lot of al-Qaeda that were being driven out of the country by us, and they were looking for refuge in Iran, and they've been jailed. I think they're still there in jail, over a hundred of them. And so, we really blew a chance by putting them on the Axis of Evil. I'd sure like to do a takeover of American history after 9/11. I think the history books are going to be—as bad as we think it is, it's worse.

AMY GOODMAN: Seymour Hersh, I want to thank you very much for being with us, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for The New Yorker. His latest piece is online at their "News Desk" blog; it's called "Our Men in Iran?"



MEK
Uncovered

455



US trained Iranian 'terrorist' group – report

April 2012

The United States' Joint Special Operations Command (JSOT) conducted training for the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian opposition group listed by the US as a terrorist organization, journalist Seymour Hersh claims.

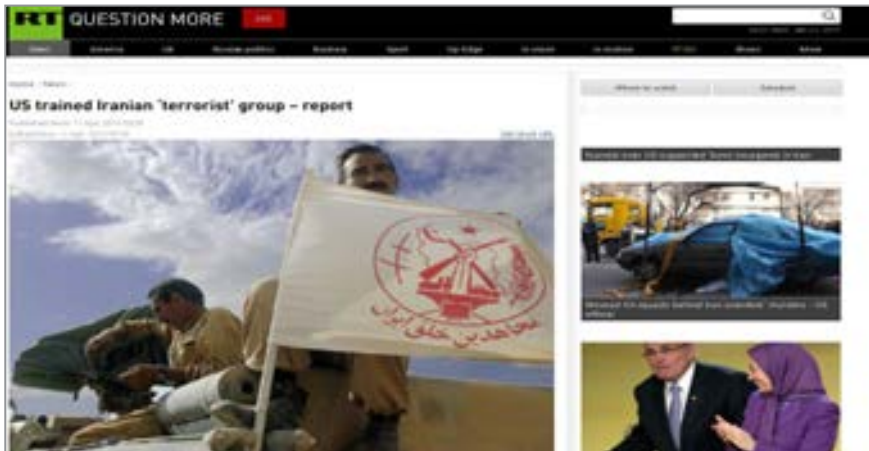
–The Department of Energy's Nevada National Security Site, 65 miles from Las Vegas, was the site of extensive military and intelligence training for the MEK, in addition to elite Iraqi combat units, Hersh writes in *The New Yorker*. The training is believed to have been covertly sanctioned by the Bush administration, and was stopped shortly before President Obama took office.

“We did train them here, and washed them through the Energy Department because the D.O.E. owns all this land in southern Nevada,” a former senior American intelligence official said. “We were deploying them over long distances in the desert and mountains, and building their capacity in communications — coordinating comms is a big deal.”

Hersh's article quotes a retired four star general who advised the Bush and Obama administrations on national security issues. The general noted that Iranians associated with the MEK received “standard training in comms, crypto, small-unit tactics and weaponry.” He also said he cautioned the JSOT that the Iranian government was very good at counterintelligence and that the US could end up in a lot of trouble if the training

MEK
Uncovered

456



program was discovered.

Former and present intelligence officials, Hersh states, also note that US has been providing the MEK, directly or indirectly, with arms, intelligence and logistics since 2003.

But it turns out that the US is not the MEK's only ally. A former senior intelligence official said Israel cooperated with the MEK to conduct a number of sabotage operations inside Iran, including pipeline attacks. Last month two senior Obama administration officials told NBC News that Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, trained and financed MEK units that organized the assassinations of Iran's nuclear scientists. MEK spokesmen have denied this claim.

Delist or not delist?

The MEK is a formerly radical Islamic-Marxist movement, labeled a "cult" by Human Rights Watch and listed by the US State Department as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, alongside Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah.

In the meantime, more and more public figures, including former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, have been pushing for the MEK to be delisted as a terror group. But experts note that the US would be better off not delisting the MEK if it is to continue its alleged close ties.

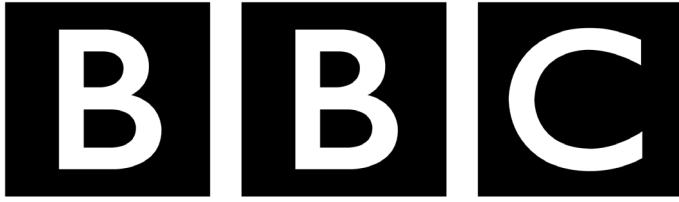
"On the one hand, the MEK was relisted year after year after year in the eight-year duration of the Bush administration, and



it's been relisted since Obama came into office," Reza Marashi, research director of the National Iranian American Council noted on RT's Alyona Show. "So it might just be as easy as, if we're going to continue to cooperate with this group directly or indirectly it doesn't really make a difference if they're on the terrorist list because this was so close-held until recently. This wasn't readily available information even to people inside the US government."



458



An Iranian mystery: Just who are the MEK?

April 2012

How do you get a group described by the US government as a cult and an officially designated foreign terrorist organisation to be viewed by many congressmen and parliamentarians as champions of human rights and secular democracy?

It would challenge even the most talented PR executive.

The starkly differing perceptions of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) or People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI) could be a case study in the power of image management - of what can be achieved not with guns but by the way information is disseminated.

The organisation has a history of ideological and tactical flexibility.

Since the 1970s, its rhetoric has changed from Islamist to secular; from socialist to capitalist; from pro-Iranian-revolution to anti-Iranian-revolution; from pro-Saddam to pro-American; from violent to peaceful.

And there is another dichotomy - it has admiring supporters and ardent critics.

Take, for example, the US military officers who had to deal with the MEK after they invaded Iraq in 2003.

Not only was the MEK heavily armed and designated as terrorist by the US government, it also had some very striking internal social policies.

For example, it required its members in Iraq to divorce. Why?

MEK
Uncovered

459



Because love was distracting them from their struggle against the mullahs in Iran.

And the trouble is that people love their children too.

So the MEK leadership asked its members to send their children away to foster families in Europe. Europe would be safer, the group explained.

Some parents have not seen their children for 20 years and more.

And just to add to the mix, former members consistently describe participating in regular public confessions of their sexual fantasies.

You might think that would set alarm bells ringing - and for some US officers it did.

One colonel I spoke to, who had daily contact with the MEK leadership for six months in 2004, said that the organisation was a cult, and that some of the members who wanted to get out had to run away.

And yet another officer, who was there at precisely the same time and is now a retired general, has become an active lobbyist on the MEK's behalf.

With his open smile and earnest friendly manner, he is a good advocate. "Cult? How about admirably focused group?" he says. "And I never heard of anyone being held against their will."

We later emailed him about a former member who claimed to



have told the general to his face that people were held against their will. "He's lying," the general replied.

You just have to decide which side to believe.

Ex-MEK member Eduard Termado is now living in Germany. His face is scarred to the point of being misshapen. His complexion is grey, his skin blotched and waxy, and his forehead constantly covered in dribbling beads of sweat - but then he spent nine years as a prisoner of war in Iraq.

He joined the MEK hoping to help Iranian democracy and did not like what he saw.

He says that after three years he asked to leave, but was told he couldn't. He stayed for 12 years.

He now says joining the MEK was the biggest mistake of his life and he has expressed that feeling in an unusual way.

He has married and produced three children. "My family is my protest against the MEK," he says.

There are many other stories.

Children who never forgave their parents for abandoning them. Children who did forgive and are now joyously reunited. Divorcees who have got out of the organisation saying they still love their former spouses who are still in.

In over 25 years of reporting, I have been lied to often enough but, as successive former MEK members told what they had been through, their tears seemed real enough to me.

And yet a significant number of politicians in the US and UK would say I was tricked because the former MEK members who spread these kind of stories are, in fact, Iranian agents.

Again, who to believe?

In the US in particular, an impressive array of public figures have spoken in defence of the MEK.

There are more than 30 big names - people like Rudy Giuliani former mayor of New York, Howard Dean at one time the democratic presidential hopeful, a retired governor, a former head of the FBI.

Many get paid. Of those who have declared their earnings,



the going rate for a pro-MEK speech seems to be \$20,000 (£12,500) for 10 minutes. But then many other prominent MEK supporters act without payment.

Why do people take such strong positions on the MEK?

After a month talking to people on both sides of the argument, I am left thinking this. Some supporters are paid, others see the MEK through the prism of Iran - they will just support anything that offers hope of change there. Many are well motivated but some are naive.

And the former members?

Some are embittered, others just seem broken.

Which is when it occurred to me - the perception people have of the MEK may say more about them than about the organisation itself.

It is so difficult to pin down you can see your own reflection in it.



Global Research

Center for Research on Globalization
globalreaserch.ca / globalreaserch.org

“CYBER TERRORISM”: US-supported Terrorist Group MEK Plants Stuxnet Virus Malware to Disable Iran’s Nuclear Facilities

April 2012

The international community has eased its condemnation of Iran following recent negotiations between Tehran and six other nations in Istanbul, Turkey. While the participating parties agreed to further discussions on May 23, 2012 in Baghdad, both Israel and the West have given no indication of easing the strict regime of sanctions imposed on Tehran. Following claims of the Iranian leadership that it pursues civil nuclear capabilities to generate electricity and fuel for medical reactors (allowing Tehran to divert its primary oil reserves to export markets) [1], Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has issued a religious prohibition on nuclear weapons in Iran [2]. During recent discussions, Iranian negotiator Saeed Jalili emphasized Iran’s right to a civil nuclear program, as guaranteed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [3]. Although Tel Aviv possess between 75 to 400 nuclear warheads, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak insists that all of Iran’s uranium enriched to 20% be moved to a “trusted” neighboring country

MEK
Uncovered

463



[4].

While both CIA chief David H. Petraeus and US National Intelligence Director James R. Clapper Jr. concede that no credible evidence exists to accuse Iran of constructing a nuclear weapon [5], the brazen criminality of intelligence operations against Iran’s civil nuclear program remain deeply troubling. ISSSource has recently confirmed that the individuals responsible for planting the Stuxnet computer worm used to sabotage Iran’s nuclear facilities in Natanz were members of Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) [6], a US State Department-listed terrorist organization (#29) [7]. MEK was founded in 1965 as a Marxist Islamic mass political movement aimed at agitating the monarchy of the US-backed Iranian Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The group initially sided with revolutionary clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but eventually turned away from the regime during a power struggle that resulted in the group waging urban guerilla warfare against Iran’s Revolutionary Guards in 1981.

The organization was later given refuge by Saddam Hussein and mounted attacks on Iran from within Iraqi territory, killing an estimated 17,000 Iranian nationals in the process [8]. MEK exists as the main component of the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a “coalition of democratic Iranian organizations, groups and personalities,” calling itself a “parliament-in-exile” seeking to “establish a democrat-



ic, secular and coalition government” in Iran [9]. Although the group has been credited with the assassination of high profile US military personnel [10] following the Islamic Revolution on multiple occasions [11], The New Yorker reports that members of Mujahideen-e-Khalq were trained in communications, cryptography, small-unit tactics and weaponry by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at a base in Nevada starting in 2005 [12]. JSOC instructed MEK operatives on how to penetrate major Iranian communications systems, allowing the group to intercept telephone calls and text messages inside Iran for the purpose of sharing them with American intelligence. Following the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi Army has twice attempted to enter Camp Ashraf, a “refugee camp” where the militant wing of MEK (consisting of approximately 3,200 personnel) resided under external security protection of the US military up until 2009 [13]. With the full support of the US Embassy in Iraq and the State Department, UN special representative in Iraq Martin Kobler has organized efforts to relocate MEK insurgents to a former US military base near the Baghdad airport, amusingly titled, “Camp Liberty” – to avoid violent clashes between the MEK and the Shiite-led Iraqi government [14]. The group has long received material assistance from Israel, who assisted the organization with broadcasting into Iran from their political base in Paris, while the MEK and NCRI have reportedly provided the United States with intelligence on Iran’s nuclear program, which publicly revealed the existence of the Natanz uranium-enrichment facility in 2002 [15].

While senior figures in the Council on Foreign Relations describe MEK as a “cult-like organization” with “totalitarian tendencies,” [16] a cabal of elder statesmen such as former NATO Supreme Allied Commander General Wesley K. Clark, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former 9/11 Commission Chairman Lee Hamilton were paid \$20,000 to \$30,000 per engagement to endorse the removal of the Mujahideen-e Khalq



MEK
Uncovered

465

from the US State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations [17]. NCRI head Maryam Rajavi, now based in Paris and endorsed by statesmen from the United States and European Union, is famously quoted saying, "Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards," during Saddam Hussein's massacre of Iraqi Kurds in 1991 [18]. Despite the documented cases of atrocities committed by MEK forces, the Council of the European Union removed the group from the EU list of terrorist organizations in 2009; NCRI spokesperson Shahin Gobadi offered, "All we want is democratic elections in Iran," in a press statement to mark the event [19].



466

Although current and former US officials agree Iran is years away from having a deliverable nuclear warhead and has no secret uranium-enrichment site outside the purview of UN nuclear inspections [20], recent revelations connecting MEK with the Stuxnet computer virus that destroyed several hundred centrifuges in Iran's Natanz nuclear facility constitutes an act of deliberate and unparalleled sabotage. Stuxnet remains the most sophisticated malware discovered thus far, the virus targets Siemens' Simatic WinCC Step7 software, which controls industrial systems such as nuclear power plants and electrical grids from a Microsoft Windows-based PC. The virus exploits security gaps referred to as zero-day vulnerabilities, to attack specific targets. Prior to its discovery, Stuxnet was previously undetected and remained unidentified by anti-virus software, as the malware was designed to appear as legitimate software to Microsoft Windows. Upon delivery of the Stuxnet payload, the malware manipulated the operating speed of centrifuges spinning nuclear fuel to create distortions that deliberately damaged the machines, while giving the impression of normal activities to the monitoring operator and disabling their emergency controls.

ISSSource has cited current and former US intelligence officials, who confirm the Stuxnet virus was planted at Natanz

nuclear facility by a saboteur believed to be a member of Mujahedeen-e-Khalq [21]. By delivering the malicious payload via USB memory stick, the group was able to damage at least 1,000 centrifuges in the Natanz nuclear facility [22]. MEK has also been accused of assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists [23] and triggering an explosion that destroyed an underground site near the town of Khorramabad in western Iran that housed most of Tehran's Shehab-3 medium-range missiles [24]. NBC News reports that Israel provided financing, training and arms to members of Mujahideen-e Khalq, who are responsible for killing five Iranian nuclear scientists since 2007 using motorcycle-borne assailants often attaching small magnetic bombs to the exterior of the victims' cars [25]. The New York Times reports that former US President George W. Bush authorized covert action intended to sabotage Iran's Natanz facility, after deflecting an Israeli request to shower specialized bunker-busting bombs on the facility in 2009 [26].

Due to the intricate nature of Stuxnet coding, security experts confirm its creation must be the "work of a national government agency" [27]. Ralph Langner, an independent computer security expert who dismantled Stuxnet credited Israel and the United States with writing the malicious software designed to sabotage the Iranian nuclear program [28]. Considering that Stuxnet targeted Programmable Logic Controllers (PLC) used in industrial plants to automate industrial operations, the malware designers required detailed knowledge of the programming language written for PLC components to successively subvert them [29]. It remains significant that the German electrical engineering company Siemens cooperated with one of the United States in 2008 to identify vulnerabilities in the computer controllers identified as key equipment in Iran's enrichment facilities [30]. Intelligence experts concede that testing of the Stuxnet virus was conducted in the Dimona complex located in Israel's Negev desert, the site of Israel's rarely acknowledged nuclear arms program [31].



When asked about the Stuxnet worm in a press conference, current White House WMD Coordinator Gary Samore boasted, “I’m glad to hear they are having troubles with their centrifuge machines, and the U.S. and its allies are doing everything we can to make it more complicated” [32]. While former chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Hans Blix challenges the IAEA’s own reports on Iran’s nuclear activities (accusing the agency of relying on unverified intelligence from the US and Israel) [33], former director of US nuclear weapons production programs, Clinton Bastin, has sent an open letter to President Obama regarding the status of Iran’s capacity to produce nuclear weapons [34]. Bastin reiterates in his letter to the President, “The ultimate product of Iran’s gas centrifuge facilities would be highly enriched uranium hexafluoride, a gas that cannot be used to make a weapon. Converting the gas to metal, fabricating components and assembling them with high explosives using dangerous and difficult technology that has never been used in Iran would take many years after a diversion of three tons of low enriched uranium gas from fully safeguarded inventories. The resulting weapon, if intended for delivery by missile, would have a yield equivalent to that of a kiloton of conventional high explosives” [35].

The theatrics of the US and Israel in their condemnation of Iran’s nuclear power program have come at a heavy price for the Iranian people, who have been subjected to sanctions, assassinations, condemnation and sabotage. The United States has produced more than 70,000 nuclear weapons between 1951 and 1998 [36], while Israel possess a nuclear weapons stockpile ranging from 75 to 400 warheads [37]. The current legal international framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty guarantees the right to conduct peaceful nuclear energy programs; the deliberate provocations of the United States and Israel acting through intelligence groups such as Mossad and the CIA constitute the most genuine contempt toward international law, security and the value of a single human life.

The mainstream media have worked to indoctrinate the population of the English-speaking world with an exploited and romanticized version of the Iranian theocracy's ideological ambitions to wage "unprovoked terror," while figures such as Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi publically renounce nuclear weapons [38].

The Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or the People's Mujahedin of Iran is an organization responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians since its inception. If the US and Israel launched a war against Iran, aggressor nations would likely recognize the touted "parliament-in-exile", the National Council of Resistance of Iran, as the nation's legitimate government. The US State Department's own website (which features Mujahedeen-e-Khalq as Foreign Terrorist Organization #29) indicates that "It is uNLAWful for a person in the United States or subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to knowingly provide 'material support or resources' to a designated FTO" [39]. As the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq continually seek removal from the US list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations [40], the group's unpardonable offenses must not be lost to the annals of history. While NCRI leader Maryam Rajavi would prefer to masquerade as a "pro-democracy" figure, the responsible parties of the international community must rightfully condemn the actions taken by her organization and its affiliates.

The Stuxnet virus was engineered with Iran's nuclear program in mind, as 60% of global Stuxnet cases appear within Iran [41]. US intelligence sources indicate that American and Israeli officials are working to finalize a new Stuxnet worm, referred to as 'Duqu' [42]; Alexander Gostev, chief security expert at Russia's Kaspersky Lab examined drivers used in Stuxnet and Duqu and concluded a single team most likely designed both worms, based on their interaction with the surrounding malware code [43]. Duqu malware similarly exploits Microsoft Windows systems using a zero-day vulnerability and is partially written in an advanced and previously unknown programming



language, comprised of a variety of software components capable of executing information theft capabilities highly related to Iran's nuclear program. Duqu has the capacity to steal digital certificates to help future viruses appear as secure software [44]. Duqu's replication methods inside target networks remain unknown, however due to its modular structure, a special payload could theoretically be used in further cyber-physical attacks [45]. As the world begins to wage warfare in currency markets and programming code, the demand has never been greater for a new international legal framework to rightfully penalize covert provocateurs for manipulating economic structures and engaging in acts of sabotage.

Notes

- [1] Iran's Nuclear Program (Nuclear Talks, 2012), The New York Times, April 9, 2012
- [2] Six-party talks 'encouraging' after 15-month break, Russia Today, April 14, 2012
- [3] Iran, world powers agree to further nuclear talks, Los Angeles Times, April 15, 2012
- [4] Barak doubts sanctions will halt Iran's nuke drive, The Jerusalem Post, April 7, 2012
- [5] U.S. Agencies See No Move by Iran to Build a Bomb, The New York Times, February 24, 2012
- [6] Stuxnet Loaded by Iran Double Agents, ISSSource, April 11, 2012
- [7] Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, January 27, 2012
- [8] Moqtada Sadr Reiterates Iraqis' Demand for Expulsion of MKO Terrorists, Fars News Agency, September 19, 2011
- [9] About the National Council of Resistance of Iran, The National Council of Resistance of Iran, 2010
- [10] Massacre at Camp Ashraf: Implications for U.S. Policy, Committee on Foreign Affairs, July 7, 2011
- [11] Iran vows capture of officers' killers, The Free Lance-Star, May 22, 1975

- [12] Our Men in Iran? The New Yorker, April 6, 2012
- [13] Former U.S. base opened to Iranian terrorist group, Foreign Policy, February 7, 2012
- [14] Are the MEK's U.S. friends its worst enemies? Foreign Policy, March 8, 2012
- [15] Iran nuclear leaks 'linked to Israel', Asia Times, June 5, 2009
- [16] Massacre at Camp Ashraf: Implications for U.S. Policy, Committee on Foreign Affairs, July 7, 2011
- [17] Mujahideen-e Khalq: Former U.S. Officials Make Millions Advocating For Terrorist Organization, Huffington Post, August 8, 2011
- [18] The Cult of Rajavi, The New York Times, July 13, 2003
- [19] EU ministers drop Iran group from terror list, EUobserver, January 26, 2009
- [20] SPECIAL REPORT-Intel shows Iran nuclear threat not imminent, Reuters, March 23, 2012
- [21] Stuxnet Loaded by Iran Double Agents, ISSSource, April 11, 2012
- [22] Did Stuxnet Take Out 1,000 Centrifuges at the Natanz Enrichment Plant? Institute for Science and International Security, December 22, 2010
- [23] Report: U.S. Officials Tie Controversial Iranian Exile Group To Scientist Assassinations, Center for American Progress Action Fund, February 9, 2012
- [24] Triple Blast at Secret Iranian Military Installation, Virtual Jerusalem, October 15, 2010
- [25] Israel teams with terror group to kill Iran's nuclear scientists, U.S. officials tell NBC News, MSNBC, February 9, 2012
- [26] U.S. Rejected Aid for Israeli Raid on Iranian Nuclear Site, The New York Times, January 10, 2009
- [27] Stuxnet worm is the 'work of a national government agency', The Guardian, September 24, 2010
- [28] US and Israel were behind Stuxnet claims researcher, BBC, March 4, 2011





- [29] Code clues point to Stuxnet maker, BBC, November 19, 2010
- [30] Israeli Test on Worm Called Crucial in Iran Nuclear Delay, The New York Times, January 15, 2011
- [31] Ibid
- [32] Ibid
- [33] Blix: US, Israel source most of IAEA allegations, PressTV, March 25, 2012
- [34] Iran has a Nuclear Power, Not a Weapons Program, 21st Century & Technology, December 2, 2011
- [35] Top US Nuclear Expert Tells Obama: There Is No Weapons Threat From Iran, LaRouche Pac, February 25, 2012
- [36] 50 Facts About U.S. Nuclear Weapons, Brookings Institute, August 1998
- [37] Nuclear Weapons – Israel, Federation of American Scientists, January 8, 2007
- [38] Iran: We do not want nuclear weapons, The Washington Post, April 13, 2012
- [39] Foreign Terrorist Organizations, Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, January 27, 2012
- [40] Iran exile group MEK seeks US terror de-listing, BBC, September 25, 2011
- [41] UPDATE 2-Cyber attack appears to target Iran-tech firms, Reuters, September 24, 2010
- [42] Stuxnet, Duqu Link Grows Stronger, ISSSource, January 3, 2012
- [43] Ibid
- [44] The Day of the Golden Jackal – The Next Tale in the Stuxnet Files: Duqu Updated, McAfee, October 18, 2011
- [45] W32.Duqu – The precursor to the next Stuxnet (Version 1.4), Symantec, November 23, 2011



MEK and That Dastardly T-Word

May 2012

In the news section, Jason Ditz tells us that the State Department is preparing to remove the Iranian dissident group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) from their official list of terrorist organizations. This, after years of praise and advocacy from elite members in American politics, from Ed Randell to John Bolton to Howard Dean and Rudy Giuliani. These types of people collected payments from the MEK for their advocacy to get the group removed from the State Department's list, which amounts to "material support" for terrorist groups, a felony. Of course, such well-connected, high-society types don't get prosecuted for uNLAWful behavior unless it involves betraying the sanctity of marriage. And the fact that the U.S. government secretly trained MEK fighters in recent years and is now being employed by Israel to conduct acts of terrorism inside Iran probably won't increase the likelihood of such prosecutions. Interestingly, Glenn Greenwald has dug up the following bit of history. A document written by the Bush administration in the lead up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, still in the archives of the White House's website, seeks to justify the war on the basis of Saddam's support for the very "terrorist" group we are now supporting!

Iraq shelters terrorist groups including the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), which has used terrorist violence against Iran and in the 1970s was responsible for killing several U.S.

MEK
Uncovered

473



military personnel and U.S. civilians.

This makes flagrantly clear that, as Greenwald writes, “the application of the term ‘Terrorist’ by the U.S. Government has nothing to do with how that term is commonly understood, but is instead exploited solely as a means to punish those who defy U.S. dictates and reward those who advance American interests and those of its allies (especially Israel).”

For another example, think back to the height of Obama’s war in Libya. Preeminent AEI jingo Marc Thiessan tried to justify ousting Gadhafi because, of course, he was a committed terrorist. After all, Thiessan wrote, Gadhafi was:

the man who blew up Pan Am 103 over Scotland, killing 270 people; destroyed a French passenger jet over Niger, killing 171 people; bombed the La Belle discotheque in West Berlin, killing two U.S. soldiers and injuring more than 50 American servicemen; established terrorist training camps on Libyan soil; provided terrorists with arms and safe haven...

See how easy that is? Thiessan and other supporters of the war went through this rap sheet repeatedly, refusing to highlight the fact that the NATO-backed rebels had direct ties to al-Qaeda and had themselves committed serious acts of “terror.”

So a terrorist is whoever our military and political leadership say it is. Until they begin to collude with them, then they’re not terrorists anymore.





Delisting the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK)

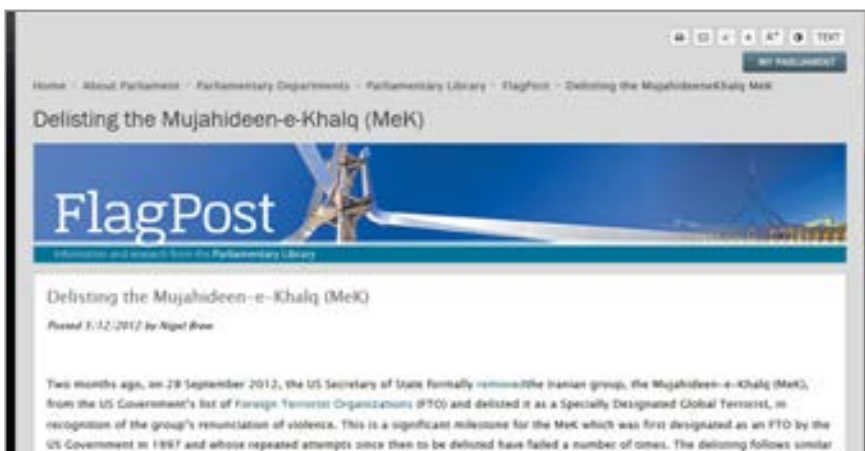
May 2012

Two months ago, on 28 September 2012, the US Secretary of State formally removed the Iranian group, the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), from the US Government's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) and delisted it as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist, in recognition of the group's renunciation of violence. This is a significant milestone for the MEK which was first designated as an FTO by the US Government in 1997 and whose repeated attempts since then to be delisted have failed a number of times. The delisting follows similar rulings in the UK in 2008 and the EU in 2009. While Australia has never proscribed the MEK as a terrorist organisation, in December 2001 the Australian Government effectively froze the MEK's assets and made it an offence to fund the group by adding the MEK to the Government's 'Consolidated List'—where it currently still remains.

As outlined in the 2003 Parliamentary Library Research Note, Behind the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), the MEK (also known as the Mujahideen-e-Khalq Organisation, or the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran, or PMOI) formed in the mid-1960s as a splinter group of the Liberation Movement of Iran and became the largest group within the coalition of Iranian opposition groups known as the National Council of Resistance of Iran. Its military wing, the National Liberation Army, was formed in 1987. The MEK was designated as a terrorist

MEK
Uncovered

475



organisation by the US Government in October 1997 following the murder of a number of US nationals in which the MEK was involved or suspected of involvement.

According to the profile of the organisation in Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism the MEK murdered three US military personnel in the early 1970s. The US State Department also notes in Country Reports on Terrorism 2010 that in 1972 the MEK set off bombs at the US Embassy and the offices of US companies in Tehran to protest against the visit to Iran by President Nixon, and again in 1974 to protest against the visit of US Secretary of State Kissinger. The State Department also claims that in 1976 and 1979, the MEK murdered several US civilians working in Iran. The MEK was also accused of actively supporting the takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979, and of assisting Saddam Hussein's suppression of the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings at the end of the Gulf War in 1991—although the MEK has always denied any involvement in either of these events. In April 1992, the MEK carried out a series of simultaneous attacks on Iranian Embassies worldwide, including in Australia, apparently in retaliation for the bombing by Iran of MEK bases in Iraq in the preceding days. The Iranian Embassy in Canberra was over-run and some staff were seriously injured. According to Jane's and the US State Department, the MEK has also, over many years, carried out armed attacks and assassinations against Iranian Government per-

MEK
Uncovered

476

sonnel and property.

The UK proscribed the MEK in March 2001 and the EU designated the MEK as a terrorist group in May 2002, although both jurisdictions have since delisted the group. For a discussion of the listing and delisting of the MEK in the UK, see the 2009 House of Commons Library Standard Note, People's Mujahiddin of Iran (PMOI) or Mujahiddin e Khalq (MEK): an update. Canada proscribed the MEK in 2005, and its listing remains current.

In December 2001, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs added the MEK to the Government's 'Consolidated List' which contains the names of entities, the assets of which must be frozen in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1373 which requires UN member states to implement a series of measures designed to suppress terrorism. As explained in detail on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) website, 'Australia implements Resolution 1373 through Part 4 of the Charter of the United Nations Act 1945 and through regulation 20 of the Charter of the United Nations (Dealing with Assets) Regulations 2008'. Once an organisation is listed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, 'it becomes a criminal offence to deal with their assets or to make assets available to them'.

In June 2003, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) conducted raids on the homes of a number of Iranian Australians. In a report at the time by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's 7.30 Report, the status of the MEK in Australia was described by Clive Williams (then the Director of Terrorism Studies at the Australian National University) as 'basically a fundraising arm'. The report cited suspicions by commentators that the raids were connected to increased diplomatic engagement between Australia and Iran in the weeks before the raids, during which, it was suggested, the Iranians may have 'expressed concern about the activities of MEK supporters in Australia'. According to the report, any suggestion that the raids were politically motivated was dismissed at the time as 'nonsense' by a spokes-



man for the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Despite its violent track record, the MEK has over the years enjoyed some political support from individual politicians in the UK, the US and Australia. While acknowledging the designation of the MEK as a terrorist group, supporters have tended to refer to it as a 'resistance organisation'. Among the Australian federal politicians to have spoken out in public support of the MEK over the years is Kelvin Thomson (a Government MP) who has repeatedly called for the removal of the MEK from the Government's 'Consolidated List'.

The MEK's entry on the 'Consolidated List' is not due to expire for another year (25 November 2013), although according to the DFAT website, listed organisations can apply at any time to the Minister to have their listing revoked. It will be interesting to see whether following the recent delisting of the MEK in the US, the MEK makes a request of the Australian Government to be removed from the 'Consolidated List' prior to November 2013. To date, the Government has not indicated that it is currently considering any such request, but with the UK, the EU and now the US having removed any restrictions on the MEK, the pressure to remove it from the Government's 'Consolidated List' could well be mounting.

A teal circular logo with the text 'MEK' in a large, white, serif font and 'Uncovered' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. A horizontal line is positioned above the circle, and a diagonal line extends from the bottom-left corner of the circle towards the bottom-left of the page.

MEK
Uncovered

478



State Dept. Poised to Remove Iranian Terror Group From Terror List

May 2012

One of the founding members of the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, the Iran-based cult the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) is almost certain to be delisted in the next 60 days, in a move that is likely to dramatically increase tensions between the US and Iran.

The MEK was originally listed for its role in assassinating Americans in Shahist Iran, and has been petitioning for its removal. A number of politicians have been openly endorsing the organization, arguing that formal US backing for the organization would be a key step toward regime change in Iran. Technically speaking, officials say, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hasn't made an official decision on the matter, but has promised to do so in the next 60 days. At the same time, they



479



concede that it would be “difficult politically” not to remove the MEK from the list.

The move would be a great relief to several officials, including former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, who violated federal law by taking funds from a still-listed terrorist organization in return for giving speeches on their behalf. The MEK has been paying off top officials for years to endorse their removal from the terror list, offering \$20,000 for a 20 minute speech of support.



480

Likely victory for MEK shills

May 2012

A bipartisan band of former Washington officials and politicians has spent the last two years aggressively advocating on behalf of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian dissident group that has been formally designated for the last 15 years by the U.S. State Department as a “foreign Terrorist organization.” Most of those former officials have been paid large sums of money to speak at MEK events and meet with its leaders, thus developing far more extensive relations with this Terror group than many marginalized Muslims who have been prosecuted and punished with lengthy prison terms for “materially supporting a Terrorist organization.” These bipartisan MEK advocates have been demanding the group’s removal from the Terror list, advocacy that has continued unabated despite (or, more accurately, because of) reports that MEK is trained and funded by the Israelis and has been perpetrating acts of violence on Iranian soil aimed at that country’s civilian nuclear scientists and facilities (also known as: Terrorism).

Now, needless to say, the State Department appears likely to accede to the demands of these paid bipartisan shills:

The Obama administration is moving to remove an Iranian opposition group from the State Department’s terrorism list, say officials briefed on the talks, in an action that could further poison Washington’s relations with Tehran at a time of renewed diplomatic efforts to curtail Iran’s nuclear program.

MEK
Uncovered

481



The exile organization, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, was originally named as a terrorist entity 15 years ago for its alleged role in assassinating U.S. citizens in the years before the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and for allying with Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein against Tehran.

The MEK has engaged in an aggressive legal and lobbying campaign in Washington over the past two years to win its removal from the State Department's list. . . . Senior U.S. officials said on Monday that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has yet to make any final decision on the MEK's status. But they said the State Department was looking favorably at delisting MEK if it continued cooperating by vacating a former paramilitary base inside Iraq, called Camp Ashraf, which the group had used to stage cross-border strikes into Iran.

This highlights almost every salient fact about how Washington functions with regard to such matters. First, if you pay a sufficiently large and bipartisan group of officials to lobby on your behalf, you will get your way, even when it comes to vaunted National Security and Terrorism decisions; if you pay the likes of Howard Dean, Fran Townsend, Wesley Clark, Ed Rendell, Rudy Giuliani, Tom Ridge and others like them to peddle their political influence for you, you will be able to bend Washington policy and law to your will. As Andrew Exum put it this morning: "I guess Hizballah and LeT just need to buy off more former administration officials."

Second, the application of the term “Terrorist” by the U.S. Government has nothing to do with how that term is commonly understood, but is instead exploited solely as a means to punish those who defy U.S. dictates and reward those who advance American interests and those of its allies (especially Israel). Thus, this Terror group is complying with U.S. demands, has been previously trained by the U.S. itself, and is perpetrating its violence on behalf of a key American client state and against a key American enemy, and — presto — it is no longer a “foreign Terrorist organization.”

Third, this yet again underscores who the actual aggressors are in the tensions with Iran. Imagine if multiple, high-level former Iranian officials received large sums of money from a group of Americans dedicated to violently overthrowing the U.S. government and committing acts of violence on American soil, and the Iranian Government then removed it from its list of Terror groups, thus allowing funding and other means of support to flow freely to that group.

Fourth, the rule of law is not even a purported constraint on the conduct of Washington political elites. Here, the behavior of these paid MEK shells is so blatantly illegal that even the Obama administration felt compelled to commence investigations to determine who was paying them and for what. As a strictly legal matter, removing MEK from the Terror list should have no effect on the criminality of their acts: it’s a felony to provide material support to a designated Terror group — which the Obama DOJ, backed by the U.S. Supreme Court, has argued, in a full frontal assault on free speech rights, even includes coordinating advocacy with such a group (ironically, some of this Terror group’s paid advocates, such as former Bush Homeland Security adviser Fran Townsend, cheered that Supreme Court ruling when they thought it would only restrict the political advocacy of Muslims, not themselves).

The fact that the Terror group is subsequently removed from the list does not render that material support non-criminal. But



as a practical matter, it is virtually impossible to envision the Obama DOJ prosecuting any of these elite officials for supporting a group which the Obama administration itself concedes does not belong on the list. The removal of this group — if, as appears highly likely, it happens — will basically have the same effect, by design, as corrupt acts such as retroactive telecom immunity and the shielding of Bush war crimes and Wall Street fraud from any form of investigation: it will once again bolster the prime Washington dictate that D.C. political elites reside above the rule of law even when committing violations of the criminal law for which ordinary citizens are harshly punished.



Speaking of the assault on the free speech rights of Muslim critics of the U.S. under the guise of “material support” prosecutions (an assault which also erodes free speech rights for everyone), Michael May has a great long article in *The American Prospect* on the horrendous, free-speech-threatening prosecution of Tarek Mehanna, whose extraordinary sentencing statement I published here.

UPDATE: In 2003, when the Bush administration was advocating an attack on Iraq, one of the prime reasons it cited was “Saddam Hussein’s Support for International Terrorism.” It circulated a document purporting to prove that claim (h/t Hernlem), and one of the first specific accusations listed was this: Iraq shelters terrorist groups including the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), which has used terrorist violence against Iran and in the 1970s was responsible for killing several U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilians.

So the group that was pointed to less than a decade ago as proof of Saddam’s Terrorist Evil is now glorified by both political parties in Washington and — now that it’s fighting for the U.S. and Israel rather than for Saddam — is no longer a Terror group.

State Department Poised to Raise Chances of War With Iran

May 2012

The State Department, according to a report in today's Wall Street Journal, is poised to do something that could increase the chances of war with Iran.

Let's set the context:

We're in the midst of negotiations with Iran, trying to keep it from building a nuclear bomb. Within Iran there is disagreement about how hard a line to take in the negotiations. Obviously, all other things being equal, it would be good to strengthen moderate voices within Iran and undermine hardliners--particularly hardliners who want the talks to fail altogether so that Iran can proceed to build a bomb.

Here is part of the narrative the hardliners are pushing:

Iran needs nuclear weapons to defend itself. It is beset by enemies. The Sunni states would love to overthrow our government. Just recall that Iraq, when it was a Sunni-run state, attacked us, starting a war that killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians. And note that Sunni states are currently trying to abet the overthrow of our ally in Syria--just one domino away from the fall of our own government. And don't forget about the American-Zionist axis: prominent Americans and Israelis openly call for regime change in Tehran, and we suspect that this is the secret goal of the Obama administration.



MEK
Uncovered

486

OK, so that's the narrative that we don't want to strengthen--particularly the America-Zionist-axis-is-bent-on-regime-change part. Here, then, is an example of something we probably shouldn't go out of our way to do: Take an Iranian-exile group that is devoted to overthrowing the Iranian government, and that has long been on America's list of terrorist organizations, and give it our seal of approval by taking it off that list. That would be stupid, right? Yet that's what, according to today's report in the Journal, the State Department is leaning toward.

The group in question is the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, which got onto our list of terrorist organizations decades ago by, among other things, killing Americans.

Now, if MEK had, as it claims, left its terrorist ways behind, this "delisting" of it, though geopolitically unfortunate, might be legally or morally defensible. However, within only the last few months, according to NBC News, MEK agents have murdered people by placing bombs on their cars.

The murdered people were Iranian scientists, and the assassinations were apparently orchestrated by Israel--facts that may raise MEK in the esteem of some Americans. But that doesn't make the killings any more legal or less terroristic. What it does do is make them very powerful talking points for Iranian hardliners who want to derail negotiations by warning about the American-Zionist axis: "America embraces Israel's proxy an-

ti-Iranian terrorists, terrorists who openly favor regime change in Iran, and then tells us we don't need a nuclear deterrent to keep us safe from America and Israel?"

There's more bad news: the campaign to delist MEK is well financed (the source of funding is unclear), and includes paying large speaking fees to influential American politicians--transactions that tend to be accompanied by these politicians suddenly saying nice things about MEK. And for all we know the people funding this scheme would be willing to make big campaign contributions to a sufficiently compliant Obama administration. The good news is that the final decision may not be imminent and could be months off--and will probably be made by Hillary Clinton. And surely she knows that if she caves in to the political pressure being mustered on behalf of MEK, she'll be guaranteeing herself a place in the diplomats' hall of shame.





Apparently Terrorism Isn't Terrorism If It Targets Iran

May 2012

The Obama administration is moving to delist an Iranian dissident group from the State Department terrorism list, which, as recently as January, reportedly detonated a magnetic bomb under the car of an Iranian scientist. Perhaps unintentionally, the message the move would send appears to be: This activity is OK as long as it's against Iran.

Last night, The Wall Street Journal's Jay Solomon and Evan Perez reported that the exile group Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK is on its way to being removed from the official U.S terror list after an aggressive two-year lobbying campaign in Washington by the group. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has yet to give the final green light but officials say the plan will likely go through so long as MEK leaves a former paramilitary base in Iraq, called Camp Ashraf, from which the group has launched cross-border strikes into Iran. According to The Journal, "Mrs. Clinton purposefully tied the closing of Camp Ashraf to the designation issue to defuse a thorny diplomatic issue between Washington and Baghdad." The other sticking point, according to The Journal, was resolved: "The group has already renounced terrorism." Great! But have they really?

According to a lengthy investigation by NBC News' Richard Engel and Robert Windrem in February, they haven't. The re-

MEK
Uncovered

488



port cites U.S. officials accusing MEK of assassinating Iran's nuclear scientists:

The attacks, which have killed five Iranian nuclear scientists since 2007 and may have destroyed a missile research and development site, have been carried out in dramatic fashion, with motorcycle-borne assailants often attaching small magnetic bombs to the exterior of the victims' cars.

According to Engel and Windre, the MEK attacks were carried out with the training of Mossad, the Israeli secret service, "Two senior U.S. officials confirmed for NBC News the MEK's role in the assassinations, with one senior official saying, 'All your inclinations are correct.'" The MEK has denied involvement in the attacks.

While some foreign policy hawks may rejoice at the idea of an Iranian dissident group setting back Iran's nuclear program, grisly assassinations are certainly a technique that should give one pause, especially if the U.S. is to have a consistent policy on terrorism. Strategically, even avowed defenders of Israel, such as The Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg, have criticized the tactic of thwarting Iran's nuclear program by murdering scientists.

"If I were a member of the Iranian regime (and I'm not), I would take this assassination program to mean that the West is entirely uninterested in any form of negotiation (not that I, the regime official, has ever been much interested in dialogue with



the West) and that I should double-down and cross the nuclear threshold as fast as humanly possible,” Goldberg wrote in January. “Once I do that, I’m North Korea, or Pakistan: An untouchable country.”

While the Journal doesn’t mention MEK’s reported role in the attacks, it does forecast what Iran’s response would be if MEK was delisted. “Western and Iranian diplomats are concerned that the MEK issue could draw serious recriminations from Tehran, which has been fixated on neutralizing the group,” reads the report. “Many of Iran’s top leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, were targets of MEK attacks during the 1980s.” Clearly, like any country, Iran takes assassination attempts on its people seriously. As Reuters reports today, Iran hanged a man it said was working with Mosad in the killing of one of its nuclear scientists in 2010. But more to the point: Isn’t the U.S. ceding some of its credibility with this flexible definition of terrorism?



MEK
Uncovered

490

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Iran Exile Group Nears U.S. Rebirth

May 2012

Bloody Past

Mujahedin-e Khalq has allegedly killed Americans, Iranians

1965 Three college students found MEK in Tehran.

1970s MEK backers opposed to the Shah assassinate U.S. officials, the U.S. says.

1981 MEK operatives set off bombs that kill more than 70 members of Iran's Islamic Republic Party, Iran says.

1986 MEK relocates operations to Iraq and allies with dictator Saddam Hussein.

1988 Iran repels MEK cross-border attack, leading to the executions of thousands of its supporters inside Iran.

2002 MEK's political wing presents intelligence accusing Iran of secretly developing nuclear sites.

2003 MEK renounces terrorism after Hussein's fall and the U.S. capture of Camp Ashraf. Residents are given 'protected persons' status under the Geneva Convention.

2011 U.S. and Iraq agree to relocate MEK members out of Camp Ashraf.

May, 2012 U.S. says it will decide on whether to remove MEK from a terrorism list 60 days after Camp Ashraf closes.

WASHINGTON—The Obama administration is moving to remove an Iranian opposition group from the State Department's terrorism list, say officials briefed on the talks, in an action that could further poison Washington's relations with Tehran

MEK
Uncovered

491



at a time of renewed diplomatic efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear program.

The exile organization, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, was originally named as a terrorist entity 15 years ago for its alleged role in assassinating U.S. citizens in the years before the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and for allying with Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein against Tehran.

The MEK has engaged in an aggressive legal and lobbying campaign in Washington over the past two years to win its removal from the State Department's list. The terrorism designation, which has been in place since 1997, freezes the MEK's assets inside the U.S. and prevents the exile group from fundraising.

Senior U.S. officials said on Monday that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has yet to make any final decision on the MEK's status. But they said the State Department was looking favorably at delisting MEK if it continued cooperating by vacating a former paramilitary base inside Iraq, called Camp Ashraf, which the group had used to stage cross-border strikes into Iran.

The group has already renounced terrorism, which was the main earlier sticking point. Residents have resisted leaving the camp because they feared retribution if they were returned to Iran and political irrelevancy abroad.

The U.S. officials said Mrs. Clinton would make her final deci-

sion on the MEK's status no less than 60 days after the last MEK member is relocated from Camp Ashraf to a new transit facility near Baghdad International Airport. The U.S. is working with the United Nations to resettle Camp Ashraf residents in third countries. Roughly 1,200 people remain at the camp from an earlier population of over 3,000.

"The MEK's cooperation in the successful and peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf...will be a key factor in her decision regarding the MEK's [foreign-terrorist organization] status," said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland on Monday. Western and Iranian diplomats are concerned that the MEK issue could draw serious recriminations from Tehran, which has been fixated on neutralizing the group. Many of Iran's top leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, were targets of MEK attacks during the 1980s.

Iran has regularly accused Western countries of hypocrisy for providing shelter to MEK members while criticizing Tehran's support for militant groups, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Palestinian territories. "We believe that despite the claims that others make about fighting terrorism, they [Western nations] provide the most support for terrorist groups," Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, Ramin Mehmanparast, said last week. "In Europe, the MEK has already been removed from the list of terrorist organizations and they are completely safe to continue their activities."

U.S. officials said that the moves weren't related to coming nuclear talks, but are tied to the MEK's legal challenge to its designation in a Washington appeals court.

A judge ordered the State Department to review the MEK's status nearly two years ago, and congressional rules maintain the process should take only 180 days.

"There is a great deal of animosity among Iranian officialdom toward the MEK. But our delisting has to be done by the facts and the law," said a senior U.S. official. "Any move to delist should not be seen as a sign of our support."





Other officials briefed on the MEK issue said Mrs. Clinton purposefully tied the closing of Camp Ashraf to the designation issue to defuse a thorny diplomatic issue between Washington and Baghdad. The U.S. military had provided security at the camp before pulling its forces from Iraq last year. Baghdad now controls the camp and has threatened to return MEK members to Iran if it isn't swiftly closed.

These officials stressed that Mrs. Clinton could still rule against delisting the MEK due to other information gathered on its role in terrorism. But they acknowledged it would be difficult politically for Mrs. Clinton to maintain the designation after publicly stating the importance of the Camp Ashraf issue.

"The secretary's statement was clear that there's a relationship between delisting and closing Ashraf. It is also true that we are making progress," said an official briefed on the deliberations. "To make that assertion on your own that the MEK will be removed is a realistic one. But in policy making you never know for sure what will happen."

The MEK's status has become an explosive political issue inside Washington and a major irritant in U.S.-Iranian relations. The group, despite its history of terrorism and anti-Americanism, reoriented itself. After Saddam Hussein's 2003 fall and the capturing of Camp Ashraf by U.S. forces, the MEK renounced violence and turned over its weapons. And it has cooperated with the U.S. and U.N. in gathering intelligence on Iran's nuclear program.

This ideological shift by the MEK has been accompanied by an intensive lobbying campaign on Capitol Hill. A number of former senior U.S. officials said they were offered payments to speak on behalf of the MEK, including James Jones, President Barack Obama's former national security adviser, and James Woolsey, the former head of the Central Intelligence Agency. Mr. Jones confirmed last year that he received a fee, but declined to specify how much. Mr. Woolsey said he waives his usual speaker's fee.

The Treasury Department has an continuing inquiry into payments made to MEK advocates, for possible violation of sanctions that prohibit financial dealings with terrorist groups. It is unclear how any delisting would affect that probe.

The deliberations over the MEK's status come as the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, are gathering in Baghdad next week for negotiations with Iran aimed at curbing its nuclear program. Officials from the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency met Monday with Iranian officials in Vienna and pressed for greater access to the country's nuclear facilities. Diplomats and Iran analysts worry that any moves to delist the MEK could result in Iran driving up its demands at the negotiating table. Tehran denies it is seeking nuclear weapons, but also says it needs advanced weapons systems to guard against the U.S. and other hostile states. The MEK issue will likely be perceived in Tehran as another American-led effort to topple Iran's theocratic government, these analysts said.

"In the cynical, conspiratorial world view of the Iranian regime, delisting the MEK will be interpreted in Tehran as validation that Washington's underlying goal is regime change, not behavior change," said Karim Sadjadpour of Washington's Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Critics of the MEK allege that the organization has no major support inside Iran and that its leaders, who are based outside Paris, run the group like a cult. They also worry that any perceived U.S. support for it could undercut the Iranian opposition, known as the Green Movement, which pushed for democratic change during 2009 street protests.

Still, the organization has large support on Capitol Hill. And some lawmakers are seeking to use the possible delisting of the organization to begin providing U.S. financial support. Congress took similar steps in the 1990s to provide funding to Iraq's opposition and, in particular, the exiled politician, Ahmad Chalabi.



“If there’s a coalition against the mullahs, then we should fund that coalition, and the MEK should be a part of it,” said Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R., Calif.). He cautioned that for now, he wasn’t advocating directly funding MEK. “The MEK has the resources to resist and fight the mullah dictatorship. They don’t need our money, they just need us to get out of the way and take the shackles off.”



Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?

May 2012

The ongoing saga of Mujahedin-e-Khalq is a good example of how the unfortunately imprecise cliché ought to be understood.

In his new book, *The Tyranny of Cliches*, Jonah Goldberg goes on a rant against the phrase, "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," writing, "It is simply absurd to contend that because people may argue over who is or is not a terrorist that it is therefore impossible to make meaningful distinctions between terrorists and freedom fighters." Is that what those who invoke the phrase are saying? Like a lot of clichés, it doesn't really make literal sense and is probably best avoided, but I suspect what many people mean when they use it is something like, "As a descriptor, terrorist is almost never applied rigorously and consistently to describe the tactics a group is using -- rather, it is invoked as a pejorative to vilify the actions only of groups one wishes to discredit. People who agree with the ends of the very same groups often don't think of them as terrorists, the negative connotation of which causes them to focus on what they regard as the noble ends of allies they're more likely to dub freedom fighters."

Put more simply, it's possible to rigorously determine who is

MEK
Uncovered

497



a terrorist if you go by the actual meaning of the word, but in practice the term is almost never applied in accordance with a strict definition.

And today I can alert you to an especially Orwellian example. Back when the Bush Administration wanted to go to war in Iraq, despite the fact that it had nothing to do with 9/11, they did their best to persuade terrorist-hating Americans that Saddam Hussein was a sponsor of terrorism. For example, the Bush White House published a document called “Saddam Hussein’s Support for International Terrorism.” Check out this bullet point especially:

Iraq shelters terrorist groups including the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), which has used terrorist violence against Iran and in the 1970s was responsible for killing several U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilians.

Nowadays, Iran is Public Enemy Number One. Mujahe-din-e-Khalq, also known as MEK, is still a terrorist organization. That is to say, it both uses violence to terrorize civilian employees of the Iranian regime and appears on America’s official list of foreign terror-sponsoring organizations. But various prominent Americans are being paid big bucks to help get MEK off the official list of terror groups.

And they’re reportedly poised to succeed. As my colleague Bob Wright puts it:

If MEK had, as it claims, left its terrorist ways behind, this “del-



isting” of it, though geopolitically unfortunate, might be legally or morally defensible. However, within only the last few months, according to NBC News, MEK agents have murdered people by placing bombs on their cars. The murdered people were Iranian scientists, and the assassinations were apparently orchestrated by Israel -- facts that may raise MEK in the esteem of some Americans.

But that doesn’t make the killings any more legal or less terrorist.

As Glenn Greenwald writes:

The application of the term “Terrorist” by the U.S. Government has nothing to do with how that term is commonly understood, but is instead exploited solely as a means to punish those who defy U.S. dictates and reward those who advance American interests and those of its allies (especially Israel). Thus, this Terror group is complying with U.S. demands, has been previously trained by the U.S. itself, and is perpetrating its violence on behalf of a key American client state and against a key American enemy, and -- presto -- it is no longer a “foreign Terrorist organization.”

If you want to know the intended rather than literally expressed meaning of, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter,” you need look no further than the story of MEK.



London Review BOOKSHOP

Terrorists? Us?

June 2012

The story of the People's Mujahedin of Iran, also known as the Mujahedin e Khalq (MEK), is all about the way image management can enable a diehard enemy to become a cherished ally. The MEK is currently campaigning to be officially delisted in the US as a terrorist organisation. Once off the list it will be free to make use of its support on Capitol Hill in order to become America's most favoured, and no doubt best funded, Iranian opposition group.

The last outfit to achieve something similar was the Iraqi National Congress, the lobby group led by Ahmed Chalabi that talked of democracy and paved the way for the US invasion of Iraq by presenting Washington with highly questionable 'evidence' of weapons of mass destruction and Saddam Hussein's links with al-Qaida. Then, as George Bush took the US to war, all that remained for the INC and its leaders was to sit back and prepare for government. Many in Washington believe that, for better or worse, the US will go to war with Iran and that the MEK will have a role to play. But first they will have to persuade Hillary Clinton to take the group off the US's official terrorist list. Some of Clinton's officials are urging her to keep the MEK on it but some of the big beasts in Washington are angrily demanding that she delist. After an exhaustive inter-agency process the MEK file is now in her in-tray. Recent State Department statements indicate that she is likely to delist the group.

MEK
Uncovered

500



Formed in the 1960s as an anti-imperialist, Islamist organisation with socialist leanings, dedicated to the overthrow of the shah, the MEK originally stood not only for Islamic revolution but also for such causes as women's rights – an appealing combination on Iran's university campuses. It went on to build a genuine popular base and played a significant role in overthrowing the shah in 1979. It was popular enough for Ayatollah Khomeini to feel he had to destroy it; throughout the 1980s he instigated show trials and public executions of its members. The MEK retaliated with attacks on senior clerical leaders inside Iran.

Fearing for their lives, MEK members fled first to Paris and later to Iraq, where Saddam Hussein, desperate for allies in the war with Iran, provided them with millions of dollars of funding as well as tanks, artillery pieces and other weapons. He also made land available to them. Camp Ashraf became their home, a citadel in the desert, 80 kilometres north of Baghdad and an hour's drive from the Iranian border. Since the 1970s, the MEK's rhetoric has changed from Islamist to secular, from socialist to capitalist, from pro-revolution to anti-revolution. And since Saddam's fall it has portrayed itself as pro-American, peaceful and dedicated to democracy and human rights. Continual reinvention can be dangerous, however, and the new, pro-Iranian Iraqi government is under pressure from Tehran to close down Camp Ashraf, which has grown over three





decades to the size of a small town. And it's not just Iran. Many Iraqis too bear grudges against the MEK, not only for having worked alongside Saddam Hussein but also for having taken part in his violent suppression of the Kurds and Shias.

Iraqi security personnel have twice attacked Camp Ashraf, in 2009 and 2011, killing more than forty people. Pictures of armoured vehicles running over unarmed Ashraf residents can be seen on YouTube. Iraq has now insisted that Camp Ashraf be closed, and its residents have very reluctantly started moving to Camp Liberty, a former US army base by Baghdad airport which is under UN supervision and guarded by Iraqi security personnel. The UNHCR is now processing the residents with a view to sending them to other countries as refugees, but few countries are willing to take in people the US officially designates as terrorists and who are described by many as members of a cult.

The MEK started to use cultlike methods – isolating members from friends and relatives and managing the flow of information that reached them – after 1989, the year its charismatic husband and wife leadership team, Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, launched Operation Eternal Light. After Saddam's failure to topple the regime in Iran, this was intended to be the big push that would finally win control of the country. Success, Rajavi told his fighters, was inevitable because the Iranian people, both civilians and military, would switch sides and join them on the march to Tehran. It would, he said, be a walkover. In the event the Iranian counter attack was ferocious. More than a thousand MEK fighters were killed and many others wounded. It lost around a third of its personnel.

Rajavi had to come up with an explanation for the defeat. His unorthodox solution was to tell his fighters they had lost because they had been distracted by love and sex. He commanded members to divorce, become celibate and live in communal, single-sex accommodation, just like soldiers in a regular army. Filled with ideas of self-sacrifice and martyrdom,

they did as they were told. (The celibacy rule is to this day so tightly enforced that there are separate times for men and women to use Camp Ashraf's petrol station.) Members were urged to transfer their passions from their former spouses to their leaders, the Rajavis. Aware that people were becoming sexually frustrated, meetings were organised where members were obliged to confess their sexual fantasies in public. If you did confess to something, other members spat at you. Friendships were also discouraged at Camp Ashraf, and so were children. From the mid-1980s, citing safety concerns, the leadership ordered that several hundred children living in the camp be moved to pro-MEK foster families in Europe and Canada. Some parents have not seen their children for more than twenty years.

These practices, along with frequent indoctrination sessions and the banning of news of the outside world (members were not allowed phones), helped the leadership to assert control. But MEK members outside Iraq also displayed remarkable devotion to the cause. When in 2003 the French authorities detained Maryam Rajavi on terrorism charges (she was later released) ten MEK members around the world set themselves on fire in protest; two of them died. The MEK of course denies being a cult, though many outsiders – senior US military officers, FBI agents, journalists and analysts for the largely Pentagon-funded Rand Corporation – have been to Camp Ashraf and come away believing that it is. One senior State Department official (now retired), sent to Iraq to interview thousands of MEK members after the invasion, concluded that the organisation was a cult; that the weirdly child-free Camp Ashraf was 'a human tragedy'; that members were 'misused and misled' by the leadership; and that many had been tricked into joining. The MEK has used various recruitment methods. The organisation's elite joined in Iran before the revolution. Others are former Iranian conscripts captured during the Iran-Iraq war. Saddam's regime offered them a bargain: if they joined the



MEK
Uncovered

503



MEK they could move from POW camps to the more comfortable confines of Camp Ashraf. Some members were recruited on US university campuses and promised jobs, money, new passports and the chance to fight the mullahs. Others were simply deceived. One Iran-based MEK activist was told on a visit to Camp Ashraf that his wife and child had died so he might as well stay. It was ten years before he got hold of a phone; the first thing he did was call home: his family were still alive. Some former MEK members say that on arrival in Iraq they were whisked past immigration control and their passports deliberately left unstamped. If later on they said they wanted to leave Camp Ashraf they were told they would be arrested for entering the country illegally. I have heard hours of such testimony from former members. The MEK insists that all the people who tell such stories are Iranian agents. It also denies misleading families. The tears of parents, spouses and children seemed real enough to me.

Despite all this, some US military officers who worked in Camp Ashraf after the invasion came away convinced that the group could be a useful ally. General David Phillips, a military policeman who spent time there in 2004, argues that the MEK is no more a cult than the US marines: in both organisations you have to wear a uniform, obey orders and follow rituals that seem bizarre to the uninitiated. Positive feelings towards the MEK in the US military are easily explained. In 2003 they had been briefed that it was a heavily armed terrorist outfit expected to fight loyally for Saddam against US forces. In the event the MEK leadership realised quite quickly that Saddam was doomed and executed a political pirouette. When US forces arrived at Camp Ashraf, they were welcomed by courteous English speakers who professed their support. Many American soldiers came to see the camp as a safe haven in a hostile country.

This doesn't explain the MEK's popularity among politicians

in London, Brussels and Washington. Some of it is paid for. Three dozen former high-ranking American officials regularly speak at MEK-friendly events. They include Rudy Giuliani, Howard Dean, Obama's former national security adviser General James Jones and the former congressman Lee Hamilton. The rate for a speech is between \$20,000 and \$40,000 for ten minutes. Subject matter is not a concern: some speakers deliver speeches that barely mention the MEK. In recent months the Obama administration has indicated it may put a halt to these events. The Treasury is investigating whether speakers have been receiving funds from a designated terrorist organisation. What they want to know, in other words, is whether the Iranian exiles who paid the speakers' fees are an MEK front; those who campaign for the group without being paid will not be affected. Most of those who back the group do so because they will back anything that seeks to upset the regime in Tehran. They seem unaware that the organisation has been called a cult and have not heard the complaints of former members. A number of the most prominent MEK lobbyists say they agreed to speak because they were reassured by the respectability of those who were already doing so.

The MEK also hires Washington lobbyists, who issue lengthy ripostes to criticism. The Rand Corporation's 105-page report on the MEK was written by a team of four who worked for 15 months in the US and Iraq to produce the most thorough analysis to date of the group's cultish aspects. The response was a 131-page report from a body called Executive Action, which describes itself as 'a private CIA and Defense Department available to address your most intractable problems and difficult challenges'. The Executive Action report was entitled 'Courting Disaster: How a Biased, Inaccurate Rand Corporation Report Imperils Lives, Flouts International Law and Betrays Its Own Standards.' Neil Livingstone, who is now a Republican candidate for the governorship of Montana, said he was retained by an 'American citizen' to assess the objectivity



of the Rand report. He concluded that, among other shortcomings, its authors were too inexperienced to write about a subject as complex as the MEK. Its supporters still dismiss the Rand paper, published three years ago, as the work of 'sophomore students'. Rand says these criticisms are references to the lead author's assistants, who had relatively minor roles and were given a credit on the title page so they had something to put on their CVs. All this lobbying costs a lot of money. Some of it is collected by the organisation's very determined door to door fundraisers in the UK and elsewhere. US officials also believe that the MEK has at its disposal the return on the large and well-invested stipend it received from Saddam Hussein.

Most pro-MEK campaigning doesn't directly address the allegations of cultish behaviour: the lobbyists focus instead on delisting. In 1996, a UN General Assembly resolution established a committee to draft a convention on international terrorism. Officials have met annually ever since to discuss the issue. But they can't agree on what terrorism is. There are two main sticking points. First, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference insists that movements resisting occupying forces and seeking national liberation – for example in Kashmir – should not be considered terrorists. Second, governments fear that they may themselves fall within any definition the committee reaches. So while some have come up with definitions that suit their own situation, at an international level no consensus has been achieved. Whether or not to label a group as terroristic is of course always a political act: the IRA never made it onto the US list; Nelson Mandela remained a terrorist in US eyes until 2008.

The MEK's record of mounting attacks goes back to the 1970s, when it opposed the shah and railed against America for backing him. The State Department believes that in 1973 the MEK killed a US Army comptroller stationed in Tehran and that in 1975 it assassinated two members of the US Military Assistance Advisory Group. Three executives from Rockwell Inter-

national and one from Texaco were also murdered. MEK hostility to the US continued after the revolution. On 4 November 1979 Iranian students occupied the US Embassy in Tehran and kidnapped 52 American diplomats, who were held captive for 444 days. One of the diplomats later said he would not have been in the embassy that day had he not been lured there by MEK contacts. Another said he had no doubt the MEK backed his kidnapping and in fact opposed a diplomatic resolution to the affair. Long after Khomeini decided it was time to settle the issue, the MEK was still pushing for the captive diplomats to be put on trial. The group used to claim that its support for the kidnappings was an elaborate pretence; now it denies it altogether. As for the killings, it says that at the time of the murders, its main leadership had been imprisoned by the shah, which allowed a Marxist faction to hijack the organisation. This faction, effectively a splinter group, carried out the killings, and the attacks ceased when the original leadership was freed and reasserted itself. But perhaps these disputes are moot. The 1970s were a long time ago. Organisations change.

The MEK may have stopped killing Americans, but it maintained its commitment to violent struggle in Iraq and Iran. Its efforts on behalf of Saddam Hussein against the Kurds and the Shias were a sideshow compared to the bombs, assassinations and broader offensives it mounted inside Iran throughout the late 1980s and 1990s. Its violent history is well documented but the organisation insists it's a thing of the past. This view has received substantial support from the European courts. In 2007, the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission, a specialised UK legal body, declared that the MEK had renounced the use of force and upheld the group's appeal against a Foreign Office decision to keep it on the official list of terrorist organisations. In 2009, the EU delisted the MEK on the more limited, procedural grounds that it should have been told why it was put on the list in the first place.

To keep the group on the US list Hillary Clinton will have to find



MEK
Uncovered

507



that the MEK still has the capacity or intent to commit terrorist acts. Its supporters point out that, as well as convincing a British court they are now peaceful, in July 2004 every member at Camp Ashraf signed a document rejecting violence and terrorism. Critics have their doubts. Given what happens at Guantánamo and Bagram air base, they point out, it would have been surprising if members had not signed a renunciation of terrorism. In November 2004, the FBI reported on the group's activities in Los Angeles, stating that it had recorded phone calls in which the MEK leadership in France discussed 'specific acts of terrorism to include bombings'. The FBI claimed that French intelligence, as well as police in Cologne, had gathered similar information with wiretaps. The 2004 FBI report has been public for a year, but most of the material on which Clinton will base her decision is classified. In 2010, the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled on an MEK lawsuit, and one of the three judges, Karen LeCraft Henderson, remarked that classified material provided 'substantial support' for the view that the MEK continues to engage in terrorism or at least retains the capability and intent to do so. A report in February on NBC News cited unnamed US officials as claiming that the MEK had been responsible for the recent assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists. While some of its US supporters hint that such actions would be to its credit, the organisation itself has denied involvement.

Raymond Tanter's book is part of the MEK's image management campaign, a briefing document for advocates of delisting. Tanter, a long-time supporter of the group, has produced a compact guide, complete with colour pictures and transcripts of speeches by paid MEK advocates. He doesn't deal with the 1970s attacks or the help the organisation gave Saddam. He also glides over attacks in Iran in the 1990s. Tanter believes that under US law only recent years are relevant to the question of whether or not to delist, and he focuses on the period since 2001. He argues that the MEK offers the best hope of

a so-called third option: a way for the US to achieve regime change without relying on sanctions or war. But this exposes a flaw in the argument of the pro-MEK lobbyists. On the one hand, they argue that the MEK has renounced force and should be delisted. But if it really has given up violence, would it not make more sense for the US to back the peaceful protesters who have a proven capability to mobilise huge numbers in contemporary Iran – the Green Movement? In reality the MEK's US backers believe the organisation has potential precisely because of its history of using force. That's what they think will shift the mullahs from power.

Since there are no reliable opinion polls in Iran, it's unclear how much support the MEK has there. Supporters insist it has a strong network inside the country and has maintained its popular base. They argue that the regime would not heap so much abuse on it if it did not fear it. The group's critics maintain that the regime merely despises it and uses it to advance conspiracy theories about foreign plots. The MEK's decision to fight alongside Saddam in the Iran-Iraq war, they say, cost it considerable support.

Clinton will not be able to ignore political considerations. The MEK lobby is predicting that MEK activists in Iraq will be massacred. Should Iraq mount another attack on MEK members at Camp Ashraf or should the group provoke one, or stage one, the response from the MEK lobby will be fierce. The State Department's current priority is to ensure that Camp Ashraf residents are safely moved to Liberty. In February, Clinton said a successful transfer 'will be a key factor in any decision regarding the MEK's Foreign Terrorist Organisation status'. Legally, this makes no sense. What does their agreement to leave Camp Ashraf say about the group's desire or ability to carry out terrorist attacks? Nothing. But it reveals the State Department's real fear: that out of malice or because of some MEK provocation the Iraqis will attack the MEK for a third time and the State Department will be denounced for ignoring all

the warnings. In May, the State Department went so far as to say that it was looking favourably at delisting as long as MEK continues to evacuate its members from Ashraf.

What the statements suggest is that Clinton has all but made up her mind to delist the group – the MEK’s hard work has not been in vain. There’s something else to bear in mind. As one world-weary observer in Washington put it recently, ‘Hillary Clinton is a politico. Right now a lot of her colleagues and associates are making good money from the MEK. They won’t appreciate it if she removes the trough.’ Were the MEK to be delisted, the group could, like Chalabi’s INC before it, receive Congressional funding, and the Rajavis would be seen as likely candidates for office in any government formed after the mullahs’ fall.

A decade ago Donald Rumsfeld and the neocons were so in thrall to the INC’s Ahmed Chalabi that they provided helicopters to bring him and a band of diehard supporters to Nasiriya so he could be seen personally liberating Iraq. But when they landed, it was plain that none of the locals had ever heard of him. Chalabi was beaten to the top job by another former exile, Nouri al-Maliki, and had to satisfy himself with the Oil Ministry. Al-Maliki is now establishing himself as an authoritarian pro-Iranian leader: an outcome far removed from US objectives. But the never-say-die MEK lobbyists in Washington like to look on the bright side. Chalabi, they concede, was not what they thought. But this time it’s different. One retired US colonel who campaigns for the MEK likes to compare Maryam Rajavi with George Washington. The US may be about to demonstrate that once again it has failed to learn its lesson.



US warns dissident Mujahideen-e Khalq to leave Iraq camp

June 2012

The United States has warned an Iranian dissident group to leave a camp in Iraq where they have been based in exile, if it hopes to be removed from a US terrorist list.

The Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) has been campaigning to have its name removed from a list of terrorist groups.

Leaving Camp Ashraf in Iraq is one of the conditions set by the US in return for it considering delisting the MEK.

So far 2,000 MEK members have moved to a camp set up by the Iraqi government

But between 1,200 and 1,400 residents remain at Camp Ashraf and the US State Department said all of them must transfer to Camp Hurriya, which is run by Iraqi authorities in order for there to be progress in their petition to be removed from the terrorism blacklist.

The MEK, also known as the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI) led a guerrilla campaign against the US-backed Shah of Iran during the 1970s and also opposed Iran's clerical leaders who replaced the Shah.

It was given refuge in Iraq by Saddam Hussein but has fallen out of favour with Iraq's Shia-dominated leadership, which is taking steps to expel them.

Court order

MEK
Uncovered

511



The group was listed as a foreign terrorist organisation by the United States in 1997. But the MEK has insisted that it has renounced violence and has lobbied fiercely in Washington to gain congressional support for its delisting.

Last month a US appeals court ordered Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to decide within four months whether the group should be removed from the US terror blacklist, describing Ms Clinton’s delay in acting on the MEK’s petition as “egregious”. But according to reports, the MEK has halted its transfer from Camp Ashraf and has reduced contact with the Iraqi government and the United Nations, which is helping to process their refugee status.

“Cooperation in the closure of Camp Ashraf ... is a key factor in determining whether the organization remains invested in its violent past or is committed to leaving that past behind,” State Department Spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in a statement.

Global Research

Center for Research on Globalization
globalresearch.ca / globalresearch.org

US Sponsored Terrorists: The Menacing Plots of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) against Iran

June 2012

The ill-omened, inauspicious plots of the terrorist gang Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization against Iran seem to have no end. The recent letter signed by 44 U.S. Senators addressed to President Obama in which it was implied that time for diplomacy with Iran is over and other options to deal with Iran's nuclear program should be considered to be a magnum opus of MKO. The website of Habilian, a non-governmental organization which represents the families of 17,000 terror victims of Iran, has recently published a news story, suggesting that the affiliates of MKO are behind the letter which near to half of the U.S. Senators signed and requested President Obama to end diplomatic efforts and dialogue with Iran and consider other options in dealing with the country's nuclear standoff.

The pro-Zionist Senator Roy Blunt who has made fanatic statements in support of Israeli regime and enjoys strong ties to the Iranian-American Cultural Association of Missouri, an MKO affiliated organization, was the mastermind of the letter to President Obama.

MEK
Uncovered

513



Blunt’s website introduces the Senator as a staunch supporter of Israeli regime, saying that he “believes America’s strongest ally in the Middle East is the democracy in the state of Israel, an alliance that dates back to Harry S Truman.”

In the introductory page of his website, it’s further mentioned that “Iran’s ongoing rush to become a nuclear power poses a terrible danger to the region and certainly to Israel... the United States must not allow Iran or any other dictatorship to develop nuclear weapons that can be used against us or our allies.”

Now, having in mind Blunt’s unwavering sponsorship of Israel and his clandestine relations with MKO, one may seriously suspect that the hostile letter which the U.S. Senators blindly put their signatures on was spearheaded by MKO.

The website of UK Committee in Support of Ashraf which is a London-based organization that advocates regime change in Iran and has voiced its support for the members of MKO organization has published articles and interviews by Roy Blunt and proposed the idea of removing MKO from the State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations.

According to a report published on May 24 on the group’s website, Roy Blunt told a Senate briefing that the decision for delisting MKO should be made as soon as possible and that there’s no evidence confirming the “allegation” that residents of Camp Ashraf in Iraq possess weapons.



In his opening remarks, Roy Blunt said, “We’re talking about MEK and Camp Ashraf... we’re talking about people in Iran who have a tremendous desire for freedom and democracy.” In a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in March 2012, the Missouri Republican had formally requested “a detailed briefing regarding the State Department’s review of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq” (MEK) designation under section 219.” He had noted that “if no satisfactory public or classified information exists to sustain our designation of the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization, it is my belief that the time has come to remove it from the list.”

These MKO-associated groups are actively lobbying to convince the Iraqi government, through pressures by Obama administration, to relocate the members of MKO who are now residing in Camp Ashraf, a refugee camp in Iraq’s Diyala province, to another country and provide them with security and shelter. They are afraid that Iraq may hand in the members of the terrorist organization to Iran which unquestionably will be followed by their legal prosecution.

The UKCSA (the UK-based group which supports MKO) calls Iranian government extremist and talks of the members of MKO as freedom and peace warriors who want to bring democracy to their fellow citizens in Iran. The irony is the name of these very “peace warriors” was until recently on the European Union’s list of terrorist organizations. EU removed MKO’s name from that list in 2009 in an attempt to pressure Iran over its nuclear program and demoralize, undermine the Iranian government.

MKO is responsible for the killing of hundreds of innocent Iranian civilians and government officials including former judiciary chief, Ayatollah Beheshti.

It’s also said that MKO has played a role in the killing of Iran’s nuclear scientist, Dr. Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan. Referring to the January 11 assassination of Dr. Ahmadi Roshan, Richard Silverstein, a senior Jewish American journalist wrote in his blog



, “my own confidential Israeli source confirms today’s murder was the work of the Mossad and MKO, as have been a number of previous operations I’ve reported here.”

On February 10, the U.S. paper New York Post wrote that MKO leaders deserve a Nobel Peace Prize for their role in the assassination of Iran’s nuclear scientists: “were the MEK (MKO) to play the critical role in derailing an Iranian bomb, it would be far more deserving of a Nobel Peace Prize than a certain president of the United States we could mention.”

The animosity and hostility of the MKO with the people of Iran needs no evidence or proof. They spare no effort to damage the security of Iran and realize their devilish plans. It’s time for the international community to mindfully confront MKO and stop them from furthering their dangerous plots in the future.



Forever in Exile: The Iranian Mujahideen-e Khalq

July 2012

The Mujahideen-e Khalq will never have the necessary popular grassroots to carry the banner of a future revolution against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

With the failure of yet another round of nuclear talks and the Islamic Republic of Iran remaining ever more defiant, sentiments in the West may once again shift to regime change and positioning opposition groups as alternatives to the current leadership. The Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian Islamic-leftist terrorist organization, is one of the major such opposition groups to the current regime in Iran.

Espousing a controversial blend of Islamic-Marxism and claimed secular outlook, the MEK originated from anti-Shah university students. It later adapted into the cultish militant group of the 1990s and eventually into the self-described liberal-Islamic alternative to the regime that exists in Tehran today. Continuing an apparent metamorphosis, the MEK and its associates claim to have shirked their original anti-Western roots and now seek recognition by the international system in their struggle to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Iran and to establish an apparent democratic society with secular ideals. From their current base of operations in Iraq and around the world, the MEK continue to fight a battle for legitimacy and identity through a well-funded lobbying campaign to gain the favor of the West and facilitate opposition to the Islamic Republic. Still,

MEK
Uncovered

517



the MEK's violent history and Iran's long cultural memory do not bode well for its prospects of acceptance by Iranians as an alternative to the authoritarian state. Thus, while it will continue to expediently transform, it is unlikely that the MEK can effectively rebrand its image to suit the Iranian people. This can be attributed to its violent history, cultish overtones, and cooperation with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war.

Enemy of the State

The MEK's ideology has been developing since the group emerged in 1963. Initially, the organization sought to antagonize what it perceived as a US–Shah dependent relationship. Violent undercurrents were evident in their efforts as some members underwent combat training with fighters from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). By 1972 two failed attacks on the regime brought reprisals as the SAVAK — the Shah's secret police — imprisoned half their members. The militant trend continued as the MEK's terrorist attacks and street fighting, with Westerners also in the crosshairs, contributed to the overthrow of the Shah. In the consolidation of power after the Shah fell, the MEK positioned itself as ideologically antithetical to the proponents of an Islamic republic, and thus suffered additional retaliations.

The group eventually dissolved and its remaining leadership

fled from the hostility of the Islamic regime. In 1981, the leaders escaped to Paris and completed the transition of the MEK from a grassroots peoples' movement to a cultish organization focusing on an armed attrition. From their base of operations, the MEK fought a "tit for tat" with Hezbollah, engaging Iranian targets across the world.

From Terrorists to Traitors

While the MEK has an extensive public history of violence in Iran, the pinnacle of its repugnance in the eyes of many Iranians came during its cooperation with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Chased out of Iran, the MEK settled under the wing of the Ba'athist regime in the 1980s. From Iraq, the National Liberation Army (NLA), the paramilitary wing of the group, carried out military excursions and over the horizon attacks on Iran. Directly fighting against their countrymen while guests of Saddam, the MEK reached a new low for Iranians as it became allies with one of Iran's most hated enemies in one of her bloodiest wars.

After the Iran-Iraq War, the counterstrike between Iran and the MEK continued well into the 1990s. Military incursions into Iran were met with an MEK base falling victim to Iranian airpower. In response, 13 Iranian embassies were targeted by the MEK. Other attacks inside Iran, such as bombings and assassinations, continued throughout the decade.

In 2002, the MEK released corroborated intelligence that Iran was covertly enriching uranium, seeking to gain the favor of the West and to undermine Tehran. Today, the MEK remains on the US State Department's terrorism list, and its personnel in Iraq at Camp Ashraf remain in a dangerous state of flux while their fate is debated in a newly hostile Iraq. Despite the publically uneasy relations with Western governments, the MEK reportedly maintains a partnership with international intelligence agencies in a covert sabotage and espionage effort against Iran's nuclear program.

As the MEK continues to weather hostility from the Iraqi gov-





ernment, it also fights a different kind of battle for legitimacy from the West. The MEK's old hostility towards the West has been supplanted by a professional and well-funded public relations campaign to convince Western policy elites of a reformation from a violent past and of the MEK's new status as a viable democratic opposition group to the Islamic Republic.

Regardless of whether these claims of rebirth are true, the MEK faces huge obstacles in its struggle for legitimacy in the hearts and minds of the Iranian people. Its violent history of political resistance and its treasonous relationship with Saddam has left a stubborn sense of loathing for the organization within Iranian consciousness. The animosity and mistrust for the MEK will be persistent as history shows that the proud Persian culture does not take such interference and hostility lightly. For Iranians, past "insults" persist within their cultural memory; the Arab invasion of the Sassanid Empire in the 7th century is still lamented to this day in Iranian culture as a grand affront against Persian heritage. In modern times, Iranian's have felt their sovereignty was being infringed upon due to the great game in Iran being played by Russia, Britain and the US. Indeed, this has not been forgotten either.

Perhaps most salient is the American led coup d'état of Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953, which resulted in a still seething animosity and blow-back, which helped trigger the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Furthermore, Iranians are very nationalistic, and in dire straits, such as during the Iran-Iraq War, they have supported their country despite reservations towards the new Islamic Republic. It is thus unlikely that the proud Iranian public will forget the MEK's violent, cultish and treasonous past.

Although clouded by the intense propaganda from both the Islamic Republic and the MEK, there appears to be very little love or sympathy for the MEK from Iranians. These sentiments are practical corroborators of the theoretical possibility that, despite its resistance to the hated Iranian regime, the MEK will

continue to receive its share of animosity from Iranians.

If not mass popular appeal, the MEK does have impressive funding and apparent support from entities not well disposed to the Iranian regime. However, without a grassroots momentum, the MEK can never become the viable superstructure of an opposition movement that some in the West, who ignore the MEK's failings for the potential prize of overthrowing the Islamic Republic, hope for.

In fact, it need not be. The Green Movement protests of 2009 showed that Iranians from all walks of life can assemble and resist tyranny without having to solidify under tainted ideological groups like the MEK.

That is not to say that MEK has no role in Iran's future. In the past, revolutionary scale resistance movements in Iran have been populist amalgamations of varied and diverse groups from both the right and the left. If the cauldron of popular dissent once more reaches a critical point in Iran, the MEK cannot hope to completely — ideologically and fundamentally — encompass what will surely be a larger and more diverse enterprise. Nonetheless, that reality does not preclude it from some role in fighting with their fellow Iranians, as they have in the past, for a free future.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Fair Observer's editorial policy.



The Cult of MEK

July 2012

The Mujahedin-e Khalq is trying to steer its supporters in the United States toward war, which shows that the enemy of our enemy is not our friend.

The Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) is in the news again. Images of Newt Gingrich bowing to the Iranian dissident group's leader, Maryam Rajavi, after speaking to MEK members at a Paris rally, and Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page's unauthorized, paid speech at the same event have brought renewed attention to the MEK's expensive (and possibly illegal) lobbying operation in Washington.

Gingrich and Page aren't the only high-profile figures the MEK has enlisted in its bid to get off the State Department's foreign terrorist organization list. The group has persuaded a number of onetime officials, including former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former Homeland Security Adviser Francis Fragos Townsend, former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, and former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, to argue its case. These public figures have taken money, in some cases more than \$30,000 per speech, to speak on the group's behalf. As a result, the U.S. Treasury Department has begun to look into the fees, because, according to the Supreme Court, "advocacy performed in coordination with, or at the direction of, a foreign terrorist organization" constitutes the federal crime of "material support of terrorism." The speakers have also failed to register as lob-

MEK
Uncovered

522



byists under the Foreign Agent Registration Act, and there is an increasing push for criminal investigations.

As it turns out, however, many of the public figures openly admit that they did not know much about the MEK when they agreed to attend the events. Many were invited by suspected MEK front groups with names such as the Organizing Committee for Convention for Democracy in Iran and the Iranian American Community of North Texas, and they approached the ex-officials through their agents. Former chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and co-chair of the 9/11 Commission Lee Hamilton, who also spoke in support of the MEK, told The New York Times, "I don't know a lot about the group." Clarence Page told ProPublica that he thought he was giving a talk on promoting democracy and regime change in Iran.

Accidentally or not, though, the speakers were helping to raise the profile and legitimize the aims of a cult group that will not bring democracy to Iran and has no popular support in the country. And while the latest news stories on the MEK highlight its immediate goal of getting off the terrorist list, they miss the group's real aim: to have the United States install the MEK as Iran's new government. That would mean war. The MEK may deny wanting violent regime change, but the only conceivable way it could become the next government in Tehran would be at the head of a U.S. invasion force.

Advertisement





Once upon a time, the MEK did enjoy some measure of popular support in Iran. But after getting shoved aside by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's party after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the MEK spent the next two decades launching terrorist attacks against the new regime and its military, harming bystanders in several instances. The MEK joined sides with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), moving to camps in Iraq in 1986 and fighting against Iranian conscripts. Frustrated that Saddam failed to install it in power in Tehran by the end of the war, the MEK attempted its own invasion of Iran (using more of Saddam Hussein's military munificence), resulting in the death of thousands of its members. These acts destroyed the MEK's credibility among Iranians. Trapped in the Iraqi desert, the group's leaders transformed the MEK into a cult after the failed invasion—engaging in such practices as mandated divorce and celibacy, sleep deprivation, public shaming, separation of families, and information control—and continued its terrorist attacks in Iran.

Now the MEK, through its Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran, has ramped up its public-relations campaign to convince the outside world that it is the biggest Iranian opposition group, one dedicated to the values of Western liberal democracy. (It just happens to have a parliament-in-waiting and a president-elect—Rajavi, of course.) To bolster its case, the MEK inflames fears of a nuclear Iran, consistently claiming that the country has an ongoing nuclear-weapons program, notwithstanding the opposite, unanimous opinion of U.S., European, and Israeli officials and the Iranian supreme leader's fatwa against building one.

It remains to be seen if the MEK's costly lobbying campaign will pay off. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has until October 1 to decide whether to keep the MEK on the foreign terrorist organization list; otherwise, a federal court will automatically delist it. That's just a few short weeks before the presidential election. Republican candidate Mitt Romney claimed in De-

ember that he had never heard of the MEK. Nevertheless, he is using the question of Iranian nukes—kept in the public eye by the MEK and its shills—in a desperate effort to make President Barack Obama look weak on national-security issues. Romney has also surrounded himself with a hawkish national-security team that includes several MEK supporters, such as Bush administration veterans like former U.N. Representative John Bolton, who believes that engagement with Tehran is “delusional” and that “the only real alternative to a nuclear Iran is pre-emptive military force”—the sooner the better. Bolton’s writings suggest that he hopes that the so-called P5+1 talks over Iran’s nuclear program will fail. (The next round of negotiations is next week.)

But the MEK’s supporters and other hawks who insist on wanting regime change in Iran need to understand that, in this case, the enemy of my enemy is not my friend. The MEK is a bad ally. It has been a bad ally in peace, and it would be a bad ally in war and reconstruction. Aligning ourselves with the MEK would undermine any attempt at credibility among Iranians because it would make us look like dupes. The public figures who have spoken in support of the MEK are dangerously mistaken when they describe the group as “a force for good, and the best hope we have” (Rendell) and “a massive worldwide movement for liberty in Iran” (Gingrich). On the contrary, this deceptive foreign cult is pouring millions of dollars into an effort to steer the United States toward war.





John Bolton Shockingly Denies Being a ‘Terrorist Supporter’

August 2012

The American Conservative’s Jordon Bloom ran into a befuddled John Bolton at the Republican National Convention yesterday and had a timely question for him:

He was on his way in to observe the speeches, and I knew he wouldn’t have much time to answer more than a question or two in passing. So I asked the most important one: given the definition laid out in *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, was he at all concerned that his advocacy on behalf of the Iranian dissident group the MEK could be defined as material support for terrorism under the PATRIOT Act?

Bolton, visibly flustered at the suggestion that he is a terrorist supporter, disputed the premise before cutting me off:

“I don’t know what you’re up to, but you’re flatly wrong, and I’m busy, so if you’ll excuse me.”

He is indeed a busy man, but if he ever cares to take some time out of his day to explain why I’m wrong, my email is [jbloom\[at\]theamericanconservative.com](mailto:jbloom@theamericanconservative.com). Or he could take it up with Glenn Greenwald or Larison.

Oh, how I’d love such an inquiry from Bolton. Perhaps Jordan could also ask why Bolton’s former employer, George W. Bush, included Saddam Hussein’s support for terrorists like MEK in his propaganda justifying the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

MEK
Uncovered

526

ANTI WAR.BLOG **HIGHLIGHTS** **BREAKING NEWS** **SCOTT HORTON SHOW**

The Big Breakthrough
 Americans are getting impatient. They want President Obama to take a strong stand against the Islamic State.
 The Rise of Israel's New Messianic Elite
 The rise of Israel's new Messianic elite is causing a major shift in the Middle East.
 There Only One Solution to the TSA
 The only way to solve the TSA problem is to get rid of it.
 Offensive on ISIS-Held Fallujah Begins
 The offensive on ISIS-held Fallujah has begun. The city is expected to be recaptured in the next few days.
 Kurd-Arab Fighting in Syria Out of Control
 The fighting between Kurds and Arabs in Syria is out of control. The situation is becoming increasingly volatile.
 Assad's Death Penalty Should Apply to Jews
 If Assad is executed, the death penalty should apply to all those who have supported him.
 Iraq Star II
 The second season of the Iraq Star II is under way. The show is expected to be a major success.
 Suicide Terrorists
 Suicide terrorists are still a major threat to the world. They must be stopped before they can cause more damage.
 Folly: Barack Rich
 Barack Obama's foreign policy is a major folly. It has led to the deaths of thousands of innocent people.

Antiwar.com Home About Antiwar.com Donate Blog US Constitution Contact Latest News

John Bolton Shockingly Denies Being a 'Terrorist Supporter'

John Glenn, August 29, 2014

[Print This](#) | [Share This](#) | [Comment](#)

The American Conservative's Jordan Bloom ran into a befuddled John Bolton at the Republican National Convention yesterday and had a timely question for him:

He was on his way in to observe the speeches, and I knew he wouldn't have much time to answer more than a question or two in passing. So I asked the most important one, given the definition laid out in *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, was he at all concerned that his advocacy on behalf of the Iranian dissident group the MEK could be defined as material support for terrorism under the PATRIOT Act?



redcappi

- Create, send and track amazing looking emails and newsletters in minutes
- On average email marketing ROI is 34% for every \$1 spent
- 30% off your first month's subscription, use coupon code **RED30OFF**

SIGN UP FREE

SEARCH

SEARCH

redcappi

BLOGROLL

- Kevin Carson
- Will Sings
- Jesse Walter
- James Landrith
- Nathanael Hawthorne
- Fathery

“Iraq shelters terrorist groups including the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization,” reads a document in the archives of the White House’s website, “which has used terrorist violence against Iran and in the 1970s was responsible for killing several U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilians.” Is Bolton proud of this point of commonality between him and Saddam?

MEK
Uncovered

527



Watergate Journalist Carl Bernstein Spoke at Event Supporting Iranian ‘Terrorist’ Group

MEK
Uncovered

528

August 2012

Update, Sept. 21, 2012: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has decided to remove the MEK from the U.S. government list of foreign terrorist organizations, CNN reports, marking a victory for the group and the dozens of former officials who have been paid to speak at events urging the policy shift. Clinton was up against a court-imposed October 1 deadline to make a decision about whether the MEK should remain on the list. The decision has not been officially announced, but an unnamed U.S. official told CNN: “We don’t love these people but the secretary’s decision is merited based on the record of facts that we have.”

On a Saturday afternoon last February, journalist Carl Bernstein got up on stage at the grand ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria in Manhattan and delivered a speech questioning the listing of an obscure Iranian group called the Mujahadin-e Khalq (MEK) on the U.S. government list of officially designated foreign terrorist organizations.

The speech, before a crowd an organizer put at 1,500, made Bernstein one of the few journalists who has appeared at



events in a years-long campaign by MEK supporters to free the group from the official terrorist label and the legal sanctions that come with it. He told ProPublica that he was paid \$12,000 for the appearance but that, “I was not there as an advocate.”

Bernstein told the crowd that, “I come here as an advocate of the best obtainable version of the truth” and as “someone who believes in basic human rights and their inalienable status.” He also challenged the State Department, saying that if the agency “has evidence that the MEK is a terrorist organization, have a show-cause hearing in court, let them prove it.”

Joining him on stage at the Park Avenue hotel was a decorated group including former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former congressman Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, and former House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-III.

Bernstein’s speech, reprinted on the website of another pro-MEK group under the title “The Kafkaesque Nature of Things,” compared the presence of the MEK on the terrorist list to his parents’ experience belonging to a group that was on a U.S. government list of subversive organizations during the McCarthy era.

“So I know, like you, what it means to be designated a certain way and your cause and your purpose misunderstood, twisted, and turned into something that it is not,” he said. “When, in





fact, the evil, the terrorism, the real terrorism, is in the heart of Tehran, not in this room.”

In an interview, Bernstein told ProPublica that the pro-MEK events are “obviously ... part of a lobbying campaign” but his speech was “largely about using the designation of terrorist and subversive organizations as a smokescreen for other things.” He said that stories focusing on speakers at pro-MEK events rather than on “the substance of what the controversy is” amounted to “journalistic McCarthyism.”

ProPublica reported in July that syndicated columnist Clarence Page had spoken at a large rally in Paris featuring MEK leader Maryam Rajavi; after we reached out to Page, he said he would reimburse his \$20,000 speaker’s fee, and the Chicago Tribune reprimanded him for violating the company ethics code.

Bernstein is a contributing editor at Vanity Fair and writes periodically for Newsweek. A Vanity Fair spokeswoman said the magazine does not have a policy governing outside work of its contributors. A Newsweek spokesman did not respond to a request for comment. Bernstein has not written or spoken about MEK issues apart from the paid appearance at the Waldorf Astoria.

A news release issued after the event by the organizing group, the Global Initiative for Democracy, ran under the headline “Bipartisan Group of U.S. Leaders Calls on State Department to Remove Iranian Dissidents From Terror List” and quoted Bernstein.

“What is news here is [that the failure to delist] is serving the purpose of the Iranian regime. That is news,” the release said, attributing the statement to “famed Watergate journalist Carl Bernstein.”

In the past few years, pro-MEK groups have marshaled considerable financial resources to bring high-profile speakers to an unending stream of rallies and other events in the U.S. and Europe. The pro-MEK campaign has taken on new prom-

inence against the backdrop of the nuclear standoff involving the U.S., Israel and Iran, whose government is a sworn enemy of the MEK.

The group, sometimes described as cult-like by critics, is blamed by the State Department for killing Americans in several attacks in Iran in the 1970s and in attacking Iranian targets through the early 2000s. The MEK now says it has renounced violence and has sued to be removed from the terrorist list. (Bernstein's speech also referred to the "murderous bureaucracy" that runs Iran, "against whom the MEK has courageously fought.")

The public push in the U.S. is notable both because it has brought together a large bipartisan group of former top military officials and veteran politicians from both parties and also because of the large sums of money paid for those appearances. For example, former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, a Democrat, received \$160,000 for appearing at seven pro-MEK rallies and conferences, his office confirmed to NBC in March. Each event typically involves five to 10 former officials who speak in favor of removing the group from the terrorist list. The typical fee for a speaker at one of the events has been in the \$20,000 range, according to news reports. Pro-MEK groups are thought to have spent millions of dollars on the events in recent years.

The Americans speaking at pro-MEK events have generally not included journalists, except for Page and Bernstein. It's common for prominent journalists to have contracts with speaker bureaus and deliver lectures for pay; Bernstein said, "I speak before all kinds of groups."

NBC reported in March that firms representing two speakers who appeared alongside Bernstein at the Waldorf Astoria event — former FBI Director Louis Freeh and former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Hugh Shelton — had received subpoenas as part of a Treasury Department inquiry into the source of money for pro-MEK events.





The New York City-based Greater Talent Network, which represents Freeh and reportedly received one of the subpoenas, also represents Bernstein. The agency did not respond to phone calls, but Bernstein told ProPublica he has not been contacted about any legal action and he is not part of the group of pro-MEK speakers that has hired former Solicitor General Seth Waxman to represent them in the matter.

Treasury Department spokesman John Sullivan told ProPublica the agency does not comment on potential investigations. “The MEK is a designated terrorist group; therefore U.S. persons are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with or providing services to this group,” he said. “The Treasury Department takes sanctions enforcement seriously and routinely investigates potential violations of sanctions laws.”

So who paid for the Waldorf Astoria event?

Bruce McColm, president of the Global Initiative for Democracy, told ProPublica in an email: “Resources for the event were provided by the Iranian-American community in New Jersey, New York, Northern California and Texas.”

McColm added that “[t]he financial arrangements for speakers were handled by the Iranian-American Community. For the legal at heart, there were no funds provided by NCRI/MEK or any other so-called front groups.” NCRI stands for National Council of Resistance of Iran and is recognized by the State Department as an alias for the MEK.

McColm is a former executive director of Freedom House, a pro-democracy group he left in the early 1990s. In recent years, he has worked for the government of Equatorial Guinea and served as a member of the Iran Policy Committee, which advocates putting support for the MEK at the center of U.S. policy toward Iran.

The Global Initiative for Democracy was incorporated in Virginia last November. The Alexandria-based group’s mission statement says it “engages in wide ranging activities nationwide to promote the cause of democracy, human rights, re-

ligious tolerance, and cultural and artistic diversity in Iran as well as to ensure the safety and security of political refugees and asylum-seekers.”

But, much like other groups that have organized pro-MEK events, the Global Initiative for Democracy appears to be primarily focused on the MEK. The only other event detailed on the group’s website was a pro-MEK event held at a Washington hotel in May and featuring former ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton and former State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley, among others. News stories featured on the group’s website mostly involve the MEK.

A decision by the Obama administration on the MEK’s status is expected soon.

Citing two unnamed American officials, The New York Times reported earlier this month that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was preparing to possibly redesignate the MEK as a terrorist group, partly because of the failure of the MEK to fully vacate the group’s home in Iraq, called Camp Ashraf, to a new location.

The Iraqi government wants hundreds of MEK members to leave the camp and, ultimately, the country. MEK members first found haven in Iraq in the 1980s during the rule of Saddam Hussein, who armed the group and, according to the State Department, “deployed thousands of MEK fighters in suicidal, waves of attacks against Iranian forces” in the Iran-Iraq war. The group now has an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 members worldwide.

The most recent acts of violence committed by the MEK were “regular mortar attacks and hit-and-run raids against Iranian military and law enforcement personnel” near the Iran-Iraq border in 2001, according to the State Department’s annual terrorism report. French authorities also arrested 160 MEK members in 2003 “at operational bases they believed the MEK was using to coordinate financing and planning for terrorist attacks.”





By law, an organization can be placed on the list of foreign terrorist organizations if it engages in terrorist activity or “or retain[s] the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism.” In the waning days of the Bush administration in 2009, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice denied an MEK petition to be removed from the list.

The State Department’s coordinator for counterterrorism, Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, told reporters in July that the closure of Camp Ashraf would be a key factor informing the agency’s decision because “the history and the use of Ashraf is that of an MEK paramilitary base.”

“It’s where the MEK had its heavy weaponry and from which it carried out a number of military operations during the reign of Saddam Hussein,” he said. “The MEK’s relocation will assist the Secretary in determining whether the organization remains invested in its violent past or is committed to leaving that past behind.”

After several years of legal wrangling, a federal appeals court in June ordered that Clinton must decide on the MEK’s status by Oct. 1. If she fails to take action, the court said it would delist the MEK itself. The order also criticized Clinton for putting off a decision on the MEK, calling the delay “egregious.”

In a petition to the court, the MEK’s lawyers said the group’s leadership decided to end all use of violence in 2001. It also pointed to decisions by Britain and the European Union in 2008 and 2009 to declassify the MEK as a terrorist group.

State Department set to take violent Iranian group off terror list

September 2012

Secretary of State Clinton is set to announce that the Iranian group Mujahideen al-Khalq (MEK) will no longer be on the State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organization list. The move comes after a high-profile, years-long lobbying campaign by a bipartisan cast of U.S. politicians and officials to delist MEK, despite a violent past that includes killing Americans.

CNN breaks the story:

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is expected to notify Congress as early as Friday that she intends to take the Iranian exile group Mujahedin-e-Khalq, or MEK, off a State Department terror list, three senior administration officials told CNN. The notification will be followed by a formal de-listing from the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in the coming days.

The move to delist MEK comes just five days after the last remaining residents of Camp Ashraf in Iraq agreed to leave for a new camp in Iraq. MEK members had been staying in the camp, much to the displeasure of the Iraqi government and the U.S. government. Iraqi security forces' attempts to enter the camp in the past have resulted in violent clashes. The continued presence of MEK members in Camp Ashraf had been a

MEK
Uncovered

535



major headache for U.S. officials. CNN notes that Clinton “has said several times that her decision would be guided, in part, by whether the group moves peacefully from Camp Ashraf.”

The decision by Clinton is sure to aggravate Iranian-U.S. tensions at a time of continued negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program.

MEK has been tied to the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists. In February, NBC News reported that “deadly attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists are being carried out by an Iranian dissident group [the MEK] that is financed, trained and armed by Israel’s secret service.” While NBC quoted U.S. officials as saying the “U.S. has no direct involvement” in the assassinations, the New Yorker’s Seymour Hersh reported that the US military trained members of the group in Nevada in 2005. Hersh also reported that, according to an unnamed former official, intelligence continued to be passed on to the group from the U.S.

The delisting of MEK comes after a high-profile campaign waged by a host of Republicans, Democrats, U.S. officials and Israel advocates. Politicians like Newt Gingrich and Howard Dean and journalists like Clarence Page and Carl Bernstein have all given speeches, many of them paid, to advocate for

the delisting of MEK.

The money being given to U.S. advocates was the subject of a Treasury Department investigation into whether people like former governor of Pennsylvania Ed Rendell violated U.S. law that prohibits doing business with terrorist groups.

In February, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported on the Israel angle of the lobbying campaign:

Famed attorney Alan Dershowitz, former Canadian Justice Minister Irwin Cotler, Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel — three prominent Jewish activists who have joined with other prominent people in a bid to remove a group with a blood-soaked history from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

The names on the growing list of influential American advocates to de-list the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK — known in English as the National Council of Resistance of Iran — suggest an effort to give the bid a pro-Israel imprimatur.

UPDATE: The National Iranian American Council weighs in: The National Iranian American Council (NIAC) deplores the decision to remove the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) from the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations. The decision opens the door to Congressional funding of the MEK to conduct terrorist attacks in Iran, makes war with Iran far more likely, and will seriously damage Iran's peaceful pro-democracy movement as well as America's standing among ordinary Iranians. "The biggest winner today is the Iranian regime, which has claimed for a long time that the U.S. is out to destroy Iran and is the enemy of the Iranian people. This decision will be portrayed as proof that the U.S. is cozying up with a reviled terrorist group and will create greater receptivity for that false argument," said NIAC Policy Director Jamal Abdi.



Members of Iran’s democratic opposition, Iran experts, human rights defenders, and former U.S. officials have warned that delisting the MEK “will have harmful consequences on the legitimate, indigenous Iranian opposition.” Kaleme, a leading pro-democracy newspaper in Iran run by supporters of the opposition Green Movement, has warned that support for the MEK strengthens the Iranian regime. According to the opposition paper, “there is no organization, no party and no cult more infamous than the MEK amongst the Iranian nation.



State Department Officially Removing MEK From US Terror List

September 2012

MEK supporters in front of the US State Department on August 26, 2011. Photo by Asawin Suebsaeng

After a few months of will-they-won't-they tension, the US State Department decided on Friday to officially remove the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) from the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list, which the Iranian exile group has been on for the past 15 years.

CNN broke the story:

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is expected to notify Congress as early as Friday that she intends to take the [MEK]... off a State Department terror list, three senior administration officials told CNN...MEK was placed on the US terrorism list in 1997 because of the killing of six Americans in Iran in the 1970s and an attempted attack against the Iranian mission to the United Nations in 1992. However, since 2004, the United States has considered the residents of Camp Ashraf [in Iraq] “noncombatants” and “protected persons” under the Geneva Conventions. The group is in the final stages of moving from a refugee camp in Iraq where they’ve lived for more than 25 years is nearing completion under the auspices of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.

The Paris-based MEK—which enjoys a solidly low level of

MEK
Uncovered

539



popular support among Iranians—is also called the The People’s Mujahideen of Iran, and was founded in Tehran in the mid-1960s as a synthesis of Islamic principle, left-wing populism, and violent resistance to the Shah. It has since been blasted by critics as a totalitarian, hero-worshipping cult with a history of engaging in indiscriminate mass murder (a particular sore spot is the allegation that MEK fighters acted as a death squad for Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Shiite and Kurdish uprisings in Iraq). Today, the group is reportedly on the frontlines of assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists, and has a long, bipartisan list of powerful friends in the US who pitch the group as the Western-friendly and pluralistic antidote to the Islamic republic.

The bizarre patchwork of high-profile advocates includes John Bolton, Gen. Wesley Clark (Ret.), at least two Romney campaign advisor, Rudy Giuliani, Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, and ex-FBI director Louis Freeh. Some of these top supporters received subpoenas from the Treasury department last March during an investigation of speaking fees for pro-MEK events—something that could potentially amount to providing material support to a designated terror organization.

As I reported last year, well-funded MEK backers also received a lobbying assist from high-powered international PR firm Brown Lloyd James—a company that has something of

a reputation for sanitizing the records of dictators with names like Qaddafi and Assad. (Other clients have included AARP, the state of Qatar, the Washington embassy of Ecuador, Al Jazeera English, Russia Today, Forbes, and the famous composer Andrew Lloyd Webber.)



541

A thin, dark grey line that starts horizontally from the left, then angles downwards to the right, ending at the right edge of the page.

THE RACE *for* IRAN

By Delisting the MEK, the Obama Administration is Taking the Moral and Strategic Bankruptcy of America's Iran Policy to a New Low

MEK
Uncovered

542

September 2012

The U.S. Department of State took the moral and strategic bankruptcy of America's Iran policy to a new low today, by notifying Congress that the Obama administration intends to remove the mojahedin-e khalq (MEK) from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs).

At a macro level, we are disdainful—even scornful—of the U.S. government's lists of both FTOs and state sponsors of terrorism. We have seen too many times over the years just how cynically American administrations have manipulated these designations, adding and removing organizations and countries for reasons that have little or nothing to do with designees' actual involvement in terrorist activity. So, for example, after Saddam Husayn invaded the fledgling Islamic Republic in 1980—on September 22, no less—and starting killing large numbers of innocent Iranians, the Reagan administration (which came to office in January 1981) found a way to remove



Iraq from the state sponsors list, in order to remove legal restrictions prohibiting the U.S. government from helping Saddam prosecute his war of aggression as robustly as the administration wanted. (During that war, the MEK—after having tried but failed to bring down the Islamic Republic through a bloody campaign of terrorist bombings and assassinations conducted against the new Iranian government’s upper echelons—ended up collaborating with an Iraqi government regularly carrying out chemical weapons attacks against targets, civilian as well as military, inside Iran.) But, when the same Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990, the George H.W. Bush administration couldn’t get Iraq back on the state sponsors list fast enough. We are very skeptical that Saddam’s ties to groups that the United States considers terrorist organizations changed all that much during this period.

Yet, precisely because we know how thoroughly corrupt and politicized these designations really are, we recognize their significance as statements of U.S. policy. Today, the Obama administration made a truly horrible statement about U.S. policy toward Iran.

The statement is horrible even if one wants to believe that FTO designations have some kind of procedural and evidentiary integrity about them. (We don’t, but we also recognize that letting go of illusions is often not easy.) Just this year, U.S. intelligence officials told high-profile media outlets that the MEK





is actively collaborating with Israeli intelligence to assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists, see here; Iranian officials have made the same charge. Since when did murdering unarmed civilians (and, in some instances, members of their families as well) on public streets in the middle of a heavily populated urban area (Tehran) not meet even the U.S. government's own professed standard for terrorism? Of course, one might rightly point out that the United States is responsible for the deaths of millions of innocent civilians across the Middle East. But Washington generally strives to maintain the fiction that it did not intend for those innocents to die as a (direct and foreseeable) consequence of U.S. military operations and sanctions policies. (You know, the United States didn't really mean for those people to die, but, as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld once said, "Stuff happens.") Here, the Obama administration is taking an organization that the U.S. government knows is directly involved in the murder of innocent people and giving this group Washington's "good housekeeping seal of approval."

But, to invoke Talleyrand's classic observation that a certain action was "worse than a crime—it was a mistake," delisting the MEK is not just a moral abomination; it is a huge strategic and policy blunder. It is hard to imagine how the Obama administration could signal more clearly that, even after the President's presumptive reelection, it has no intention of seeking a fundamentally different sort of relationship with the Islamic Republic—which would of course require the United States to accept the Islamic Republic as a legitimate political entity representing legitimate national interests.

Count on this: once the MEK is formally off the FTO list—a legally defined process that will take a few months to play out—Congress will be appropriating money to support the mon-afeqin as the vanguard of a new American strategy for regime change in Iran. In the 1990s, similar enthusiasm for Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress—who were about as

unpopular among Iraqis as the MEK is among Iranians—led to President Clinton’s signing of the Iraq Liberation Act, which paved the way for George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003. The chances for such a scenario to play out with regard to Iran over the next few years—with even more disastrous consequences for America’s strategic and moral standing—got a lot higher today.

—Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett



Q&A: what is the MEK and why did the US call it a terrorist organisation?

September 2012

The MEK cut a 'swath of terror' in the Middle East, but leaders have worked hard to convince the west they are peaceful now
Why did the US designate the MEK a terrorist organisation in 1997?

The MEK's supporters say it was banned as a move by the Clinton administration to appease the Iranian government. The US state department, which decides which groups to include on the list of designated terrorist organisations, points to a long and bloody history.

The MEK ran a bombing campaign inside Iran against the Shah's regime the 1970s. The targets were sometimes American, including the US information office, Pepsi Cola, PanAm and General Motors. The group routinely denounced Zionism and "racist Israel", and called for "death to America".

A state department report in 1992 identified the MEK as responsible for the killing of six Americans in Iran during the 1970s. They included three military officers and three men working for Rockwell International, a conglomerate specialising in aerospace including weapons, who were murdered in retaliation for the arrest of MEK members over the killings of the US military officers.

MEK
Uncovered

546



The MEK was an enthusiastic supporter of the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran following the Iranian revolution. It called the eventual release of the American hostages a “surrender”. After falling out with Iran’s new rulers, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, the MEK launched a bomb campaign against the Islamic government. In 1981, it attacked the headquarters of the Islamic Republic Party, killing 74 senior officials including the party leader and 27 members of parliament. A few months later it bombed a meeting of Iran’s national security council, killing Iran’s president and the prime minister.

The state department described the MEK as cutting a “swath of terror” across the country in the following years and of “violent attacks in Iran that victimise civilians”.

“Since 1981 the [MEK] have claimed responsibility for murdering thousands of Iranians they describe as agents of the regime,” the report said.

The bombings continued into the 1990s including one at Khomeini’s tomb and against oil refineries.

Who supported the MEK?

After the MEK leadership fell out with the Islamic regime it fled first to Paris. France expelled the MEK leader, Masud Rajavi, in 1986. The group then ran into the arms of Iran’s enemy, the

MEK
Uncovered

547



Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. Iraq helped arm the MEK's thousands of fighters with artillery, guns and tanks and housed them in three camps near Baghdad and along the border with Iran. Baghdad also supplied money.

The MEK's armed wing, the National Liberation Army (NLA), conducted raids into Iran during the last stages of the Iran-Iraq war. It also became a tool of Saddam Hussein's campaign of internal oppression.

"The NLA's last major offensive reportedly was conducted against Iraqi Kurds in 1991 when it joined Saddam Hussein's brutal repression of the Kurdish rebellion," the state department report said.

The last major act of violence committed by the MEK in the west was in 1992 when it stormed Iranian diplomatic missions in the US, Britain, Canada, Germany, France and Switzerland. The assault was in response to an Iranian air force bombing raid on an MEK base in Iraq.

Wouldn't the killing of Americans, calls for the destruction of Israel and supporting Saddam Hussein be enough to scare off any American politician from ever supporting the MEK?

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 changed everything for the MEK. Its fighters at Camp Ashraf, near the Iranian border, and other sites near Baghdad were disarmed by the Americans. The MEK leadership moved swiftly to distance itself from Saddam Hussein, emphasising its opposition to the Islamic government in Tehran and casting its supporters as selfless and long suffering supporters of freedom and democracy. From then on the MEK reinvented itself in American eyes.

Until the 1990s it was known as the People's Holy Warriors of Iran, but that's not the kind of name to win support in the west these days so it tweaked the name.

Two decades ago, the state department identified the MEK as running what it called "a determined lobbying effort among western parliamentarians".

"To conduct its propaganda campaign the group has estab-

lished offices through western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and the Middle East,” it said. “Through such efforts, the (MEK) attempt to transform western opprobrium for the government of Iran into expressions of support for themselves”.

The MEK leadership has played on opposition to the present Iranian leadership, which is in part bound up with concerns among US politicians over Tehran’s nuclear programme and fears for Israel’s security, to bury its past by portraying itself as a democratic and popular alternative to the Islamic regime. “Exploiting western opprobrium of the behaviour of the current government of Iran, the (MEK) posit themselves as the alternative. To achieve that goal, they claim they have the support of a majority of Iranians. This claim is much disputed by academics and other specialists on Iran, who assert that in fact the MEK have little support among Iranians,” it said.

The state department report quotes an American journalist as saying of the MEK: “They hope to transform their public image in America from terrorists to freedom fighters”.

It appears to have been largely successful in that. Few of the MEK’s American backers appear to know the detail of its past, particularly the scale of its killing and the depth of its hostility to the US and Israel. Instead it described as a loyal and useful ally. Supporters say that it was the MEK that first provided the US with information about Iran’s nuclear programme.

Has the MEK changed?

It has certainly abandoned violence, at least for now. But that is in part because it was forcibly disarmed by the US army in Iraq. It also recognises that since 9/11, bombing attacks by a mostly Muslim organisation are not likely to win it friends in the west.

In exile, the MEK leadership established the National Council of Resistance which has evolved into what the group calls a parliament in exile.

But the MEK is far from democratic. It is autocratically run by a



husband and wife, Masud and Maryam Rajavi, who the state department say have “fostered a cult of personality”.

In its 1992 report on the MEK, the state department said the group’s leadership “never practices democracy within their organisation”.

“Many Iranians who have dealt with MEK members assert that the [MEK] suppress dissent, often with force, and do not tolerate different viewpoints. The [MEK’s] credibility is also undermined by the fact that they deny or distort sections of their history, such as the use of violence or opposition to Zionism. It is difficult to accept at face value promises of future conduct when an organisation fails to acknowledge its past,” the report said.

So what is the likelihood of the MEK being unbanned?

As part of their campaign, the MEK’s supporters have won a federal court order requiring the state department to make a decision on whether the group should remain on the designated terrorist list by October 1.

Some pro-MEK activists have interpreted that as a foregone conclusion that the state department will have to delist the organisation. They have been bolstered by its unbanning in Europe.

The MEK’s well financed and organised lobbying campaign has placed enormous pressure on the state department to delist the group. But the state department has warned the MEK that its status will in part be decided over whether it obeys a demand to leave its main camp in Iraq. Its refusal, so far, to move remaining supporters from Camp Ashraf – where it used to train its paramilitary fighters – to a former US military base near Baghdad is said by the state department to be a significant obstacle to delisting the group.

The MEK has moved 2,000 of the 3,200 people who were living in Camp Ashraf but refuses to shift the rest. The MEK has portrayed the issue as a humanitarian one to its sympathisers in Washington, saying that all that remains in Camp Ashraf



are families and that conditions in the Baghdad camp are inadequate. They say it is effectively a prison – even going so far as to call it a concentration camp – and alleged they will be vulnerable to violence from the Iraqi government and forces. Some US officials say that those refusing to leave shows that the MEK has not really abandoned its past.



WIRED

Iranian Cult Is No Longer Officially a Terrorist Group

September 2012

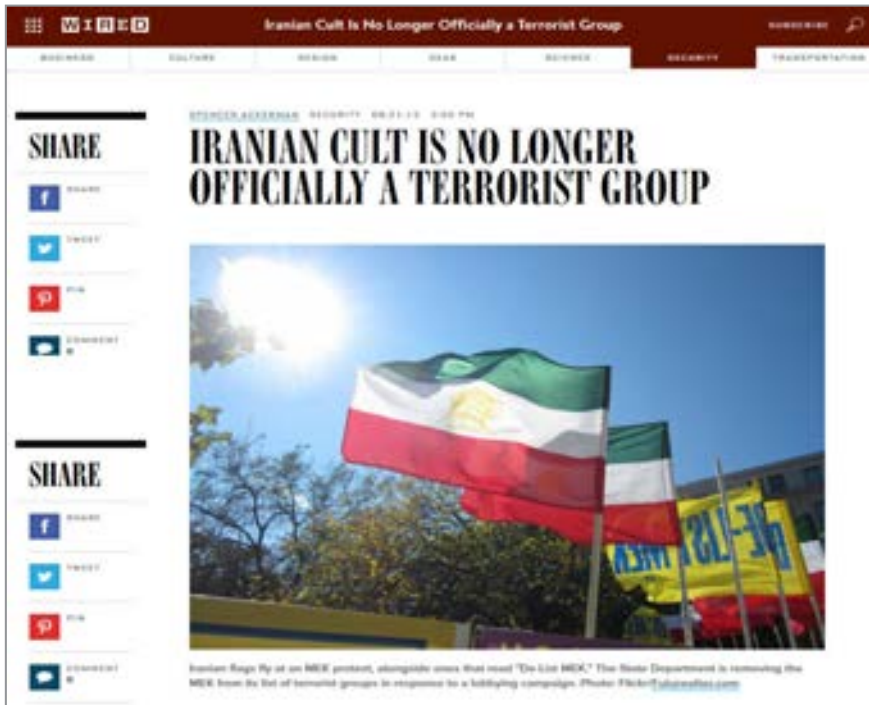
Washington's favorite Iranian terrorist group has likely won. By a forthcoming edict of the State Department, you can now no longer call the Mujahideen-e Khalq — formerly Saddam Hussein's proxies against the Iranian regime — a terrorist organization. Erasing its status as a cult is a different story.

The State Department is set to remove what everyone simply calls the MEK from its list of terrorist groups, in advance of a court-imposed deadline for a decision. That will leave the organization free to fundraise and operate without attracting the attention of the FBI. The impact on U.S.-Iranian relations may be marginal, but the symbolism is enormous: As tensions with Iran over its nuclear program remain high, the Obama administration is wiping away the stigma from a cultish group that wants to overthrow the Iranian regime so badly it has attacked Iranian and other civilians to advance its agenda. And it comes after a long and deep-pocketed lobbying effort attracted a host of Washington politicians to advocate for the group.

"The delisting of the MEK, following a well-funded political lobby campaign, creates the dangerous impression that it is possible for terrorist organizations to buy their way off the [terrorism] list," says Mila Johns of the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Respons-

MEK
Uncovered

552



es to Terrorism.

The MEK's questionable practices extend beyond attacks on Iranian civilians. In a 2004 New York Times Magazine story, Elizabeth Rubin documented the group's cult-like behavior. "Every morning and night, the kids, beginning as young as 1 and 2, had to stand before a poster of Massoud and Maryam, salute them and shout praises to them," a former member told Rubin, referring to the "husband-and-wife cult" of leaders Masoud and Maryam Rajavi. Life in the MEK, Rubin reported, means enforced celibacy and public confessions of sexual desires. "Mujahedeen members have no access to newspapers or radio or television," Rubin wrote, "other than what is fed them."

Originally founded as a student organization in the 1960s to overthrow the Shah, the MEK attacked Western targets in pre-revolutionary Iran, and their victims included three U.S. Army officers. But they fell out of step with the Islamic radicals that took control of Iran in 1979, and turned their weapons



on the new regime. Saddam Hussein became their sponsor during the Iran-Iraq war, yet the leadership moved to Paris. For over a decade, the MEK carried out bombings and hijackings on regime targets inside and outside Iran, including an audacious April 1992 coordinated raid on 13 Iranian diplomatic facilities around the world. The State Department listed them as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997.

But it's been years since the MEK attempted a terrorist attack. Most of its operations have centered around endearing itself to the U.S. by portraying itself as an advocate for a democratic Iran, a source of information on Iran's nuclear program and an implacable enemy of Washington's Tehran enemies. It turned over its weapons at a training camp in Iraq after the U.S. invasion that until recently was a de facto U.S. protectorate called Camp Ashraf. In Washington, supporters have spent years and millions of dollars waging a lobbying campaign to remove the group's terrorist status, holding rallies outside of Congress and slathering the sides of buses with pro-MEK posters.

The sources of that money remain undisclosed. But it purchased prominent D.C. lobbying firms like Akin Gump and advocates like Reagan administration veteran Victoria Toensing. And it got an odd collection of supporters, from former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani on the right to former Vermont Governor Howard Dean on the left, plus retired Army Gen. Wesley Clark, ex-CIA director Michael Hayden, ex-FBI director Louis Freeh, ex-Obama national security adviser James Jones and a host of other notables.

The Iranian government, having been on the receiving end of MEK attacks, thinks the group still plans violence against it. Accordingly, some consider the MEK a diplomatic obstacle to resolving the Iranian nuclear question. The MEK also has support among U.S. Legislature who want to see the U.S. take a more bellicose turn toward Iran, so it's possible that the group will rocket from the terrorist list to the halls of Congress.

Chances are, the State Department decision will merely en-

trench the impasse between Washington and Tehran. “I don’t think the world really looks that much different after the MEK delisting,” says Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “U.S.-Iran relations will remain hostile, and the MEK will remain a fringe cult with very limited appeal among Iranians.”



MEK decision: multimillion-dollar campaign led to removal from terror list

September 2012

Supporters of a designated Iranian terrorist organisation have won a long struggle to see it unbanned in the US after pouring millions of dollars into an unprecedented campaign of political donations, hiring Washington lobby groups and payments to former top administration officials.

A Guardian investigation, drawing partly on data researched by the Centre for Responsive Politics, a group tracking the impact of money in US politics, has identified a steady flow of funds from key Iranian American organisations and their leaders into the campaign to have the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran removed from the list of terrorist organisations. The US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, is expected to notify Congress that the MEK will be removed from the terrorism list in the coming days.

The campaign to bury the MEK's bloody history of bombings and assassinations that killed American businessmen, Iranian politicians and thousands of civilians, and to portray it as a loyal US ally against the Islamic government in Tehran has seen large sums of money directed at three principal targets: members of Congress, Washington lobby groups and influential former officials.

Prominent among the members of Congress who have re-

MEK
Uncovered

556



ceived fund is Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the chair of the House of Representatives foreign affairs committee. She has accepted at least \$20,000 in donations from Iranian American groups or their leaders to her political campaign fund.

Other recipients include Congressman Bob Filner, who was twice flown to address pro-MEK events in France and has pushed resolutions resolutions in the House of Representatives calling for the group to be unbanned. More than \$14,000 in expenses for Filner's Paris trips were met by the head of an Iranian American group who also paid close to \$1m to a Washington lobby firm working to get the MEK unbanned.

A Texas Congressman, Ted Poe, received thousands of dollars in donations from the head of a pro-MEK group in his state at a time when he was a regular speaker on behalf of its unbanning at events across the US, describing the organisation as the ticket to regime change in Iran.

Mike Rogers, chairman of the House of Representatives intelligence committee, has also received the backing of individuals and groups that support the unbanning of the MEK. Rogers has been among the strongest supporters in Congress of delisting the group, sponsoring resolutions and pressing other members of Congress to support the cause.

A leading advocate of unbanning the MEK and chairman of the foreign affairs committee's oversight subcommittee, congressman Dana Rohrabacher, has received thousands of dollars in donations from supporters of the banned group this





year alone.

The Guardian sought comment from Ros-Lehtinen, Rogers, Filner, Poe and Rohrabacher. Only Rohrabacher responded. He said he was comfortable accepting donations from MEK supporters but that the money has no influence on his position that it should be unbanned.

“I wouldn’t doubt that people would donate to my campaign if it’s something that they see as beneficial to them, to what they believe in, whether it’s the MEK or whether it’s anybody else,” he said.

“The question is whether it’s the right position to take or not and whether it’s a benefit to the people of the United States as a whole. In this case I’ve no doubt that supporting the MEK under this brutal attack from the Mullah regime [in Tehran] is in the interests of what I believe in but also in the interests of the people of the United States.”

Rohrabacher said the MEK’s past attacks on Americans, its bombing campaign in Iran that killed top politicians and civilians, and its support of Saddam Hussein were history and the group has turned its back on violence. He also denied that public support for a designated terrorist organisation might put him in conflict with the law.

Advertisement

“This isn’t a bad group. A long time ago, in their history, they certainly had a questionable time – 20, 30, 40 years ago. But I don’t know of any evidence they’ve engaged in terrorism for many, many years,” he said. “They’re not a terrorist group simply because some bureaucrats in the state department say so.”

Three top Washington lobby firms - DLA Piper; Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld; and DiGenova & Toensing - have been paid a total of nearly \$1.5 million over the past year to press the US administration and legislators to support the delisting of the MEK and protection for its members in camps in Iraq.

Two other lobby groups were hired for much smaller amounts. The firms employed former members of Congress to press

their ex-colleagues on Capitol Hill to back the unbanning of the MEK.

Scores of former senior officials have been paid up to \$40,000 to make speeches in support of the MEK's delisting. Those who have received money include the former chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, General Hugh Shelton; ex-FBI director Louis Freeh; and Michael Mukasey, who as attorney general oversaw the prosecution of terrorism cases.

The former Pennsylvania governor, Ed Rendell, has accepted more than \$150,000 in speaking fees at events in support of the MEK's unbanning. Clarence Page, a columnist for the Chicago Tribune, was paid \$20,000 to speak at the rally. Part of the money has been paid through speakers bureaus on the US east coast.

Others accepted only travel costs, although in some cases that involved expensive trips to Europe.

In June, Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the US House of Representatives and Republican presidential candidate, flew to Paris to address a pro-MEK rally and meet its co-leader, Maryam Rajavi. He was criticised for bowing to her.

Congressman Rohrabacher has described the lobbying campaign as one of the most effective he has seen on Capitol Hill. It has galvanised powerful support for delisting the MEK far beyond those receiving political contributions, lobbying fees or other payments.

Ros-Lehtinen has been a vigorous proponent of recognition of the MEK, flying around the country to speak in support of unbanning the group and pressing the issue among fellow members of Congress. She has accepted an award from one group funding the campaign to delist the MEK. Other recipients of political donations, including Rogers, Filner and Rohrabacher, have also lobbied other members of Congress to support the unbanning. As a result, nearly 100 members of Congress have co-sponsored a resolution demanding the Obama administration to delist the MEK.



Last month, 17 former senior officials and US generals called on the state department to remove the group’s terrorist designation. Among them were General James Jones, Barack Obama’s former national security adviser; Tom Ridge, the former homeland security director; as well as Mukasey, Freeh and Rendell.

Some of the same politicians and former officials have also targeted newspapers and online publications in a campaign of opinion articles and letters aimed at changing the image of the MEK as a terrorist group.

The campaign has in part been funded by substantial donations from Iranian Americans and a web of organisations they lead from Florida to Texas and California.

The most generous benefactors include:

- Saeid Ghaemi, head of Colorado’s Iranian American Community, who paid close to \$900,000 of his own money to a Washington lobby firm for its work to get the MEK unbanned.
- Ali Soudjani, president of the Iranian American Society of Texas. He gave close to \$100,000 over the past five years to congressional campaign funds. His organisation paid more than \$110,000 in fees to lobbyists last year.

Advertisement

- Ahmad Moeinimanesh, leader of the Iranian American Community of Northern California. The group paid \$400,000 to a lobby firm. Moeinimanesh made personal donations to Ros-Lehtinen’s campaign even though her constituency is several thousand miles from where he lives.

Some of the payments have prompted an investigation by the US treasury department. It is examining the fees paid to Shelton, Freeh, Mukasey and Rendell, and possibly others, to see if they breach laws against “material support for a terrorist group”. In cases involving links to other banned organisations, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, individuals have received long jail sentences for indirect financial support.

The original source of the considerable sums involved is not

always clear as groups making political donations or funding lobby firms are not required to declare their origin. Previously the MEK has relied in part on funding from Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

Soudjani told the Guardian that the moneys were raised from Iranian Americans in the US. “The Iranian community is wealthy. It has more than \$600bn in the United States. This is pennies for supporting freedom,” he said.

Asked if his own donations to members of Congress was specifically because of their positions on the MEK, he replied: “Yes, it is.”

However, Soudjani was careful to say that the support is not for the MEK as an organisation, which could open donors to investigation under anti-terrorism laws.

“We are not giving material support to the MEK. We are supporting freedom of speech for justice and peace in Iran,” he said.



Iranian exiles, DC lobbyists and the campaign to delist the MEK

September 2012

MEK
Uncovered

562

To the US government, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (MEK) was a terrorist group alongside al-Qaida, Hamas and the Farc in Colombia. The MEK landed on the list in 1997 with American blood on its hands and by allying itself with Saddam Hussein along with a long list of bombings inside Iran. But the organisation is regarded very differently by a large number of members of Congress, former White House officials and army generals, and even one of the US's most renowned reporters, Carl Bernstein. They see the MEK as a victim of US double dealings with the regime in Tehran and a legitimate alternative to the Iran's Islamic government.

That difference is in no small part the result of a formidable fundraising operation and campaign to transform the MEK's image led by more than 20 Iranian American organisations across the US. These groups and their leaders have spent millions of dollars on donations to members of Congress, paying Washington lobby groups and hiring influential politicians and officials, including two former CIA directors, as speakers.

In a highly sensitive political game, MEK supporters have succeeded in pressing the state department into removing the group from the list of terrorist organisations after winning a court order requiring a decision to be made on the issue be-



fore the end of this month. But its supporters were forced to tread a careful path so as not to cross anti-terrorism laws. Only a few years ago, the US authorities were arresting pro-MEK activists and freezing the assets of front groups for “material support for a terrorist organisation”. Now members of Congress openly praise the group in apparent contradiction of the anti-terrorism legislation many of them supported. Nearly 100 members of the House of Representatives backed a resolution calling on the US government to drop the MEK from the terrorist list.

At the forefront of the campaign are several Iranian American organisations across the US. They are:

- The Iranian American Society of Texas. It paid more than \$110,000 in fees last year to a Washington lobby firm, DiGenova & Toensing, to campaign for the lifting of the ban on the MEK and the protection of its supporters still in camps in Iraq. The Texas group’s president, Ali Soudjani, has personally donated close to \$100,000 to members of Congress and their political campaigns over the past five years because, he told the Guardian, of their positions on the MEK and Iran. Among the beneficiaries were Ted Poe, a member of the House foreign affairs committee, and Sheila Jackson Lee, who have been vocal supporters of delisting the MEK. The pair appeared at a House event at Congress earlier this year also attended by Soudjani at which Poe gave support to the MEK in calling for “freedom-loving Americans [to] support a regime change



in Iran”. Jackson Lee described the group as the “voices of freedom”. Soudjani also gave to John Boehner, speaker of the House of Representatives as well as the National Republican Congressional Committee and the Obama Victory Fund.

- Colorado’s Iranian American Community. One of its leaders, Saeid Ghaemi, paid close to \$900,000 of his own money to a Washington lobby firm, DLA Piper, for its work to get the MEK unbanned, the protection of its members in Iraq and human rights issues. Ghaemi’s brother, Mehdi, who is president of the Colorado group, paid \$14,000 to fly a member of Congress, Bob Filner, to meet MEK leaders in Paris and attend the group’s rallies. In the weeks before Filner spoke at an event in support of delisting the MEK last year he was the recipient of several thousand dollars in donations from Iranian Americans living outside his district.

- The Iranian American Community of Northern California. It paid \$400,000 over the past year to a Washington lobby group, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, to work on Capitol Hill to work for the removal of the MEK from the list of foreign terrorist organisations. The company assigned several former members of Congress to the account. The IACNC has also organised events in support of unbanning the MEK with appearances by Ros-Lehtinen and other prominent members of Congress as well as former White House officials.

Its director, Ahmad Moeinimanesh, has made personal financial donations to Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the chair of the House of Representatives foreign affairs committee even though her congressional district is on the other side of the country in Florida, as well as to her reelection committee. She has accepted more than \$20,000 in political contributions from activists who support the MEK’s delisting.

The IACNC’s registered address is at a photocopying shop in Albany, California, owned by Behnam Mirabdol who has made financial donations to Ros-Lehtinen and Dana Rohrabacher, a subcommittee chairman who is among the most vigorous

proponents of unbanning the MEK.

- The Iranian Society of South Florida (ISSF). The group came to the notice of US authorities eight years ago as one of the sponsors of a fundraiser in Washington ostensibly to help victims of the Bam earthquake which killed 30,000 people. The FBI concluded it was a front for raising funds for the MEK.

The ISSF's president and vice-president, Bahman Badiie and Akbar Nikooie, have for years made regular donations to Ros-Lehtinen. The Florida congresswoman boasts on her website of receiving an award from the ISSF.

Nikooie also spent at least \$130,000 in 2009 to pay a lobby firm, DLA Piper, to promote "human rights" in Iran, including pressing for the unbanning of the MEK in the US. Badiie contributed \$3,200 to Ros-Lehtinen. He gave \$2,000 to congressman Mario Diaz-Balart in March the day after he made a speech in Congress in support of the MEK.

The principal lobbyist on the account was the former leader of the Republicans in the House of Representatives, Dick Armey, who a decade ago wielded considerable power and played a major role in the Republican takeover of Congress. He went on to head the Tea Party-supporting group, Freedom Works.

Armey used his relationship with sitting members of Congress five years ago to press them to urge the then secretary of state Condoleezza Rice to unban the MEK and to support legislation that would effectively have resulted in US sponsorship of the group. He also lobbied the Pentagon, the White House and the state department in support of unbanning the MEK.

- The California Society for Democracy in Iran. Its founder and president is Nasser Sharif who has called for the US government to "engage the Iranian people and their organized resistance". Sharif is listed as donating thousands of dollars to Rohrabacher and Filner.

Sharif called the MEK's banning an "injustice" in an article in the Orange Country Register in which he quotes Rohrabacher in support of his cause. He has organised events at which the





speakers include Ros-Lehtinen, Rohrabacher, Filner and Poe. Several of the groups also poured money into persuading leading politicians and former administration officials to speak on behalf of unbanning the MEK. Among those who have addressed meetings arranged by the Iranian American Community of Northern California are the former Democratic presidential candidate, Howard Dean; the former FBI director, Louis Freeh; the ex-attorney general, Michael Mukasey; and Tom Ridge, the former homeland security secretary. They have been joined by members of Congress including Ros-Lehtinen, Poe and Jackson Lee.

Sharif's California Society for Democracy in Iran has organised meetings at which John Bolton, the former US ambassador to the UN; Andrew Card, President George W Bush's chief of staff; Mukasey, Ros-Lehtinen, Rohrabacher and other members of Congress have spoken. Several prominent former officials have acknowledged being paid significant amounts of money to speak about the MEK. The former Pennsylvania governor, Ed Rendell, has accepted more than \$150,000 in speaking fees at events in support of unbanning the MEK.

Among others who have spoken in support of delisting the group are two former CIA directors, James Woolsey and Porter Goss. Some speakers have been flown to Paris and Brussels. The US authorities have at times scrutinised efforts in support of unbanning the group, including launching investigations in to whether they breached laws against financial dealings with banned organisations or legislation barring material support for terrorism.

Three years ago, seven people in California pleaded guilty to "providing material support to a designated foreign terrorist organisation", and a parallel conspiracy charge, after fundraising for the MEK. Among other things the seven admitted to raising several hundred thousand dollars in collections at Los Angeles airport and other public locations in the name of a charity, the Committee for Human Rights.

Following an investigation by the FBI's joint terrorism task force and the convictions, the US attorney's office said "the CHR was simply a front organisation for MEK fund-raising operations in the United States" and that the money was going in part to support the group's "terrorist activities".

"We cannot allow any terrorist organisation to fundraise on our shores or to steal money from our own citizens so that they can finance their own terrorism operations," said the prosecuting US attorney, Thomas O'Brien.

In 2004 Bush administration officials examined whether a fund-raising event at a Washington DC convention centre, ostensibly on behalf of victims of the Bam earthquake, was in fact a cover for collecting money for the MEK. The organisers, the Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia, described the \$35 a head event as a "night of solidarity with Iran" and a "referendum for regime change in Iran".

Among those paid to speak at the event was Richard Perle, at the time a defence adviser to the Bush administration and a strong advocate of invading Iraq. Perle later said he was unaware of any connection to the MEK.

The organisers claimed the money was going to the Red Cross but even before the event was held the Red Cross said it did not want the proceeds because the fundraiser was political. The FBI concluded that the Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia was a front for the MEK and the treasury department froze the funds raised by the event.

Those groups cosponsoring the fundraiser included several that the FBI described as MEK front organisations or as linked to prominent supporters. These included Iranian Society of South Florida, the Iranian-American Society of Texas and Colorado's Iranian-American Community.

The Iranian-American Society of Northern Virginia is now defunct.

Soudjani pointedly said that the money was not intended to support the MEK but it's unbanning "in the name of freedom





and justice”.

“The MEK is supporting a free Iran. That is what we are supporting,” he said.

Sharif makes a similar argument.

“None of us are involved in illegal activities. All we’re doing is bringing the issue to the attention of members of Congress,” he said.

Asked if his donation to Filner, who has a district about 2,500 miles from where Sharif lives, was because of his position on Iran and the MEK, Sharif said that it was.

“Yes. If you see members of Congress with a good position on Iran, you can support them. This is a voluntary thing. Members of the community do this. If they feel like members of Congress have a good position in supporting these issues they are willing to support those members of Congress”.

Moeinimanesh and several other leaders of Iranian American organisations did not respond to questions. Neither did Ros-Lehtinen and other members of Congress did not respond to questions. But Rohrabacher did speak to the Guardian.

The California congressman said he is comfortable accepting donations from MEK supporters.

“If they want to contribute to me because I believe strongly in human rights and stand up in cases like this, that’s fine. I don’t check their credentials,” he said.

Rohrabacher said he is not concerned at potentially being at odds with the law.

“When you have a person or an organisation that has been legally labelled something that is not just then you should take that label off. It doesn’t undermine efforts to label terrorists when they are indeed committing acts of terrorism,” he said.

The congressman also denounced the treasury investigation of payments to speakers in support of the MEK.

“It seems to be me this is an example where somebody’s challenging a government policy and the government is trying to intimidate those who don’t believe in the policy into closing

their mouths. Because someone is advocating a certain position, and it goes against government policy, it doesn't mean the government should start focussing on them and try to find something they can hurt them with. That's a damper on freedom of speech," he said.





Analysts Respond to Expected US Decision to delist MEK from FTO List

September 2012

Jim Lobe and I wrote a report yesterday for IPS News about the expected US decision to delist the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (aka MEK, PMOI and NCRI) from its foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) list. Most analysts we interviewed predicted that the removal would only worsen already abysmal relations with Iran and possibly make any effort to defuse the gathering crisis over its nuclear programme yet more difficult. Here's a round-up of what they had to say beginning with statements that came in following the article's publication:

John Limbert, a retired career foreign service officer and former embassy hostage in Tehran who served as the first-ever Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iran from 2009 to 2010 when he returned to teach at the US Naval Academy:

There may be reasons, but it's a strange and disappointing decision.

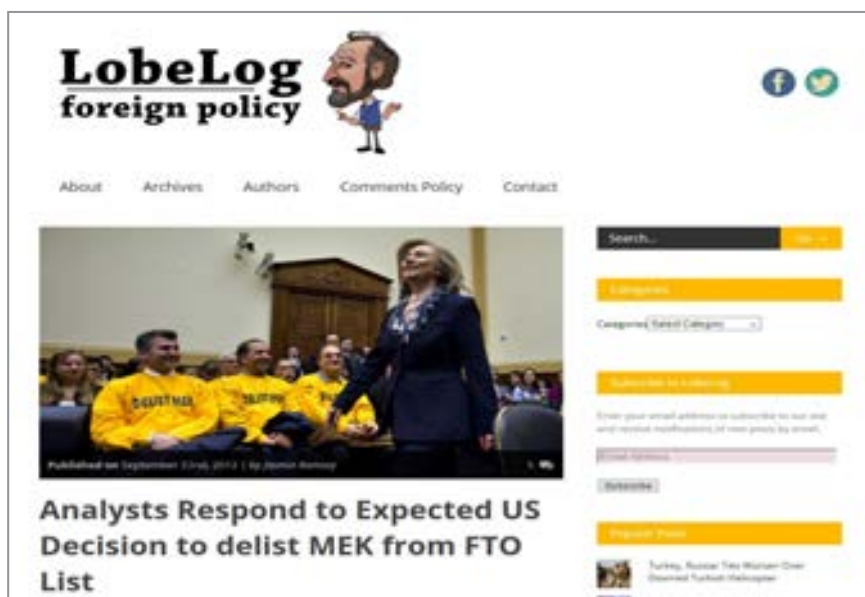
I know the group claims it has abandon its violent and anti-American past. I wish I could believe them. They have a very dubious history and a similarly dubious present.

Farideh Farhi, Iran expert at the University of Hawaii:

As to the MEK delisting, especially after high-level leaks by members of the US intelligence community that the MEK was involved in terror operations inside Iran, the decision will no

MEK
Uncovered

570



doubt make the Iranian leadership even more distrustful of US intentions regarding the future of Iran, particularly given the congressional support for the MEK to spearhead regime change. Less trust will make compromise less likely, presumably a preferred outcome for the high profile supporters of the MEK in Congress and elsewhere.

Note that the Obama Administration's humanitarian argument for delisting says very little about the future operation of this group in the US and how their well-funded operation and agitation for regime change will be promoted or managed in the US. This ambiguity by itself will be a source of tension and will be used by hardliners inside Iran to further delegitimize all efforts to agitate for political reform from inside and outside of the country.

The issue is not about whether something needed to be done to help the poor souls caught in Iraq, abused by everyone including their own cult-like organization. The issue has to do with the wisdom of linking the highly political and politicized process of de-listing to a humanitarian effort.

Paul Pillar, a former top CIA analyst who served as the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia from

MEK
Uncovered

571



2000 to 2005:

“Delisting will be seen not only by the Iranian regime, but also by most Iranian citizens, as a hostile act by the United States.”

“The MEK has almost no popular support within Iran, where it is despised as a group of traitors, especially given its history of joining forces with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War,” Pillar, who now teaches at George Washington University, added.

“Any effect of the delisting on nuclear negotiations will be negative; Tehran will read it as one more indication that the United States is interested only in hostility and pressure toward the Islamic Republic, rather than coming to terms with it.”

Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former senior Iranian diplomat and nuclear negotiator currently at Princeton University:

“The Iranian security establishment’s assessment has long believed that foreign intelligence agencies, specifically the CIA, Israeli Mossad, and the UK’s MI6 utilise the MEK for terror attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists, nuclear sabotage and intelligence gathering,”...

“Therefore, the delisting of MEK will be seen in Tehran as a reward for the group’s terrorist actions in the country,” he wrote in an email exchange with IPS. “Furthermore, Iran has firmly concluded that the Western demands for broader inspections (of Iran’s nuclear programme), including its military sites, are a smokescreen for mounting increased cyber attacks, sabotage and terror of nuclear scientists.

“Delisting MEK would be considered in Tehran as a U.S.-led effort to increase sabotage and covert actions through MEK leading inevitably to less cooperation by Iran with the IAEA (the International Atomic Energy Agency).”

He added that government in Tehran will use this as a way of “demonstrating to the public that the U.S. is seeking ...to bring a MEK-style group to power” which, in turn, “would strengthen the Iranian nation’s support for the current system as the perceived alternative advanced by Washington would be cat-

astrophic.”

Karim Sadjadpour, analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:

...said the move was unlikely to be “game-changer” in that “the MEK will continue to be perceived inside Iran as an antiquated cult which sided with Saddam Hussein during the (Iran-Iraq) war, and U.S. Iran relations will remain hostile.”

“It doesn’t help (Washington’s) image within Iran, certainly, and some Iranian democracy activists may misperceive this as a U.S. show of support for the MEK, which could have negative ramifications,” he noted.

Jamal Abdi, policy director at the National Iranian American Council:

“The biggest winner today is the Iranian regime, which has claimed for a long time that the U.S. is out to destroy Iran and is the enemy of the Iranian people,” said NIAC’s policy director, Jamal Abdi.

“It will certainly not improve U.S.-Iranian relations,” according to Alireza Nader, an Iran specialist at the Rand Corporation, who agreed that the “delisting reinforces Tehran’s longstanding narrative regarding U.S. hostility toward the regime.

“Nevertheless,” he added, “I don’t think it is detrimental to U.S. interests as Tehran suspects U.S. collusion with the MED anyhow, whether this perception is correct or not.”

Mila Johns, a researcher at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland:

“The entire atmosphere around the MEK’s campaign to be removed from the FTO list – the fact that (former) American government officials were allowed to actively and openly receive financial incentives to speak in support of an organisation that was legally designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, without consequence – created the impression that the list is essentially a meaningless political tool,” she told IPS.

“It is hard to imagine that the FTO designation holds much



legitimacy within the international community when it is barely respected by our own government,” she said.

No other group, she noted, has been de-listed in this way, “though now that the precedent has been set, I would expect that other groups will explore this as an option.”



574

Five lessons from the de-listing of MEK as a terrorist group

September 2012

The Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), or People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, is an Iranian dissident group that has been formally designated for the last 15 years by the US State Department as a "foreign terrorist organization". When the Bush administration sought to justify its attack on Iraq in 2003 by accusing Saddam Hussein of being a sponsor of "international terrorism", one of its prime examples was Iraq's "sheltering" of the MEK. Its inclusion on the terrorist list has meant that it is a felony to provide any "material support" to that group.

Nonetheless, a large group of prominent former US government officials from both political parties has spent the last several years receiving substantial sums of cash to give speeches to the MEK, and have then become vocal, relentless advocates for the group, specifically for removing them from the terrorist list. Last year, the Christian Science Monitor thoroughly described "these former high-ranking US officials - who represent the full political spectrum - [who] have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to speak in support of the MEK." They include Democrats Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Wesley Clark, Bill Richardson, and Lee Hamilton, and Republicans Rudy Giuliani, Fran Townsend, Tom Ridge, Michael Mukasey, and Andrew Card. Other prominent voices outside government, such

MEK
Uncovered

575



as Alan Dershowitz and Elie Wiesel, have been enlisted to the cause and are steadfast MEK advocates.

Money has also been paid to journalists such as The Washington Post's Carl Bernstein and the Chicago Tribune's Clarence Page. Townsend is a CNN contributor and Rendell is an MSNBC contributor, yet those MEK payments are rarely, if ever, disclosed by those media outlets when featuring those contributors (indeed, Townsend can go on CNN to opine on Iran, even urging that its alleged conduct be viewed as "an act for war", with no disclosure whatsoever during the segment of her MEK payments). Quoting a State Department official, CSM detailed how the scheme works:

"Your speech agent calls, and says you get \$20,000 to speak for 20 minutes. They will send a private jet, you get \$25,000 more when you are done, and they will send a team to brief you on what to say.' . . . The contracts can range up to \$100,000 and include several appearances."

On Friday, the Guardian's Washington reporter Chris McGreal added substantial information about the recipients of the funding and, especially, its sources. As he put it, the pro-MEK

campaign “has seen large sums of money directed at three principal targets: members of Congress, Washington lobby groups and influential former officials”, including the GOP Congressman who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, Mike Rogers.

What makes this effort all the more extraordinary are the reports that MEK has actually intensified its terrorist and other military activities over the last couple of years. In February, NBC News reported, citing US officials, that “deadly attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists are being carried out by [MEK]” as it is “financed, trained and armed by Israel’s secret service”. While the MEK denies involvement, the Iranian government has echoed these US officials in insisting that the group was responsible for those assassinations. NBC also cited “unconfirmed reports in the Israeli press and elsewhere that Israel and the MEK were involved in a Nov. 12 explosion that destroyed the Iranian missile research and development site at Bin Kaneh, 30 miles outside Tehran”.

In April, the New Yorker’s Seymour Hersh reported that the US itself has for years provided extensive training to MEK operatives, on US soil (in other words, the US government provided exactly the “material support” for a designated terror group which the law criminalizes). Hersh cited numerous officials for the claim that “some American-supported covert operations continue in Iran today.” The MEK’s prime goal is the removal of Iran’s government.

Despite these reports that the MEK has been engaged in terrorism and other military aggression against Iran - or, more accurately: likely because of them - it was announced on Friday the US State Department will remove MEK from its list of terrorist organizations. This event is completely unsurprising. In May, I noted the emergence of reports that the State Department would do so imminently.

Because this MEK scam more vividly illustrates the rot and corruption at the heart of America’s DC-based political culture



than almost any episode I can recall, I've written numerous times about it. But now that the de-listing is all but official, it is worthwhile to take note of the five clear lessons it teaches: Lesson One: There is a separate justice system in the US for Muslim Americans.

The past decade has seen numerous "material support" prosecutions of US Muslims for the most trivial and incidental contacts with designated terror groups. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any Muslim who gets within sneezing distance of such a group is subject to prosecution. Indeed, as I documented last week, many of them have been prosecuted even for core First Amendment activities: political advocacy deemed supportive of such groups.

When they're convicted - and marginalized Muslims, usually poor and powerless, almost always are - they typically are not only consigned to prison for decades, but are placed in America's most oppressive and restrictive prison units. As a result, many law-abiding Muslim Americans have become petrified of donating money to Muslim charities or even speaking out against perceived injustices out of fear - the well-grounded fear - that they will be accused of materially supporting a terror group. This is all part of the pervasive climate of fear in which many American Muslims live.

Yet here we have a glittering, bipartisan cast of former US officials and other prominent Americans who are swimming in cash as they advocate on behalf of a designated terrorist organization. After receiving their cash, Howard Dean and Rudy Giuliani met with MEK leaders, and Dean actually declared that the group's leader should be recognized by the west as President of Iran. That is exactly the type of coordinated messaging with a terrorist group with the supreme court found, in its 2010 Humanitarian Law v. Holder ruling, could, consistent with the First Amendment, lead to prosecution for "material support of terrorism" (ironically, numerous MEK skills, including CNN's Townsend, praised the supreme court for its broad

reading of that statute when they thought, correctly, that it was being applied to Muslims).

Yet other than a reported Treasury Department investigation several months ago to determine the source of Ed Rendell's MEK speaking fees - an investigation that seems to have gone nowhere - there has been no repercussions whatsoever from this extensive support given by these DC luminaries to this designated terror group. Now that MEK will be removed from the terror list, there almost certainly never will be any consequences (as a legal matter, the de-listing should have no impact on the possible criminality of this MEK support: the fact that a group is subsequently removed from the list does not retroactively legalize the providing of material support when it was on the list).

In sum, there are numerous American Muslims sitting in prison for years for far less substantial interactions with terror groups than this bipartisan group of former officials gave to MEK. This is what New York Times Editorial Page Editor Andrew Rosenthal meant when he wrote back in March that the 9/11 attacks have "led to what's essentially a separate justice system for Muslims". The converse is equally true: America's political elites can engage in the most egregious offenses - torture, illegal eavesdropping, money-driven material support for a terror group - with complete impunity.

Lesson Two: The US government is not opposed to terrorism; it favors it.

The history of the US list of designated terrorist organizations, and its close cousin list of state sponsors of terrorism, is simple: a country or group goes on the list when they use violence to impede US interests, and they are then taken off the list when they start to use exactly the same violence to advance US interests. The terrorist list is not a list of terrorists; it's a list of states and groups which use their power to defy US dictates rather than adhere to them.

The NYU scholar Remi Brulin has exhaustively detailed the



rank game-playing that has taken place with this list: Saddam was put on it when he allied with the Soviets in the early 1980s, then was taken off when the US wanted to arm and fund him against Iran in the mid-1980s, then he was put back on in the early 1990s when the US wanted to attack him.

And now, with the MEK, we have a group that, at least according to some reports, appears to have intensified its terrorism, and yet they are removed from the list. Why? Because now they are aligned against the prime enemy of the US and Israel - and working closely with those two nations - and are therefore, magically, no longer “terrorists”. As the Iran experts Flynt and Hillary Mann Leverett wrote on Friday:

“Since when did murdering unarmed civilians (and, in some instances, members of their families as well) on public streets in the middle of a heavily populated urban area (Tehran) not meet even the US government’s own professed standard for terrorism?”

They answered their own question: “We have seen too many times over the years just how cynically American administrations have manipulated these designations, adding and removing organizations and countries for reasons that have little or nothing to do with designees’ actual involvement in terrorist activity.” In other words, the best and most efficient way to be removed from the list is to start engaging in terrorism for and in conjunction with the US and its allies (i.e. Israel) rather than against them.

Lesson Three: “Terrorism” remains the most meaningless, and thus the most manipulated, term in political discourse.

The US government did not even pretend that terrorism had anything to do with its decision as to whether MEK should be de-listed. Instead, they used the carrot of de-listing, and the threat of remaining on the list, to pressure MEK leaders to adhere to US demands to abandon their camp in Iraq. But what does adhering to this US demand have to do with terrorism? Nothing. This list has nothing to do with terrorism. It is simply

a way the US rewards those who comply with its dictates and punishes those who refuse.

Terrorism, at least in its applied sense, means little other than: violence used by enemies of the US and its allies. Violence used by the US and its allies (including stateless groups) can never be terrorism, no matter how heinous and criminal.

Lesson Four: Legalized influence-peddling within both parties is what drives DC.

MEK achieved its goal by doing more than merely changing the beneficiaries of its actions from Saddam to the US and Israel. It also found a way - how it did so remains a mystery - to funnel millions of dollars into the bank accounts of key ex-officials from both parties, a bipartisan list of DC lobbyist firms, and several key journalists. In other words, it achieved its policy aims the same way most groups in DC do: by buying influence within both parties, and paying influence-peddlers who parlay their political celebrity into personal riches.

So pervasive is this scam that most people have become utterly numb to it (that's because people are willing to acquiesce to most evils when they become perceived as common; that acquiescence is often justified as worldly sophistication). As a result, there was no pretense here to hide these sleazy transactions. The very idea that Ed Rendell suddenly woke up one day and developed an overnight, never-before-seen passion for the MEK and Iran policy is just laughable. But the former Pennsylvania governor is a key advocate to enlist - he remains well connected within the Democratic Party and now has an important platform on MSNBC - so on the payroll he went.

Once the bipartisan list of DC officials receiving cash from MEK became known, it became almost impossible to imagine any outcome other than this one. As one person tweeted after reading this State Department decision: any American billionaire could easily have his birthday declared a national holiday by simply spreading the cash around enough to DC political and media figures on a bipartisan basis.





Lesson Five: there is aggression between the US and Iran, but it's generally not from Iran.

Over the last decade, the US has had Iran almost entirely encircled, thanks in part - only in part - to large-scale ground invasions of the nations on its eastern and western borders. Some combination of Israel and the US have launched cyberwarfare at the Iranians, murdered their civilian scientists, and caused explosions on its soil. The American president and the Israeli government continuously and publicly threaten to use force against them.

And now, the US has taken a key step in ensuring that a group devoted to the overthrow of the regime, a group that sided with Saddam in his war against Iran, is able to receive funding and otherwise be fully admitted into the precincts of international respectability. Just imagine if Iran took steps to legitimize an American rebel group that has long been devoted to the overthrow of the US government and which has a long history of serious violence on US soil.

Not just the Iranian government, but also most of its citizens, are likely to perceive this de-listing as exactly what it is: yet another act of aggression toward their nation. As the Christian Science Monitor said of the group, it is "widely despised inside Iran". But the US has now officially offered a clear gesture of legitimization, if not support, for this group, one that only exacerbates the war-threatening tensions between the two nations.

UPDATE

Several commenters have raised questions about the motives of Dershowitz and Wiesel in supporting MEK. While motives can never be known with certainty - one can attempt only to make inferences based on conduct and circumstances - it was the JTA, the self-described "global news service of the Jewish people", which reported their involvement, and they suggested the motive was not any receipt of money but rather MEK's alignment with Israel:

"The names on the growing list of influential American advo-

cates to de-list the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK -- known in English as the National Council of Resistance of Iran -- suggest an effort to give the bid a pro-Israel imprimatur. . . .

“On the record, the people involved insist there is no Israel element to what they say is a humanitarian endeavor to remove the movement’s followers from danger.

“I don’t see any Israel issue at all,’ Dershowitz told JTA in an interview, instead casting it in terms of Hillel’s dictum, ‘If I am only for myself, who am I?’

“Off the record, however, figures close to the campaign use another ancient Middle Eastern dictum to describe the involvement of supporters of Israel: ‘The enemy of my enemy is my friend.’”

“A source close to the effort to bring pro-Israel voices into the initiative cited reports that Israel has allied with the MEK, which reportedly maintains agents in Iran and in the past has published details of Iran’s nuclear weapons program.”

A separate JTA article reporting on the de-listing noted that “Iranian Americans sympathetic to the plight of MEK enlisted the support of a number of pro-Israel figures, including Nobel Peace laureate and Holocaust memoirist Elie Wiesel; Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz; and Irwin Cotler, the former Canadian justice minister.” The original sentence has been clarified to reflect this report.



MEK Still Isn't OK

September 2012

This past Friday, the State Department announced that it will remove the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK)—a fringe Iranian dissident group that has been criticized for its cultish practices—from its list of terrorist groups. The State Department may have satisfied a court-imposed deadline and could help the group's members escape their current stateless limbo, but the decision will enable the MEK to put more effort into pushing the United States toward war with Iran in its campaign to become the new government in Tehran.

The court's deadline comes from a lawsuit brought by the MEK arguing that its designation as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO)—which it has held since 1997—is no longer appropriate because it claims to have abandoned violence in 2002; in 2003, when its members in Iraq were disarmed by the U.S. military, the group signed documents promising to use only peaceful means of protest to advocate for its goals. In June, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit gave Secretary of State Hillary Clinton until October 1 to decide whether the group still belonged on the list or the court would delist the group.

Whether the MEK still belongs on the FTO list presents a legal question. If it has abandoned violence—including the capability and intent to commit terrorism—then perhaps it's earned removal. The group's many critics point to rumors that the MEK has been collaborating with the American and Israeli militaries and intelligence services (for example, [here](#)). But the FTO

MEK
Uncovered

584



statute counts only terrorism or terrorist activity that “threatens the security of United States nationals or the national security of the United States”; even if unsubstantiated rumors about MEK’s collaboration with the U.S. military are true, they would not qualify the MEK for FTO status under the statute. This highlights the problem: The law as written gives a pass to groups whose activities are viewed as useful to the United States, just as it could fail to apply to unsavory groups that do not pose a danger to the country.

Aside from highlighting problems with the way U.S. law classifies terrorist organizations, the MEK decision creates a few practical problems. First, though, let’s look at two potential benefits. The Iraqi government wants the MEK out of the country—in part because it is close to the Tehran regime and in part because Iraqi Kurds and Shias despise the MEK for helping Saddam Hussein suppress their uprisings after the 1991 Gulf War. Iraq has demonstrated an unwillingness to respect its responsibility under international law to protect people who are essentially refugees; Iraqi security forces killed some 49 members during clashes with the group after the United States turned responsibility of Camp Ashraf over to the Iraqi government in 2009. The MEK can’t just be sent home to Iran because it is a crime to be a member of the group there. They need to go somewhere else, but no country was willing to welcome MEK members so long as the group was on the U.S.’s FTO list, and the MEK wouldn’t cooperate in the resettlement





process until the State Department held out the carrot of delisting. This decision brings some hope, however limited and tenuous, that they may be able to find new, permanent homes, bringing an end to their stateless limbo.

Should members be resettled, another possible humanitarian benefit of the decision could be that they might then be able to engage with the wider world, and some might even consider leaving the cult. This is particularly relevant to the 70 percent or so of the group's membership who joined after the MEK allied itself with Saddam Hussein, lost its support in Iran, transformed into a highly insular organization, and took up deceptive recruitment practices.

Those are the potential benefits. Now we turn to the problems with the decision. In light of the unprecedented lobbying effort made to get the MEK delisted, in which prominent former officials received tens of thousands of dollars to speak on the group's behalf, it looks highly politicized. The MEK will make it look like delisting was a symbol of U.S. approbation. With regards to our complicated relationship with Iran, Tehran will see the decision as—in the words of CIA veteran and Georgetown University professor Paul Pillar—"one more indication that the United States is interested only in hostility and pressure toward the Islamic Republic, rather than coming to terms with it." Some fear that it will undermine American credibility as a force for democracy in Iran (to the extent that the U.S. has such credibility).

The most significant concern is how it will unleash the MEK to further ratchet up the probability of violent conflict with Iran. As I have written here and here, the MEK has had two major goals: an immediate one of getting off the FTO list and a long-term one of taking power in Tehran (it already has a "parliament in exile" and a "president-elect" in its National Council of Resistance of Iran). Now that it has accomplished its short-term goal of getting off the list, it can focus on its core objective.

If the MEK were really what it claims to be—"the largest

peaceful, secular, pro-democratic Iranian dissident group” and it didn’t need our help—we wouldn’t need to worry much. But it’s not. The MEK has almost no support among the Iranian people, who vilify the group for signing up with Saddam Hussein, killing Iranians, and then becoming a cult—or see it as a joke. There are only two ways that the MEK could achieve its goal: money or arms. Both options would likely involve the United States, and it is hard to imagine the MEK getting into power by money alone.

The MEK has been pumping up fears of Iran for years. I don’t want to discount the risks of Iran building a nuclear weapon someday, but the MEK plays up the issue for its own uses. The MEK will continue to encourage fear of Iran on Capitol Hill, maintain its ongoing public-relations campaign that promotes wildly exaggerated fears of Iran among the American public, and likely offer its services as a proxy-force ally against Iran, as it has for years.

We should worry that removing the MEK from the FTO list will open the door to a repeat in Iran of what we experienced in Iraq thanks to the embrace of Ahmed Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress. It started with us funding the Iraqi émigré banker-turned-politician, and it ended with us invading Iraq and putting him in charge of the interim governing council. Even if it was just a relatively small bunch of neocons in the Bush administration and Congress who bought Chalabi’s rosy picture of having huge support in Iraq and a ready-made government, it wasn’t as if the rest of Congress or the media put a stop to their push for war. It was more like full speed ahead. To limit the damage from its decision, the State Department needs to make it powerfully clear that the United States does not support the MEK. That will take a lot of work, because the MEK will flaunt the delisting.

More important, the U.S. government should not engage with the MEK going forward. Congress should ignore the group. Some officials will inevitably think that working with the MEK



makes sense or is convenient. They will be wrong. The White House should consider making it policy for the government not to fund, employ, or otherwise collaborate with the group. The MEK is not our ally. Its interests are its own, not ours. The State Department's decision may be legally sound, and it's good to help MEK members find a new home, but when it comes to American policy, the group is not to be trusted. To quote Ambassador John Limbert, former embassy hostage and the first deputy assistant secretary of state for Iran, the MEK has "a very dubious history and a similarly dubious present." Let's have nothing to do with its dubious future.





Obama Decision on Islamist-Marxist Terror Cult Will Lead to U.S. Funding, Experts Say

September 2012

After a multi-million dollar lobbying campaign that unlawfully enlisted top members of the bipartisan U.S. political class, the Obama administration decided that the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an Islamist-Marxist terror cult notorious for murdering Americans, should no longer be on the State Department's list of designated terrorist organizations. Experts say the decision paves the way to begin openly showering U.S. taxpayer money on the anti-American outfit in its bid to overthrow the Iranian regime.

The controversial decision to formally "delist" the organization came in the wake of reports charging that the federal government was already arming and training the cult-like Iranian MEK in violation of U.S. terror laws. The purpose of the alleged support, according to multiple sources, was to help wage a proxy war against Iran. Criticism of the administration's recent decision, however, erupted quickly and forcefully.

Also known as the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran, the MEK was founded in an effort to advance a hybrid system incorporating communism and Islam. It officially landed on the U.S. government's terror list some 15 years ago for perpetrat-

MEK
Uncovered

589



ing numerous terror attacks against civilians and more than a few senior American military personnel. The group was also allied with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, helping him to wage a brutal war against Iran while suppressing dissidents within Iraq.

“The U.S. Department of State took the moral and strategic bankruptcy of America’s Iran policy to a new low,” observed Iran expert Flynt Leverett, a professor at Pennsylvania State University’s School of International Affairs. “Since when did murdering unarmed civilians (and, in some instances, members of their families as well) on public streets in the middle of a heavily populated urban area (Tehran) not meet even the U.S. government’s own professed standard for terrorism?”

Despite federal statutes defining as a felony the provision of any “material support” to designated terrorist organizations, the MEK managed to buy die-hard support from numerous senior U.S. politicians and former officials on both sides of the aisle. Advocates for the terror cult range from neo-conservative terror-war cheerleaders like Rudy Giuliani and Michael Mukasey to liberals like Howard Dean and Gen. James Jones. Former White House Chief of Staff Andy Card, ex-CIA and FBI bosses, and many others jumped on the pro-MEK bandwagon, too.

The paid lobbyists for the terror cult uNLAWfully earned massive sums of money — often tens of thousands of dollars or more. But the administration’s decision, supposedly based on

“humanitarian” concerns to get the group’s members out of Iraq, sets a troubling precedent, according to analysts. “The delisting of the MEK, following a well-funded political lobby campaign, creates the dangerous impression that it is possible for terrorist organizations to buy their way off the [terrorism] list,” Mila Johns of the University of Maryland’s National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism was quoted as saying by Wired magazine.

But there is undoubtedly more to the decision to delist the group than the fact that it showered money on former U.S. officials — funds that were probably extracted from American taxpayers at some point. While well-paid shills for the group claim that the MEK has not been engaged in much terrorism recently — at least not against American targets — numerous reports indicate that the cult has been as busy as ever. As recently as 2009, for example, the U.S. State Department warned that “MEK leadership and members across the world maintain the capacity and will to commit terrorist acts in Europe, the Middle East, the United States, Canada and beyond.” More recently, U.S. officials have even admitted that the murders of Iranian scientists over the past several years were being conducted by the MEK — apparently with support and training from the Obama administration and the Israeli government. Journalist Seymour Hersh with the New Yorker reported that members of the cult were actually receiving training from the U.S. government on American soil, a severe violation of federal law.

However, for now at least, the group’s terror campaign appears to be largely directed at Iran, which is ruled by a regime that both the Western establishment and the MEK hope to depose. So, because the Iranian regime is now the terror cult’s primary target for terrorism — it used to be capitalism, America, and the West, and probably will be again at some point — war-mongering U.S. officials have apparently found an ally.

“When these criminal politicians start speaking about the ‘war



against terrorism,' spit on your television screen, as they are the terrorists," fumed liberty-minded analyst Daniel McAdams after the decision was made public. "They are wealthy terrorists who steal your tax dollars to send overseas and recoup to lobby in favor of bloody killers of civilians in Iran."

Experts predict with relative certainty that U.S. taxpayer money will soon begin openly flowing to the Marxist terror cult, too. However, observers argue that collaborating with the dangerous group at all would be a terrible plan — let alone openly arming and funding it to wage a war against a foreign government.

"To limit the damage from its decision, the State Department needs to make it powerfully clear that the United States does not support the MEK," wrote analyst Jeremiah Goulka, who studied the MEK in Iraq for the RAND Corporation. "The White House should consider making it policy for the government not to fund, employ, or otherwise collaborate with the group. The MEK is not our ally. Its interests are its own, not ours."

Analysts also said the delisting of the terror cult would be counterproductive on multiple fronts even for goals the Obama administration purports to support. For one, it reinforces Tehran's narrative that the lawless U.S. government intends to destroy Iran and the Iranian people no matter what — and that it has nothing to do with non-existent nuclear weapons. It also makes war more likely.

Meanwhile, the MEK, unsurprisingly, is widely despised within Iran, partly because it worked with Saddam Hussein to massacre Iranians with American support before the Iraqi tyrant found himself on the U.S. government's enemy list. The fact that the Obama administration is now seen as openly supportive of the terror cult and may even begin openly funding it soon will decimate the genuine movement for political reform inside Iran as well.

The decision will also allow the Islamo-Marxist group to have

an even larger say in U.S. government policy toward Iran as it seeks to overthrow the government and seize the reins of power. Former DNC boss Howard Dean even called for recognizing the mass-murdering cult, which, again, has virtually no support outside of Washington, D.C., as the legitimate government of Iran.

Iranians opposed to the Islamist regime, however, say that would be a terrible idea. “The MEK does not represent the Iranian-American community or the pro-democracy movement in Iran,” noted the National Iranian American Council. “We do not support the use of violence and war to replace Iran’s undemocratic regime that abuses human rights with the MEK’s undemocratic cult that tortures its own members.”

According to analysts, the controversial decision to delist the MEK has also exposed once again the lawless and hypocritical nature of U.S. government policy makers. In recent decades, no matter which political party has been in power, the U.S. government has routinely backed dictators and terrorist groups before turning against them. Critics of the latest example of such outrageous behavior say the MEK’s victory fits into that pattern perfectly.

“This MEK scam more vividly illustrates the rot and corruption at the heart of America’s DC-based political culture than almost any episode I can recall,” observed popular analyst Glenn Greenwald in the U.K. Guardian, adding that the U.S. government often “favors” terrorism despite purporting to oppose it. “The history of the U.S. list of designated terrorist organizations, and its close cousin list of state sponsors of terrorism, is simple: a country or group goes on the list when they use violence to impede U.S. interests, and they are then taken off the list when they start to use exactly the same violence to advance U.S. interests.”

Activists are still hoping that federal terror laws will be applied consistently so former U.S. officials and politicians bought by the MEK can be held accountable for providing “materi-



al support” to a designated terrorist organization. Even more important, however, are the consequences of having the U.S. government work with yet another terror group, in this case an anti-American Islamo-Communist cult. The blowback will undoubtedly come back to haunt the world — probably sooner rather than later.





Iranian exile group removed from U.S. terror list

September 2012

The Iranian exile group Mujahedin-e-Khalq has been removed from a State Department terror list, officials said Friday.

The group was put on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, which includes more than 50 groups like al Qaeda and Hezbollah, in 1997 because of the killing of six Americans in Iran in the 1970s and an attempted attack against the Iranian mission to the United Nations in 1992.

However, since 2004 the United States has considered the group, which has lived for more than 25 years at a refugee camp in Iraq, “noncombatants” and “protected persons” under the Geneva Conventions.

Mujahedin-e-Khalq’s move from Camp Ashraf is nearing completion under the auspices of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. The members are relocating to a temporary site there before being resettled in third countries.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was under a court order to decide by October 1 whether to remove the group from the terror list.

“With today’s actions, the department does not overlook or forget the MEK’s past acts of terrorism, including its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil in 1992,” the State Department said in a statement.

MEK
Uncovered

595

Iranian exile group removed from U.S. terror list

By the CNN Wire Staff

Updated 21:17 GMT (13:17 HKT) September 28, 2013



State Dept.: MEK no longer terrorists (1/4)



“The department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organization, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members.

“The Secretary’s decision today took into account the MEK’s public renunciation of violence, the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism by MEK for more than a decade, and their cooperation in the peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf, their historic paramilitary base,” the statement said.

Maryam Rajavi, head of Mujahedin-e-Khalq and president-elect of the National Council of Resistance, praised the decision Friday.

“I understand that this decision was difficult and required political courage,” Rajavi said in a statement. “This has been the correct decision, albeit long overdue, in order to remove a major obstacle in the path of the Iranian people’s efforts for democracy. For more than a decade, the mullahs made every effort to prevent removal of this designation.

“They do not conceal their anger and disappointment and are trying hysterically to counter Secretary Clinton’s decision with their lobby groups in the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe.

“The people of America and the U.S. Government will realize that, contrary to the campaign of demonization and misinformation orchestrated by the religious fascism ruling Iran, our movement is far removed from all the allegations and accusations churned out by the current Iranian regime, is merely striving for freedom and democracy in Iran, and is campaigning against fundamentalism and export of terrorism,” Rajavi said.

Being on the list carries a certain stigma and allows the United States to legally go after financing and take other steps against individuals associated with these groups.

Officials acknowledge that the decision has been the subject of a contentious debate within the administration.

Mujahedin-e-Khalq is considered by many in the administration to be a bizarre cult-like organization, prompting concerns about its behavior. Officials say these concerns factored heavily in the debate.

The group denies that it supports terrorism, and supporters rally daily in front of the State Department to demand removal from the terrorism list.

Many members of Congress have pressured Clinton to do the same.

Moreover, Mujahedin-e-Khalq has paid well-known former U.S. politicians and former administration heavyweights to speak out on its behalf, including former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, former U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, former FBI Director Louis Freeh and former National Security Adviser James Jones.

The last major convoy of 680 members of Mujahedin-e-Khalq arrived this month at the temporary relocation site at a former U.S. military base near Baghdad International Airport, the U.N. mission for Iraq said.

The State Department said at the time that the arrival marked “a significant milestone in efforts to achieve a sustainable humanitarian solution to this issue.”



Mujahedin-e-Khalq leaders have been reluctant to complete the move from Camp Ashraf to Camp Hurriya, formerly an American facility known as Camp Liberty. They complained about conditions at the new camp, calling it more a prison than a home after the first convoy arrived in February.

Camp Ashraf was established in 1986 after former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invited members of Mujahedin-e-Khalq to relocate to Iraq in an effort to undermine the Iranian government, which was then at war with Iraq. Iran also considers the group to be a terrorist organization.



The Washington Times

U.S. takes Iranian dissident group MEK off terrorist list

September 2012

NEW YORK — The Obama administration has taken the Mujahideen-e-Khalq off the U.S. terrorist blacklist culminating an expensive PR campaign by the Iranian dissidents.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's decision took into account the MEK's public renunciation of violence, the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism by the group for more than a decade, and their cooperation in the closure of Camp Ashraf, their paramilitary base in Iraq, the State Department said in a statement.

Following an extensive review, U.S. officials found no evidence of the group's involvement in terrorist activity.

The decision was based on a "global evaluation of the group's activities," a senior State Department official told reporters in a background call on Friday afternoon.

The MEK was responsible for terrorist attacks in Iran in the 1970s that killed several U.S. military personnel and civilians, according to the State Department. The group denies any role in the deaths of U.S. military personnel.

The State Department said that it "does not overlook or forget the MEK's past acts of terrorism, including its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil in 1992."

MEK
Uncovered

599



600

The MEK was given shelter by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. It has since renounced violence and in 2003 surrendered its weapons as part of a cease-fire agreement with U.S. forces.

The MEK says it is now working to overthrow the Iran's Islamic regime through peaceful means.

The senior State Department official said the group's activities in Iran were also considered in the decision to delist.

"We do not distinguish between actions in or against Iran or in or against any other country," the senior State Department official.

The decision, effective immediately, allows U.S. citizens to support the group without the need for a license.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, an ally of Iran, has sought to shut down the group's paramilitary base, Camp Ashraf, in a bid to kick its members out of his country.

Mrs. Clinton's decision was shaped, in part, by the MEK's cooperation in relocating from Camp Ashraf to Camp Liberty, a temporary location near Baghdad's international airport.

U.N. and Western officials have said the terrorist designation by the U.S. had deterred Western nations from taking in members of the MEK. The decision on Friday could remove that

hurdle.

“It is certainly plausible to assume that this action will assist in our efforts to support the UNHCR in its efforts to find homes for these people outside Iraq,” a second senior State Department official said on background.

A U.S. appeals court in June set an Oct. 1 deadline for Mrs. Clinton to take a decision on removing the MEK from terrorist blacklist.

Britain and the European Union took the MEK off their lists of terrorist organizations in 2008 and 2009 respectively.

Maryam Rajavi, MEK’s Paris-based leader, welcomed Mrs. Clinton’s decision.

“I understand that this decision was difficult and required political courage,” Mrs. Rajavi said. “This has been the correct decision, albeit long overdue, in order to remove a major obstacle in the path of the Iranian people’s efforts for democracy.”

The MEK has sought to position itself as a democratic force in Iran. However, U.S. officials are skeptical about its qualifications.

“We do not see the MEK as a viable opposition or democratic opposition movement,” the first senior State Department official said. “We have no evidence and we have no confidence that MEK is an organization that could promote the democratic values that we would like to see in Iran.”

The Clinton administration designated the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997 in an attempt to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough with the Iranian government.

Iran lashed out at the decision to take the MEK off the terrorism list.

A spokesman for Iran’s foreign ministry on Wednesday condemned U.S. plans to take the MEK off the terrorist list.

“The United States’ double standard in dealing with terrorism and instrumental use of these groups for political gain is not a new issue,” foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast was quoted as saying by Iranian state media.



“If the U.S. government goes ahead with this move, then it will be accountable for the blood of thousands of Iranians and Iraqis spilt by this cult... and it weakens world efforts in combating terrorism,” he said.

The MEK, whose leadership is based in Paris, invested a lot of money in an intense and expensive campaign to get itself off the U.S. terrorist blacklist. The group has prominent Republican as well as Democratic supporters, some of whom have admitted taking money to speak on behalf of the group.

The State Department officials said that campaign did not influence Mrs. Clinton’s decision.

The group’s supporters plan to celebrate outside the State Department on Friday.

The decision to delist the MEK, also known as the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran, will be published in the Federal Register on Wednesday.





THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

The MEK Is Bad News, But Delisting Them Was A Good Decision

October 2012

Members of the Iranian dissident group known as the Mujahedin e-Khalq, or MEK, really don't like me. I don't trust them, either. I've been reporting on the MEK for the Huffington Post since last summer, and members of the group have threatened my house and hacked my email.

Still, I believe the State Department's decision Friday to remove the MEK from the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations was a good one.

Like many people who've researched how the MEK actually works, I don't believe that they're freedom fighters in exile as they claim to be. Nor do I believe their values are democratic, as they claim they are.

I believe the MEK is a militant cult of personality, whose leaders, Maryam and Massoud Rajavi, figured out in the 1980's that they could survive by doing mercenary work on behalf of governments that hate Iran. Saddam Hussein was their first patron, and he granted them land in Iraq to build a walled, military compound, Camp Ashraf, where until a few months ago, more than 3,000 members lived.

There, they would wake up every day and worship images of Maryam Rajavi before commencing with the day's Army base-type tasks. The MEK claims to subsist on foreign contributions,

MEK
Uncovered

603



but that's only partly true.

In America, their well-paid U.S. advocates, men like former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell and former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, wax on about how the MEK renounced violence a decade ago and just needs U.S. backing in order to topple the Iranian regime and seize power. I've watched these guys earn \$40,000 for an eight-minute speech.

But the debate over whether or not the MEK is a terrorist group doesn't matter. It never really did. After dozens of conversations and background briefings over the past year, I don't believe Secretary of State Hillary Clinton decided to delist the MEK how and when she did because the secretary suddenly changed her mind on the question of whether or not they are terrorists.

I think the reason the MEK was delisted on Friday is, more importantly, because Clinton understands that they're a dangerous cult, and that all the other potential outcomes of the 30-year standoff between the MEK and the outside world would have likely been much, much worse.

Near the top of that list was mass suicide, a possibility that kept more than a few U.S. diplomats up at night. After that, it was

that the MEK's leaders would deliberately provoke a confrontation with Iraqi security forces, many of whom would be happy to avenge the ethnic cleansing raids MEK soldiers carried out for Hussein back in the day. In France, where Maryam Rajavi lives, officials considered the unwelcome possibility of public self-immolations — a tactic the MEK has used there before.

Truth is, most of the world doesn't really care what happens to the 3,200 people who used to live at Camp Ashraf.

But Secretary Clinton cares, despite years of daily MEK protests outside her office on C Street, N.W., where I've watched the same dozen or so people, all dressed in identical Maryam Rajavi t-shirts, banging drums and accusing Clinton of violating human rights, breaking international law, and callously leaving them to die at the hands of Iraqi soldiers.

Ironically, while they cursed the secretary from the sidewalk, inside the State Department, Clinton and her aides were quietly working on a plan to save thousands of brainwashed MEK foot soldiers in Camp Ashraf from their own leaders and from the Iraqi military.

The only way to do this is to split the 3,200 into small groups and transfer them out of Iraq a few at a time, as refugees. This being a cult, however, the leaders initially refused to let anyone leave Ashraf unless they all left as a group. But as one former U.S. diplomat said to me, "What the hell kind of country is going to agree to take in 3,000 militant cult members?"

Clinton only had one major bargaining chip. In exchange for leaving Camp Ashraf, the secretary agreed to delist the group from the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, which she officially did on Friday. That afternoon, State Department officials presented us reporters with three reasons they said the decision was merited. None of the official reasons holds up to scrutiny, but the eventual outcome, the delisting, does.

Therein lies the difference between politics and diplomacy. The "reasons" given here didn't win anybody over. They were more of a gesture meant to placate people like me, who have



MEK
Uncovered

605

reported what everyone at the State Department already accepts, namely, that the MEK is dangerous and untrustworthy and capable of future violence.

But the question facing Secretary Clinton wasn't whether the MEK could be trusted. Or even if the MEK's members were still dangerous. Privately, U.S. officials don't pretend to know the answer to either one.

The question at the heart of the MEK decision was whether Clinton would be willing to quietly save 3,200 lives. She was. I may not trust the MEK or their tactics, but the year-long negotiation that culminated on Friday represents a bright point for U.S. diplomacy and humanitarianism.



MEK: When Terrorism Becomes Respectable

October 2012

Department of State Public Notice 8050 dated September 21, 2012, reads thus:

In the matter of the designation of Mujahadin-e Khalq, also known as MEK, also known as Mujahadin-e Khalq Organization, also known as MKO, also known as Muslim Iranian Students' Society, also known as National Council of Resistance, also known as NCR, also known as Organization of the People's Holy Warriors of Iran, also known as the National Liberation Army of Iran, also known as NLA, also known as National Council of Resistance of Iran, also known as NCRI, also known as Sazeman-e Mujahadin-e Khalq-e Iran, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Pursuant to Section 1[b] of Executive Order 13224, as amended. Acting under the authority of Section 1[b] of Executive Order 13224 of September 23, 2001, as amended]"the Order"] I hereby revoke the designation of the entity known as the Mujahadin-e Khalq, and its aliases, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist pursuant to Section 1[b] of the Order. This action takes effect September 28, 2012.

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State

With this stroke of the pen, as it were, the United States removed from its global terrorist list an organization—Mujahadin-e Khalq [MEK]—that had been listed since 1997. A shadowy outfit, MEK's delisting was the result of a full-court press

MEK
Uncovered

607



by a bipartisan group of policy influentials, including General Hugh Shelton, former chairman of the joint Chiefs of Staff; Lee Hamilton, former congressman from Indiana; Bill Richardson, former governor of New Mexico; General Wesley Clark, former supreme commander of NATO; and Louis Freeh and Michael Hayden, former directors of the FBI and CIA, respectively.

In a speech at a conference in February 2011, Governor Richardson urged that MEK should be removed from the terrorist list : “This is a movement that doesn’t want any money. This is a movement that doesn’t want weapons,” Richardson declared. “This is a movement that just wants to be allowed to roam, to do your democratic thing.” Equally opaquely, General Shelton said at the same event: “When you look at what the MEK stands for, when they are antinuclear, separation of church and state, individual rights, MEK is obviously the way Iran needs to go.”

On one level, the ostensible reason for the United States’ delisting is that the Iraq-based MEK is a force in exile dedicated to removing the current regime in Tehran. As General Shelton added, “By placing the MEK on the FTO [Foreign Terrorist Organizations] list we have weakened the support of the best organized internal resistance group to the most terrorist-oriented anti-Western world, anti-democratic regime in the region.” In the zero-sum game of U.S.-Iran relations, there appears to

be, then, a certain logic to the move. It is illuminating, however, to take a closer look at this movement, through the eyes of some individuals lesser known than the heavyweight list that supports their cause, but who might just be in a position to know more about it.

These would include Ray McGovern, an ex-CIA operative, who said of the MEK: “Why the U.S. cooperates with organizations like the Mujahedin, I think, is because that they are local, and because they are ready to work for us. Previously, we considered them a terrorist organization. And they exactly are. But they are now our terrorists and we now don’t hesitate to send them into Iran....for the usual secret service activities: attacking sensors, in order to supervise the Iranian nuclear program, mark targets for air attacks, and perhaps establishing secret camps to control the military locations in Iran. And also a little sabotage.”

Or, from Karen Kwiatkowski, formerly with the Department of Defense: “MEK is ready to do things over which we would be ashamed, and over which we try to keep silent. But for such tasks we’ll use them.” (For both these quotes, see “U.S. Government’s Secret Plans for Iran,” by Markus Schmidt, John Goetz, WDR TV, Germany, February 3, 2005).

And what exactly are these “tasks”? According to the State Department’s original statement designating MEK as a terrorist organization (in 1997, when the Clinton administration was trying to engage Iran), MEK instigated a bombing campaign, including an attack against the head office of the Islamic Republic Party and the Prime Minister’s office, which killed some 70 high-ranking Iranian officials, including Chief Justice Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, President Mohammad-Ali Rajaei, and Prime Minister Mohammad-Javad Bahonar. In addition, MEK assassinations range in date and targets from U.S. military personnel and civilians in the 1970s (hence the original terrorist listing) to, almost certainly, the killing of at least five leading Iranian nuclear scientists in recent months.





Complementing the lethal violence of the MEK is the organization's bizarre internal dynamic. Elizabeth Rubin of The New York Times visited its Camp Ashraf headquarters in Iraq in 2003, and, in the course of the drumbeat of support for delisting, posted an article in the Times on August 13, 2011, "An Iranian Cult and its American Friends." Herein she describes a—"cult" is the only appropriate term—headed by a woman named Maryam Rajavi and her husband, Massoud. What she relates is eerily reminiscent of the doomed Jim Jones cult in Guyana in the 1970s:

a fictional world of female worker bees...staring ahead as if they were working at a factory in Maoist China....Friendships and all emotional relationships are forbidden. From the time they are toddlers, boys and girls are not allowed to speak to each other. Each day at Camp Ashraf you had to report your dreams and thoughts....After my visit, I met and spoke to men and women who had escaped from the group's clutches. Many had to be reprogrammed. They recounted how people were locked up if they disagreed with the leadership or tried to escape; some were even killed.

So far, this is only a Jim Jones situation—which is bad enough—in that the tragedy affected only the cult's members. But, as Rubin also reports:

During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the group served as Saddam Hussein's own private militia opposing the theocratic government in Tehran. For two decades, he gave the group money, weapons, jeeps and military bases along the border with Iran. In return, the Rajavis pledged their fealty.

In 1991, when Mr. Hussein crushed a Shiite uprising in the south and attempted to carry out a genocide against the Kurds in the north, the Rajavis and their army joined his forces in mowing down fleeing Kurds. Ms. Rajavi told her disciples "Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards." Many followers escaped in disgust. Rubin concludes: "MEK is not only irrelevant to the cause of

Iran's democratic activists, but a totalitarian cult that will come back to haunt us.”

All of which begs the pressing question: Why the policy reversal? And why now? There are at least three reasons, from the pragmatic to the venal. First, MEK's presence in Iraq has been a growing source of tension between the host country's Shia government and the United States. As a 2009 Rand Corporation report (“The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum”) says:

From the early weeks of Operation Iraqi Freedom [OIF] until January 2009, coalition forces detained and provided security for members of the MEK, an exiled Iranian dissident cult group living in Iraq. From the outset of OIF, the MEK was designated a hostile force, largely because of its history of cooperation with Saddam Hussein's military in the Iran-Iraq war and its alleged involvement in his suppression of the Shia and Kurdish uprisings that followed the Gulf War of 1991.

The Rand report goes on:

The coalition's decision to provide security for a foreign terrorist organization was very controversial because it placed the United States in the position of protecting a group that it had labeled a terrorist organization. Among many resulting complications, this policy conundrum has made the United States vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy in the war on terrorism.

The Nour Al- Maliki government in Iraq, therefore, wanted the MEK out; but only by offering the prospect of delisting could the Obama administration persuade its rogue protectee to leave Ashraf peacefully, as it has now done, to be processed for resettlement by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Second, the dance with the MEK is a commentary on our lack of engagement with Iran, despite early promises for such by President Obama. According to a blog posting of September 24, 2012, by Leila Kashefi, a Washington-based Iranian-American human rights activist: “It has been incredible to watch





members of a designated terror group walk the halls of Congressional office buildings, mingling with Hill staffers and representatives. ‘The only Iranians we see are the MEK’, said one staffer.”

Third—and this is the least salubrious factor in the delisting—despite General Shelton’s protestations to the contrary, the MEK both wants and gets money, and uses it strategically. How exactly the group receives its support is a murky, perhaps impenetrable question. A report by the UK daily, *The Guardian* (“Iranian exiles, DC lobbyists and the campaign to delist the MEK,” September 21 2012) attributes this to “a formidable fundraising operation and campaign to transform the MEK’s image led by more than 20 Iranian-American organizations across the US. These groups and their leaders have spent millions of dollars on donations to members of Congress, paying Washington lobby groups and hiring influential politicians and officials, including two former CIA directors as speakers.” As the *Financial Times* summed up in a recent editorial (*Mujahedin mistake*,” September 25, 2012) “MEK has found the best friends money can buy”. (As a footnote, it goes without saying that neither of these press organs is typically amicably disposed toward the Iranian regime.)

Others have been skeptical about the role of expatriate groups—citing their characteristic frugality! Another, perhaps fanciful, explanation has been the largesse of Saddam Hussein toward MEK in the 1990s, and shrewd stewardship of his funding. Or perhaps the multiple aliases—self describing as “freedom fighters” or “democracy” activists—have diversified the funding options. Whatever the nature of the money trail, according to the *Guardian* report, “Several prominent former officials have acknowledged being paid significant amounts of money to speak about the MEK. The former Pennsylvania governor, Ed Rendell, has accepted more than \$150,000 in speaking fees at events in support of unbanning the MEK.” (Others who have accepted fees include Howard Dean, former

governor of Vermont, and Rudy Giuliani, former mayor of New York City. See, for example, “Iranian group’s big-money push to get off US terrorist list,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 8, 2011.) Nor do these friends in court appear overly concerned with a process of background checking: for Representative Dana Rohrabacher, “If they want to contribute to me because I believe strongly in human rights and stand up in cases like this, that’s fine. I don’t check their credentials.” [Guardian]

Finally, what are the consequences of the step to delist the MEK? In practical terms, the liberation will enable the MEK to lobby the U.S. Congress for support in the same way as the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 allowed the Iraqi National Congress led by the exiled Ahmad Chalabi to do so—a monumental policy error that led to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In this regard, history, as we know all too well, has a habit of repeating itself. Some 30-odd years ago, we saw the mujahedin of another state as “allies” in a cosmic struggle. Welcome to the Afghanistan of the Taliban, three decades on. It is the old adage “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” taken to absurd extreme.

Lest there are doubts about the adverse ethical as well as policy consequences, consider the response from the National Iranian American Council [NAIC], an organization opposed to the current regime, dated September 21, 2012:

The NAIC deplors the decision to remove the MEK from the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations. This decision opens the door for Congressional funding of the MEK to conduct terrorist attacks in Iran, makes war with Iran far more likely, and will seriously damage Iran’s peaceful pro-democracy movement as well as America’s standing among ordinary Iranians. The biggest winner today is the Iranian regime, which has claimed for a long time that the U.S. is out to destroy Iran and is the enemy of the Iranian people.

All in all, a sad saga—one of taking the moral low ground in pursuit of dubious policy objectives. Let us give the last word to the *Financial Times* editorial, which sums it up rather well:



“The US government’s decision to take Mujahedin-e Khalq, the exiled Iranian organization, off its list of terrorist groups is a vivid example of the influence of money and lobbying in Washington. At worst it highlights the analytical fog that clouds many US policy heavyweights’ view of Iran.”



614



Mujahedin-e Khalq: America's protected terrorists gearing up against Iran (Op-Ed)

October 2012

Unsatisfied in “crippling” Iran with sanctions, the US looks to be set for active operations there - and already has an in: a group called the Mujahedin-e Khalq, which in the near future could become the Persian equivalent of the Free Syrian Army. –On September 21, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton passed Public Notice 8050, de-listing the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) from the State Department’s Specially Designated Global Terrorist list, effective September 28.

What is MEK? Mujahedin-e Khalq is an Iranian Islamic militant organization in exile that advocates the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since its inception in 1965 in Iran, the group conducted assassinations of US military personnel and civilians working in Iran in the 1970s, jubilantly supported the takeover of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 and opposed the release of American personnel, calling for their execution instead, fought against the Islamic Republic together with Saddam Hussein during the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988) and set up headquarters in Iraq at Camp Ashraf.

In recent years, according to various sources including NBC, MEK teamed up with the Israeli secret service to kill Iranian

MEK
Uncovered

615

[Home](#) / [News](#)

Mujahedin-e Khalq: America's protected terrorists gearing up against Iran (Op-Ed)

Published time: 26 Oct. 2012 09:02

Updated time: 27 Oct. 2012 11:27

[Get this](#)MEK
Uncovered

616

nuclear scientists. NBC reported that US officials confirmed that “the Obama administration is aware of the assassination campaign but has no direct involvement”.

In 1994, the State Department sent a damning 41-page report to Congress on why the MEK is a terrorist organization; that designation was enacted in 1997. The report concluded: “It is no coincidence that the only government in the world that supports the Mujahedin politically and financially is the totalitarian regime of Saddam Hussein.” Well, the MEK’s mission to overthrow Iran’s leadership has not changed since, but the US agenda has: In a vertiginous about-face, Washington became the powerful protector of the Mujahedin-e Khalq.

Over the past few years, a formidable fundraising operation and campaign to de-list MEK from the Specially Designated Global Terrorist register gathered some high-caliber US supporters

including General James Jones, President Obama's National Security Advisor from 2009 to 2010; Bill Richardson, Energy Secretary and UN ambassador in the Clinton administration and Obama's Special Envoy to North Korea; Tom Ridge, the first Secretary of Homeland Security; General Wesley Clark, former supreme commander of NATO; Louis Freeh, former director of the FBI; three former directors of the CIA – Michael Hayden, James Woolsey and Porter Goss; Rudolph Giuliani, former Mayor of New York City; former UN Ambassador John Bolton; General Hugh Shelton, former Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002; and many others.

Top Washington lawyers and lobbyists made the case for the terrorist group as well: Akin Gump, Strauss Hauer & Feld, Patton Boggs and others. Robert Strauss, of the firm of the same name, was US Ambassador to the Soviet Union during the critical months of August 2, 1991, through December 26, 1991. A senior member of the firm Tobi Gati was also head of the intelligence branch of the US State Department.

When speaking about terrorist groups, one might think of MEK as a ragtag bunch of cutthroats in shreds and tatters, confined to an unsanitary tent city. The truth is nothing of the sort. Watch this report by CNN's Michael Ware dating back to 2007: You will see a marching army in crisp brand-new white-and-blue and khaki uniforms, entering a spacious parade ground framed by sculptures of lions. Camp Ashraf itself is one of the best-kept military facilities in Iraq and a sprawling city of 4,000 people, with shopping centers and hospitals, gardens, monuments, fountains and illuminations quite unexpected in the war-torn deserts of Iraq. The MEK is also armed with more than 2,000 well-maintained tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft guns and armored personnel carriers. Its supplies are guarded by US military police, and the camp itself is guarded by the American military. Indeed, "The coalition remains deeply committed to the security and rights of protected people of Ashraf," US Major Gen-





eral Gardner said, according to a Headquarters Multinational Force Iraq document dated March 11, 2006. Michael Ware calls the MEK “the US’ officially protected terrorists.” Another film of Australian origin shows Camp Ashraf’s own parliament and hundreds of tanks on the camp’s parade ground.

Well-versed in American political mores, the MEK’s leadership says the group is ‘pro-democracy.’ However, even the New York Times disagrees: In the middle of the 2011 de-listing campaign, it described MEK as “a repressive cult despised by most Iranians and Iraqis.”

‘Totalitarian cult’ is indeed the most frequent label applied to the MEK by people who come in contact with the group. And American support for MEK is not limited to military protection. Seymour Hersh, in his New Yorker piece “Our Men in Iran?” revealed that beginning in 2005, MEK fighters were trained in Nevada by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC).

Why is Washington backing the MEK? As General Shelton said at a conference in February 2011, “When you look at what the MEK stands for, when they are antinuclear, separation of church and state, individual rights, MEK is obviously the way Iran needs to go. ... By placing the MEK on the FTO [Foreign Terrorist Organizations] list we have weakened the support of the best organized internal resistance group to the most terrorist-oriented anti-Western world, anti-democratic regime in the region.”

In an interview with Germany’s WDR TV back in 2005, ex-CIA operative Ray McGovern explained the logic: “Why the U.S. cooperates with organizations like the Mujahedin, I think, is because that they are local, and because they are ready to work for us. Previously, we considered them a terrorist organization. And they exactly are. But they are now our terrorists and we now don’t hesitate to send them into Iran for the usual secret service activities: attacking sensors, in order to supervise the Iranian nuclear program, mark targets for air attacks, and perhaps establishing secret camps to control the

military locations in Iran. And also a little sabotage.”

Karen Kwiatkowski, formerly with the Department of Defense, makes a long story short for WDR TV: “MEK is ready to do things over which we would be ashamed, and over which we try to keep silent. But for such tasks we’ll use them.”

Now is the time for Russia and the world community to take active political measures preventing the United States from launching another proxy war in the Middle East. The MEK is much better trained and prepared for war than the Syrian rebels were at the beginning of the conflict, or even today. The MEK has all the necessary capabilities to become the military arm of an American attack against Iran. This time – unlike in Syria – the world should not ignore the march to war, and must take steps to prevent it from happening again.





THE AUSTRALIAN

Iranian terrorist group demands delisting

October 2012

AN Iranian group with a history of violent clashes with authority is fighting to be delisted as a terrorist organisation in Australia and it has the backing of several federal politicians.

For half a century the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), or People's Mujahideen of Iran, has fought to topple what it calls the "oppressive" Iranian government.

Listed as a terrorist group in Australia since 2001, it is seen by some as a modernising democratic force, and others as a mystical terror-cult.

Its logo, in use since the 1970s, features a Marxist clenched fist holding a sickle, crossed over a gun and bayonet.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade told AAP the MEK was listed because it satisfied, on reasonable grounds, the definition that it was either "a person who commits, or attempts to commit, terrorist acts or participates in or facilitates the commission of terrorist acts; an entity owned or controlled directly or indirectly by such persons; or a person or an entity acting on behalf of, or at the direction of such persons and entities."

Now the MEK is lobbying to be removed from the list, saying it has cleaned up its act.

But it's unclear whether the outfit will be able to shake off its past.

MEK
Uncovered

620



In 1992, about 15 MEK members trashed the Iranian embassy in Australia and assaulted staff, an event filmed by an SBS camera crew which had been tipped off by local MEK supporters.

Federal police raided about 10 homes of suspected MEK members in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane in 2003.

No one was charged or arrested, and the AFP still won't comment on the raids.

The organisation has a far more troubled record overseas.

Defectors speak of a Marxist-Islamist cult centred for 40 years on its leaders; husband and wife team Massoud and Maryam Rajavi.

US government-funded think tank RAND Corporation, which produces analysis for the armed forces, listed the group's cult-like characteristics in a 2009 report.

“(Massoud) Rajavi instituted what he termed an ‘ideological revolution’ in 1985, which, over time, imbued the MEK with many of the typical characteristics of a cult,” the RAND report states.

It lists tactics including authoritarian control, confiscation of assets, sexual control (including mandatory divorce and celibacy), emotional isolation, forced labour, sleep deprivation, physical abuse, and limited exit options.

“Recruits were brought into Iraq illegally and then required

MEK
Uncovered

621



to hand over their identity documents for ‘safekeeping’. They were effectively trapped,” the report said.

The findings of the RAND report are largely replicated in a 2005 Human Right Watch (HRW) report.

It states that during the ideological revolution in Iraq, married couples were forced to divorce and families were broken up, with children sent to live in safe houses run by the MEK.

The HRW document says many were told their families had died, only to find out years later they had been alive all along. Likewise the families had been told their loved ones in the camp had died.

The report claims members were also forced to undergo daily self-deprecation sessions where they would be marched out in front of hundreds of other members and asked to chastise themselves.

Those who tried to get out of the MEK were beaten, tortured, held in solitary confinement and even killed, it says.

But last month the US delisted the MEK as a terrorist group after a well-funded lobbying campaign.

Australian Federal MPs who support the group, including Labor Senator Claire Moore, and Nationals Senator John Williams, hope this country will follow suit.

“I think it’s worth giving them a go,” Senator Williams said.

“Are they a threat to our society if they come here, are they a threat to the rest of the world?” he asked.

“A lot of countries have delisted them, saying they aren’t.”

Co-Secretary of Australian Supporters of Democracy in Iran, Peter Murphy, isn’t surprised the US delisted the MEK, calling the group “a peaceful, democratic, constitutionalist force for change”.

But University of NSW Middle East expert Dr Anthony John Billingsley claims that’s a fantasy.

“It’s a dark illusion and a shameful demonstration of the power of lobbyists,” Dr Billingsley told AAP.

“I wouldn’t call them a force for democracy in Iran, quite the

opposite.

“They’re a group of weird, quite nasty terrorists, guilty of killing a fairly large number of Iranians including leading members of the regime, but also a large number of Americans and other westerners as well.”

Upon delisting the MEK, US State Department officials released a statement saying it “does not overlook or forget the MEK’s past acts of terrorism, including its involvement in the killing of US citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on US soil in 1992.

“The department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organisation, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members,” it said.

“The secretary’s decision today took into account the MEK’s public renunciation of violence, the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism by the MEK for more than a decade.”

Dr Billingsley said some members are giving up their lives for the group.

MEK observer Mohammed Sadeghpour explained that last year a Brisbane based supporter sold his home and donated all the money to the group before moving to France to become a full member.

“He is a good supporter, whole-hearted,” he said.

“He sold it for about \$300,000 or \$400,000.

“But these are individual decisions; they make them on their own.”

A report produced later in 2005 by a group known as Friends of a Free Iran (FOFI), comprising four European Parliament MPs, found no evidence of the RAND and HRW claims.

Mr Murphy said HRW’s report was “a spray job, but useful slander” for the MEK’s opponents.

“There are obviously HRW staff that are very pro-Iranian regime,” he said.

“It’s a shame HRW let itself go down that path.”

But HRW says its critics haven’t provided any evidence to back





up claims the organisation is pro-Iranian.

Mr Murphy bristles at any suggestion the MEK has operated as a cult, including instances of self-immolation.

When MEK leader Maryam Rajavi was detained and questioned by French police in 2003, 10 members set themselves on fire in Paris - three died.

Hunger strikes also occurred in Australia, and Ms Rajavi was released without charge after a few weeks.

When asked about these events, Mr Murphy's frustration becomes apparent.

"There's absolutely no evidence anyone asked them to do that," he said.

"What you are suggesting is just absurd, ridiculous."

After the interview with AAP Mr Murphy took to Twitter to say this author was a pawn of the Iranian government.

"AAP journalist Martin Silk is unethically entrapping torture victims, ultimately for the misogynist Iranian regime," he Tweeted.

AAP rejects this notion as absurd and ridiculous.

Mr Murphy denies the MEK was ever anything but a pro-democracy group or has used any terrorist tactics in its war with the Iranian government.

"One of the MEK's cultic characteristics is a focus on suicide," the RAND report states.

"Although it had not used suicide as a tactical weapon in terrorist attacks since 1981, the MEK has frequently used the threat of suicide as a negotiating tactic or to frustrate investigations," the document says.

Labor Senator Claire Moore admits it seems odd a democratic group has only had one leader in 40 years.

But she blames the terrorist listing for stopping the MEK telling governments its side of the story.

She says she understands the group has been at war with the Iranian government in the past, and employed tactics including bombings and assassinations.

"But they deny they've been careless, and they haven't been

involved in terrorist activities against Australia, the US or any European countries,” she said.

But Dr Billingsley insists any portrayal of the MEK as a peaceful organisation is flawed.

Some people think the MEK isn’t so nasty after all, he said, because “they’re blowing up our enemies rather than us”.

“The fact is they’re killing civilians,” he said.

“It’s terrorism by any definition.”



Ottawa drops Saddam Hussein-linked Iranian group from terror list in bid to ramp up pressure against Tehran

MEK
Uncovered

626

December 2012

An Iranian exile group that conducted bombings, assassinations and hijackings as part of a campaign to overthrow the Islamic regime in Tehran has been removed from Canada's official list of terrorist organizations, the government said Thursday.

Although the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) once recruited teens in Canada and was behind the 1992 storming of the Iranian embassy in Ottawa, it has now become the first group to be taken off the federal government's list of outlawed terrorist entities.

The announcement by Vic Toews, the Public Safety Minister, means it is no longer a criminal offence to fund or otherwise support the MEK, which ran a branch office in Canada until it was outlawed in 2005 by the Liberal government of the day.

Mr. Toews offered no explanation for the decision.

"As recommendations to remove a specific entity are based on classified information, we cannot provide specific details. However, we can tell you that the recommendation is in line



with similar actions recently taken by the USA and EU,” said Julie Carmichael, the Minister’s communications director.

At the same time that it de-listed a foe of the Iranian regime, the government added a pro-regime group to the list: the Quds Force, the clandestine branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps that arms, funds and trains extremist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas.

Canada will not tolerate terrorist activities

The listing of terrorist groups makes it easier for prosecutors to lay criminal charges against operatives in Canada. Forty-four terrorist groups, ranging from al-Qaeda to the Jewish extremist group Kahane Chai are now on the list.

“The list of terrorist entities sends a strong message that Canada will not tolerate terrorist activities, including terrorist financing, or those who support such activities,” Mr. Toews said, calling the move a “principled decision.”

The Quds Force is distinct from the others on the list because it is an arm of the Iranian state. Tehran uses it to export its Islamic Revolution by providing direct support to terrorists active throughout the region. It was also behind a 2011 plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States.

Related

- Ottawa ramps up sanctions against Iran as Tehran stone-walls on nuclear program
- Canadian resident's death sentence in Iran suspended because he 'repented': reports
- Iran blasts Canada as 'racist' and 'self-centred' for moving UN resolution condemning Islamic Republic's abuses

The main beneficiary of Quds Force backing is Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shi'ite group that has been fighting to prop up the Assad regime in Syria. Iran has also recently admitted to shipping missiles to the Gaza Strip for Hamas attacks on Israelis. The decision is Ottawa's latest attempt to tighten pressure on the regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In September, Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird severed diplomatic relations with Tehran, citing its human rights abuses and rogue nuclear program. He also branded Iran a state sponsor of terrorism, removing the barriers for terror victims to sue the Iranian government for damages.

The MEK has alienated much of its support base within Iran. On Thursday, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Canadian-led resolution condemning Iran's human rights record. Mr. Baird said Canada would "continue to urge the regime in Tehran to uphold its obligations and respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people in Iran."

Based in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein gave it sanctuary at a paramilitary base called Camp Ashraf, the MEK portrays itself as an alternative to the Iranian theocracy that seized power in 1979. Supporters argue the MEK long ago abandoned terrorist tactics and has evolved into a opposition-in-exile to a regime that does not tolerate dissent.

But a Canadian Security Intelligence Service report circulated in 2004 called it a “militant, Marxist Islamic movement” that had little support in Iran and was partly a personality cult built around its leaders Maryam and Massoud Rajavi.

“Although it remains a significant force in exile, the MEK has alienated much of its support base within Iran through its open alliance with Iraqi president Saddam Hussein – especially during the Iran-Iraq War. This lack of popular support does not lend credibility to the MEK’s insistence that it is a viable alternative to the president Iranian government,” the report said.





2013



THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

More Smoke and Mirrors From the MEK Propaganda Factory

January 2013

The MEK have been very keen to publicize a Library of Congress report called “Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile.”

On the surface this is understandable, as the MEK is the sworn enemy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, a closer look at the content reveals a murkier truth.

The report is characterized by its mixture of allegation, assertion and allusion, much of which is not substantiated by evidence. The report blends fact and fiction in a manner intended to deceive and mislead. As such, this document is not an attack, it is a defensive act, it is a play on words intended to prevent informed discussion and stop important people being listened to. Indeed, the gratuitous mention of two specific individuals, Anne Singleton and me. We have consistently exposed the aspects of the Mojahedin Khalq which it most wants to hide — its cult nature, human rights violations, and mercenary relation to foreign agents — is the strongest possible indication of the provenance of this report.

The other indication is that the source of this specific misinformation is Rabbi Daniel M. Zucker. In a footnote, the article “Disinformation Campaign in Overdrive: Iran’s VEVAK in High-Gear” is sourced at Global Politician, September 3,

MEK
Uncovered

631



2007, www.globalpolitician.com/23386-vevak-iran (accessed April 17, 2012). Interestingly, this website can no longer be accessed.

It is known that Zucker, along with his family, visited Maryam Rajavi in Paris and was sufficiently impressed by her glamorous outfits, free dinners and weasel words to become an active advocate of the MEK in America.

However, Zucker's article received a thorough retort back in 2007 from Professor Paul Sheldon Foote.

Reference to the same discredited article in this report can only be done out of ignorance, stupidity or desperation. Do Zucker and his ilk really believe that through defamation they can prevent the truth from emerging? Perhaps the MEK believe this will save their necks in Washington. Certainly Massoud Rajavi is deluded. He really believes that his cultic "thought-terminating clichés" will work with everyone. In Zucker he has found a like-minded person, willing to place hope over experience. But surely there are people in Washington who are not so willing

to be so easily duped.

So, what is it that Rajavi and his supporters are so desperate to hide?

Part of the answer to this question lies in the recent article “Do not Disturb — Criminals at Work in Camp Liberty” by one of the people named in the report. As time passes and the UNHRC processes the individuals in Camp Liberty for refugee status and relocation, the danger of further exposure of human rights abuses inside the MEK is becoming ever more critical for the cult. More and more exhausted and disillusioned MEK members are scheduled to come to Europe. When they are freed from Rajavi’s cultic constraints, what else will they reveal about the cult and its criminal activities?

While the UN is timidly tiptoeing around outside the closed door of Camp Liberty, afraid to intervene for fear of being labelled an ‘agent of the Iranian regime,’ only three thousand individuals are affected.

But in America the implications behind this report signal a potent threat to the national interest. Behind the self-interested motivations of the MEK and its sponsors there lies real danger for the American establishment. The problem for America is not the fact or fiction of the Iranian Intelligence Ministry’s reach into western countries. Instead, it is the reach of the internal enemies of America into its corridors of power which is truly disturbing.

Let us not forget that a similar document, mingling actual fact and unsubstantiated allegations masquerading as fact, became a central piece of evidence which was used in the legal argument to remove the MEK from the proscribed terrorism lists of both the UK and the European Union. Is this not a disturbing precedent?

Now, if Zucker and his ilk can insert this MEK-written propaganda into an apparently official document for the Pentagon — an easy target, of course, as it is swarming with willing warmongers — will it be long before such documents reach into



higher circles of power — that is, the people with America's nuclear arsenal at their fingertips. The decision-making clique in a national crisis cannot afford to be swayed by either ideologically biased or un-researched information.

When MEK misinformation so blatantly reaches the Pentagon, is it too far-fetched to imagine it reaching The White House? Should a crisis arise, can Americans be confident that those at the top really have well researched and balanced information on which to base their decisions, or could America be heading for a catastrophic miscalculation?

The loopholes to such a possibility can and should be closed. The MEK may look like friends now, but do not think they won't turn around and bite you in the future.





RadioFreeEurope
RadioLiberty

Diary Of An MKO Rent-A-Crowd Demonstrator

June 2013

Kyrgyz student Alina Alymkulova recounts how she was recruited to travel from Prague to Paris to attend a rally for the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO), an Iranian opposition movement in exile.

The MKO and its Paris-based political wing, the National Council of Resistance in Iran, are often at the center of controversy. The MKO, which advocates regime change in Iran, was only recently delisted as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union.

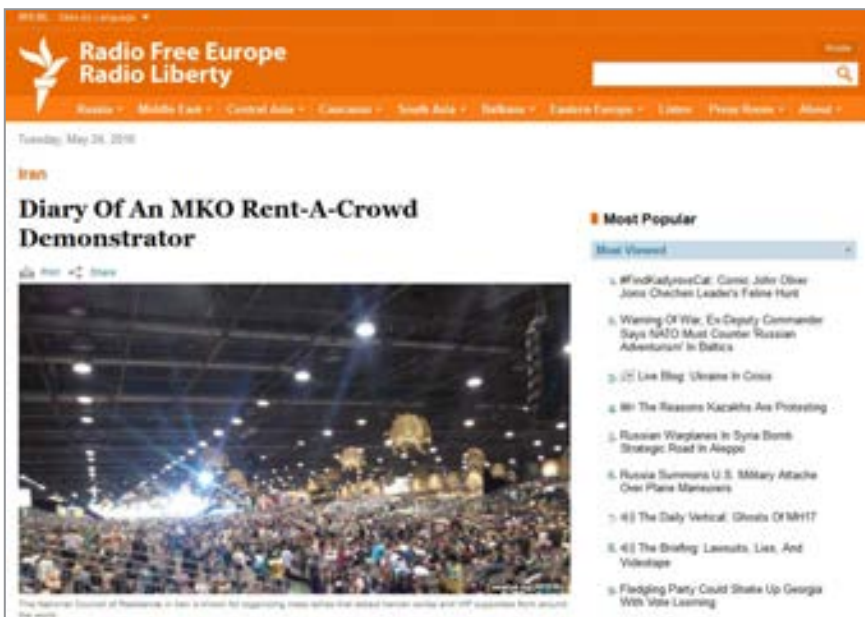
The National Council of Resistance in Iran and its president-elect, Maryam Rajavi, are known for organizing mass rallies that attract Iranian exiles and VIP supporters from around the world. But as Alymkulova's diary makes clear, some of the tens of thousands of supporters who attended the June 22 rally in Paris might have been motivated by more than their wish for a free Iran.

I was in Prague listening to music online and checking news on social media when an advertisement caught my eye. It offered a weekend trip to Paris, a city I always dreamed of visiting at least once during my lifetime.

The price was amazingly cheap -- round-trip by bus and bed and breakfast at a four-star hotel would cost me only 35 euros

MEK
Uncovered

635



(\$46).

I wrote to the trip organizer and discovered there was a catch, but it didn't bother me. The organizer explained that I would have to take part in a rally in Paris for a few hours. He promised the protest would be peaceful and violence-free, and that I would return home safe and sound.

JUNE 20*

9 p.m.: I arrived at a bus station in Prague along with a friend, a fellow student from Kyrgyzstan. Just as the trip organizer said last night, there were eight buses waiting to take us to Paris. Most of the "protesters" were young and obviously students like me. I met many Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs, and students from Asian countries who were all recruited via the Internet.

More than an hour later we were still at the bus station. People kept coming. It was cold and rainy, and some people began to drink alcohol to keep warm. Some others started to chant slogans: "Freedom to Iranian parrots!" and "Organizers should bring beer!"

I approached two Russian girls to see if they might have a better idea about the purpose of our trip. "To defend the rights

of Iranian women,” said one of the girls. “To meet handsome Frenchmen,” said the other. “Who cares about Iranian women?”

11:12 p.m.: Finally, the trip organizers arrived and let us on the buses. The journey had begun.

JUNE 21*

11:56 a.m.: After a lengthy bus journey and a sleepless night, we arrived in Paris. The organizers told us we had the whole day to see the city.

I met a student who traveled from Germany to take part in the same rally. But he was sure we were going to attend a rally in support of changes in Iraq, not Iran.

JUNE 22*

12:52 a.m.: The hotel was about 60 kilometers outside Paris. We were promised a night in a four-star hotel, but I wouldn't even give one star to the shabby place the organizers brought us to. “Well, what else would you expect for a 35 euro, all-inclusive trip to Paris?” someone said as we stood in line to use the toilet.

11:42 a.m.: I overslept and missed my breakfast. Those who woke up early said the breakfast consisted of milk and a sandwich.

1:16 p.m.: The buses took us to some strange place not far from Charles de Gaulle Airport. We were given papers explaining where to go and what to do. Cameras were not allowed. As we exited the bus, I resigned myself to the idea that running away was not an option -- people were guarding the area.

There were yellow-and-purple flags hanging everywhere. The name “Maryam Rajavi” was written on the flags. Well, at least I knew the name of the person behind this massive event.

The endless sight of buses from many different countries was somewhat alarming. Security guards checked us as we entered a building. They stopped me because I had kept my camera inside my backpack despite the organizers' warning. Amazingly, the guards let me take my camera in after I paid

MEK
Uncovered

637

them a couple of euros. Within seconds I was inside the building.

2:23 p.m.: There were at least 10,000 people inside. Strange music was playing. All the participants were given coupons for a free drink and sandwich. We ate and drank and then joined the rally being held in what appeared to be a huge stadium.

There were headphones on each seat, apparently so we could listen to direct translations of the speeches. I suddenly realized that there was a woman standing next to me. She was covered head-to-toe and kept saying, "Allahu Akbar."

Enough. I had to find the exit door.

Near the exit doors, where organizers were distributing salmon sandwiches and kebabs, I heard a few people speaking Kyrgyz, my mother tongue. They were three students who traveled from Germany.

9:28 p.m.: I spent the rest of the day sightseeing in Paris before returning to our bus.

JUNE 23*

11:57 a.m.: We arrived back in Prague. I was feeling down, and even the souvenirs I bought in Paris could not cheer me up. In thinking about the whole experience, a saying comes to mind: "Only a mousetrap has free cheese."



The Cult in the Shadow War: An Interview with a former member of Mojahedin-e-Khalq

November 2013

Masoud Banisadr was an active member of the controversial Iranian opposition group Mojahe-din-e-Khalq (MEK, PMOI) for twenty years, serving as the organizations representative to the United Nations and to the United States during his tenure. The group is largely obscured from public discourse, or more recently veiled in headlines describing them as political dissidents or refugees. To those more familiar with the group the debate tends to focus primarily on their na-ture. For many MEK is a dangerous terrorist organization, yet for others they are freedom fight-ers and the only legitimate alternative to the Iranian Government. They've been subject to several pieces suggesting they work as assassins for the United States and Israel. Masoud has published a book called Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel about his experience in the organization, which he very candidly describes in detail as a cult, and one that has long lost its strength and vibrance. He now focuses much of his work on the research and understanding of cults, terrorism, and cult behavior within those structures.

Richard Potter: How long were you active in MEK?

Masoud Banisadr: I left MEK 1996. Before that I was the repre-

MEK
Uncovered

639



representative in the United States and the United Nations.

You were only in the political arm?

Yes.

You would have joined in 1976 when it was a more political guerilla movement?

Yes at the time I joined them I was a PhD student in UK in New Castle University. I was married and I had a little daughter. Of course I married young, so everything was very fast. We married in UK far from Iran, but the only source of news we had during the Iranian revolution was from MEK. So because of the past history and the number of martyrs the MEK had against the Shah we trusted them. The slogans they gave were about freedom and democracy and equal rights, women's rights, minority rights. All destructive cults are like some lizards and can change colors very rapidly to their surroundings.

How did this change?

What happened in 1981 is that Massoud Rajavi (The head of MEK until 2003. Currently believed dead or in hiding) saw that he had attracted so many students and he thought he could repeat the Bolshevik revolution of Russia in Iran. So what he did was he suddenly on 20 June 1981 asked all members and supporters to come to the streets of Tehran and overthrow the

new establishment. MEK says that 500,000 people came to the streets. They failed. They failed and they couldn't do anything and from the next day they changed into a clandestine organization. Between the summer of 1981 the MEK went through many terrorist actions. They bombed the Islamic revolution party buildings. They killed the new President and Premier of Iran, and then they killed at Friday prayers in different cities through suicide operation, they killed different imams through suicide operations. They themselves claim that within one year that they killed almost 1400 people, high officials and supporters of the new establishment in Iran. At the same time they claimed 2000 of their members were killed in street clashes with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. In Iran what they were doing was what they called "heroic terrorism operations" later they thought the word terrorism had a bad connotation, especially in the west and they changed it to heroic actions. Most of their supporters in Iran were those who joined this group because of its peaceful nature. For the democratic liberal and pro social justice nature, so they were not ready to change into terrorist or even guerrillas. People are ready to vote for a party, but not to fight for that party.

You refer to MEK as a destructive cult, when do you believe they transformed from a political group or a guerilla group to a cult?

What happened was within Iran they were left losing 99% of their member. Only 2,000 to 3000 members left in Iran. Most of them were gone because of change of policy from peaceful demonstration to terrorist activities and street fighting. Even those who could become radicals were either killed in street clashes or by execution by the government. They lost the battle in Iran. Out-side of Iran they were portraying themselves as the democratic alternative to the Iranian government. Two of the most important allies of theirs were ex Iranian President Bani-sadr and the Kurdish democratic party of Kurdish Iran. These two left the National Council of Resistance in 1984, suddenly

MEK
Uncovered

641



this coalition of Rajavi and others turned into the pseudonym MEK. In 1983 they could get support from the labor party of UK and the socialist party of France, but after this they did not have it anymore. MEK was on the verge of disintegration, so he had to do some-thing, which is why I think he did what was called the ideological revolution, which is when it became a destructive cult.

You’ve written about the organization forcing you to divorce your wife at this point, can you elaborate?

At this time they were telling me that my wife was what they called “revoluted”- meaning that she had accepted the ideological revolution and she was now a disciple of Mr. and Mrs. Rajavi and if I wanted to leave the group I had to leave my wife and my children as well. This was my main problem. It wasn’t just leaving the group it was leaving my children and the love of my life. I tried to rationalize it and I tried to stay in the group. Then there was some time later when they asked me to divorce my wife, again it was the same problem. Then I was in the United States and everything was wrong and slogans were wrong and meaningless, everything they said was meaningless.

How did you rationalize all of this?

There is an experiment where they put a live frog in a pot and they turn the heat up degree by degree. Outside the pot is cold, inside the pot is warm. The frog won’t jump out of the pot. It can but it won’t. It’s because the outside is cold. But when it’s realized that it is boiling and it is cooking the opportunity is gone because all of his muscles have been cooked. This is what hap-pened to us. When the ideological revolution changed and we could see the pot was boiling, all of our muscles were cooked. All our self confidence or individuality that would help us jump out of the pot were gone.

MEK was originally aligned with some of the Kurdish groups but later on there **was a great deal of fighting between MEK and Kurdish groups. What caused this change?**

After the gulf war when Saddam lost the war the Kurds in the north and Shia in south thought they could revolt against Saddam Hussein and get rid of him. Unfortunately the US didn't help and this is why they lost. Since Saddam's army wasn't in good shape after the war they asked MEK to attack some of the Kurdish guerillas in the north and MEK committed many atrocities. Of course then I was outside of Iraq and I couldn't believe that we did this. After I left the group and I met other who left I realized it was true. What we were told was we were fighting Iranian revolutionary guards who had Kurdish guards, and this is what I was believed. When the accusation was brought up at the UN or anyone I would deny it vehemently, but when I left the group and met ex MEK from that war I realized this wasn't an accusation, but a fact. They say they even killed women and children.

Saddam was probably one of the only allies in the Middle East MEK had at that time, no?

No. At this time Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were helping as well. As a matter of fact, Rajavi at one juncture traveled to Saudi Arabia and met the king. In MEK they showed us a video of him meeting the king. It was secret, the KSA and UAE support. Everyone knew about Saddam, but even within the group they didn't speak about KSA or UAE. I saw the video when I reached the highest rank men could go in MEK. When MEK had their last battle, Forough Jav-idan, which means eternal light, the plan was that MEK, with the help of Saddam Hussein, would take part of Iran and announce the government order over it, calling it the democratic Is-lamic government of Iran- They'd go and capture western Iran and establish a government and immediately Saddam Hussein would recognize it and Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates would support it, and there were others. They were hoping Kuwait would join and the United States could be pressured to acknowledge them and they could create a situation of pres-sure on Iran like North and South Vietnam, or



Korea. This was their tactic.

This one of the bloodiest incidents during this period, no?

They failed. They lost a third of the members. As a matter of fact I was in that battle. I lost some of the muscles in my right soldier because I was shot. Of course, we were not trained, not for that battle. They said everyone had to attend, even representatives who weren't in Iraq. So I had to go back to fight. I had no military training but I had to go. Rajavi wanted everyone to attend but himself and his wife.

I'm sorry to hear about this

It was very horrible. There were 15 students who were from the United States, they were supporters. They were brought to Iraq and in the same night they were moved to the battle field. Because of my political rank I was a commander even though I had no military background. I didn't know anything about fighting. Only a few days before for the first time I saw a machine gun, and I only shot it once. So in the first battle I almost lost my life, I was shot and went unconscious and was taken back to the hospital. Unfortunately I learned all 15 died because they didn't have any training, and because it was done so quickly no one asked them their names and nothing was recorded. I didn't even know their names. It was horrible.

How did you eventually get out?

In 1996 Maryam Rajavi (Wife of Massoud Rajavi and current head of MEK) was speaking in London and they asked me to come and mobilize supporters, and talk to British politicians and arrange meetings for Mrs. Rajavi, including Margaret Thatcher. So in London after five or six years I met my daughter. Before that she was 13 and now she was 18. I was faced with a lady. Emotions and feelings are very important in destructive cults. They isolate you from your loved ones, so you don't turn your emotions to your loved ones. In London I could see my daughter and my sister and my old friends. From early morning to midnight I had to see old friends, ex-supporters of MEK, and answering thousands of questions which internally

I had no rational answer for any of them. So these things, my feelings between my friends and family helped me change. And also luck. I had an accident and back problems, and I was so active in London that I had to go to the hospital. My back gave out. Fortunately for me MEK was very busy then for Maryam Rajavi with different meetings, so they didn't care about me. If it was another juncture they'd make sure someone was with me, because MEK never leaves a member without a chaper-one, always at least two with each other they watch and look after each other. So in the hospital I was alone for the almost a month and I could see normal relationships of people with each other. There was a guy beside who had an accident and I was helping him to shave his beard, or to feed him and so on, and this revived my individuality and my humanity and self confidence. All gradually it came back. When it came that I left the hospital I left MEK. I didn't reject them fully yet, but I realized I couldn't be with them anymore.

There are many who believe MEK serves as proxy for the West and that they are allied, do you believe this?

I don't think so. Another problem MEK has is that Americans and Europeans know MEK has no support. In the early eighties there was an illusion of support but it was realized there was no support. There are no demonstrations for MEK and no one comes to support them. Even in Iran anyone who hates the government, hate the mullahs, even the old supporters, if you ask them they'll say MEK is worse than the Mullahs. Western governments know this. Would the US re-peat the same mistake they made in Afghanistan by supporting MEK where in Afghanistan they supported the Taliban but now they fight them. All of this aside it isn't said that they don't use MEK, because they do. As long as there is a bad relation with the United States and Iran they will use MEK. The Israelis, they also use MEK very much. But it doesn't mean that even the Israelis trust them.

There was an accusation that the US was training MEK in

Nevada to be used as assassins. Do you believe this?

No I don't believe this. What is the average age of MEK members now/ I think it is about eighty. What do you want to do with people this old? I don't think so. Probably not even spying. The only use they might have for them may be in relation to some terrorist activities in Thailand and in Europe where they say Iran or Hezbollah are committing terrorist attacks against Israeli embas-sy or the personnel of the Israeli embassy. Probably they could use MEK to discredit the Iranian government or even Hezbollah because Politically I don't believe they use these tactics at this point, it would be political suicide for them. There was a story in the United States that came to the media and vanished about someone who was going to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in the United States. It's possible they can create this news with MEK members to work against the Iranian government, but no real action.





2014





THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

John Kerry Gets Pressed To Grant Asylum To Former Terrorist Group MEK

March 2014

WASHINGTON — In what has become an all-too-familiar sight on Capitol Hill, at least a half-dozen members of the exiled Iranian group Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, arrived at Thursday's hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, all dressed in their trademark yellow shirts.

For most of the past 15 years, the group had been designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. government. But in September 2012, as the U.S. prepared to pull troops out of Iraq, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton revoked the terrorist designation, part of a diplomatic effort to persuade MEK leadership to begin moving their 3,000-plus members out of Iraq. Ever since the American pullout, the MEK has found itself under threat from Iraqis who vividly recall its decade-long alliance with Saddam Hussein.

MEK members attended Thursday's hearing to advance a bold proposition: that the thousands of their adherents still living in Iraq should be granted asylum and moved to the United States.

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) emerged Thursday as the most vocal proponent of this plan, which was also championed at the hearing by Reps. Ted Poe (R-Texas) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.). Rohrabacher aimed his questions at the only

MEK
Uncovered

648



witness testifying that day, Secretary of State John Kerry. “I’ve introduced legislation, H.R. 3707, which would grant asylum to these people in Camp Ashraf, who are obviously in danger,” Rohrabacher said. “Is the administration supporting this concept?” Kerry sidestepped the question in his typically diplomatic way. “There’s one solution to the problem [of the MEK], and that is that we need to relocate those folks,” he said. “Can’t we relocate them here? Why not?” Rohrabacher shot back. “That’s one of the things we’re looking at,” Kerry replied. Kerry went on to describe a new position he had created within the State Department, that of senior advisor for Mujahedin-e Khalq resettlement. In October of last year, he appointed Jonathan Winer, a longtime Kerry adviser and an expert in international law, to the position. Rohrabacher’s bill is co-sponsored by many of the same law-



makers who initially backed delisting the MEK from the terrorist roll. As of Thursday, there were 46 co-sponsors.

But administration officials privately suggest that Rohrabacher's bill, and any other efforts to grant asylum to the MEK in the United States, face nearly insurmountable odds.

"It's one thing to unfreeze their assets [by removing the terrorist designation], but asylum is a whole different ballgame," an administration official said, speaking on background to The Huffington Post. To illustrate how limited U.S. asylum policy is in practice, the official noted that out of the more than 135,000 applications received from individuals fleeing Syria's bloody civil war, only 31 were admitted in the last fiscal year.

"The policy concern with asylum is what kind of precedent that might set for the future. By those standards, the MEK isn't looking very good," said the official.

So far, Winer has managed to secure visas from the Albanian government for more than two dozen MEK members.

Other than that, however, it's been an uphill climb to convince other countries to accept MEK members, due to their cult-like characteristics and near-religious devotion to the Paris-based Maryam Rajavi and her husband, Massoud Rajavi. Under the Rajavis, MEK members have instituted forced celibacy, mandatory divorce and gender segregation, according to a 2009 report from the nonpartisan Rand Corporation. The MEK is also still widely viewed as a militant organization with a "cultic focus on suicide," wrote the Rand authors, despite the group's having formally renounced violence in 2003.

But long odds don't mean the MEK won't keep trying to gain asylum in the United States. No longer restricted by the terrorist designation, they are now free to spend their millions of dollars — the source of which remains murky — without fear of Treasury Department scrutiny. In 2013, they opened a formal office in a high-rent building on Pennsylvania Avenue and set about expanding their already large cadre of prominent Washington lobbyists.

Around Washington, the MEK is known for having spent millions of dollars on a highly visible advocacy campaign to help secure their delisting as a terrorist organization. To plead their case, the group hired dozens of former administration officials turned government affairs consultants, including Andrew Card, onetime chief of staff to President George W. Bush, and James Jones, former national security advisor to President Barack Obama.



How US Policy on Iran Came to Be Based on Fabricated Documents

June 2014

The key “evidence” of an Iranian nuclear weapons program comes via the MEK, a cult-like terrorist group—and was likely produced by Israel.

The nuclear talks between the P5 plus 1 (the permanent five UN Security Council members plus Germany) and Iran entered the drafting phase in Vienna on May 13. The objective is to reach a final deal in the dispute over Iran’s nuclear program by July 20, although the talks could be extended by mutual agreement for another six months. But the Obama administration is demanding a deep reduction in Iran’s uranium enrichment capabilities, which makes a successful conclusion of the negotiations highly unlikely.

This deal-killing demand is not based on an objective assessment of Iran’s nuclear program. It has been justified by the highly politicized concept of “breakout,” which refers to the time it would take Iran, in theory, to enrich enough uranium to weapons-grade level for a single nuclear weapon. But the administration’s embrace of the breakout concept is based on a false narrative about an alleged past covert Iranian nuclear weapons program, which the Obama administration inherited without the slightest questioning from the George W. Bush ad-

MEK
Uncovered

652



ministration.

The Obama administration's decision to demand draconian cuts was adumbrated by Robert Einhorn, who was the State Department's special adviser for nonproliferation and arms control until June 2013. In a report published this past March, Einhorn wrote, "The number and type of centrifuges will be limited to ensure that breakout times are...a minimum of 6 to 12 months at all times." And in a later article in *The National Interest*, Einhorn explained what that would mean in terms of reduction from Iran's present 19,000 centrifuges: "an enrichment capacity greater than a few thousand first-generation centrifuges would give Iran an unacceptably rapid breakout capability."

Secretary of State John Kerry confirmed that Einhorn revelation in testimony on April 8 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Responding to committee chairman Robert Menendez's complaint that the administration would allow Iran to accumulate enough weapons-grade uranium to make a single nuclear weapon within six to twelve months of a decision to do so, Kerry said, "I'm not saying that's what we'd settle for," hinting that the administration might demand an even longer breakout period. And he defended six to twelve months as "significantly more" than the two months he said was estimat-

MEK
Uncovered

653

ed to be the existing Iranian breakout capability.

The insistence on such a reduction in Iran's enrichment capability is certain to be rejected. Iran has long asserted that it needs a much greater number of centrifuges than specified in US demands, enough to provide nuclear fuel for future nuclear power reactors as they come online. Iranian foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif explained to me in an interview on June 3 that Iran is proposing to reassure the United States and its negotiating partners that it isn't interested in breakout; it will do so by converting all low-enriched uranium immediately into a form that would not be available for weapons-grade enrichment (around 90 percent purity), and then into fuel assemblies for a nuclear reactor.

The Obama administration has taken the position that Iran has no legitimate need to produce its own reactor fuel and should rely instead on the Russians and the French for its supply. Zarif told me, however, that it is "thirty years too late" to tell the Iranians that they must rely on other states for their nuclear fuel. He pointed to the long history of agreements with other states, both on nuclear fuel supply and other forms of nuclear cooperation, on which the other states have reneged.

France, under US pressure, refused to provide enriched uranium fuel assemblies to Iran in the early 1980s despite earlier legal arrangements to do so. It was precisely because US intervention had eliminated the possibility of reliance on foreign enrichment that Iran decided in the mid-1980s to develop its own enrichment capability. That lesson was underlined once again when Russia, under US pressure, delayed the shipment of nuclear fuel for the Bushehr power plant in 2005–06 in order to pressure Iran to cease enrichment entirely.

The insistence that Iran must not be allowed to have the enrichment facilities that would support a civilian nuclear program is the logical consequence of a false narrative about Iran—

namely, that Tehran has been systematically concealing a nuclear weapons program that was active at least as late 2003. This view, now almost universally accepted by the US national security establishment and political elites in the United States and Europe, has been reinforced by nearly a decade of mainstream media coverage. The centerpiece of the narrative is the idea that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has published, in the form of two sets of intelligence documents, hard evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program at least from 2001 to 2003.

The first set of documents, which surfaced in 2004, was said to have come from the laptop computer of an Iranian scientist working on the program. It included a series of drawings of efforts to integrate a nuclear weapon into the re-entry vehicle of Iran's Shahab-3 missile. Descriptions of those drawings were leaked to selected journalists from 2005 on, generating sensational media stories of a "smoking gun" of nuclear weapons intent.

The US National Intelligence Estimates of 2005 and 2007, which concluded that Iran had carried out a nuclear weapons program, were based in large part on the assumption that those documents were genuine. The IAEA described them as "credible" in 2008—despite the fact that its director general at the time, Mohamed ElBaradei, warned repeatedly that their authenticity had not been established.

But a fundamental error in the re-entry vehicle documents proves they were fabricated: the missile they showed had been abandoned by 2000—two years before the drawings were made—in favor of an improved model whose re-entry vehicle bore no resemblance to that of the old model. And the real story of those documents, revealed to me last year by Karsten Voigt, a former senior official in Germany's foreign ministry, is that they were turned over to Germany's foreign intelligence agen-





cy, the BND, by a member of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), the cult-like Iranian terrorist group that has been fighting the Tehran regime ever since the early 1980s. Furthermore, a senior BND official told Voigt that German intelligence officials regarded the source as “doubtful” and were concerned about what appeared to them to be the Bush administration’s intention to base its Iran policy on those documents.

The MEK role in transferring the documents indicates that they originated in Israel, because the MEK had been serving as a client of Israel for several years, including the “laundering” of Israeli intelligence reports by presenting them to the IAEA and the press as coming from the MEK itself. Israel also provided a new series of documents and intelligence reports to the IAEA in 2008 and 2009 claiming that Iran had been testing nuclear weapons designs and had continued to work on other components of nuclear weapons well after 2003. Although the IAEA never mentioned Israel publicly, former director general ElBaradei reveals in his memoirs that Israel provided the documents directly. After ElBaradei was succeeded by the more pliable Yukia Amano, the IAEA used those Israeli-supplied documents as the basis for its November 2011 report, which made a series of new accusations about Iranian nuclear weapons research projects going beyond the alleged 2001–03 program.

The unquestioning acceptance of this false narrative has shifted the political discourse surrounding the nuclear negotiations sharply toward the Israeli position. As a result, the Obama administration is more vulnerable to the propaganda war against negotiations that Israel’s clients in Congress are waging.

The biggest impact of the false narrative has been to impose the concept of breakout on the administration’s diplomatic posture. That concept is always presented as merely a technical tool to measure Iran’s ability to build a nuclear weapon. Its real

significance, however, is the assumption implicit in it that the Islamic Republic has been working feverishly to obtain nuclear weapons and must be prevented by US power from doing so. During the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, ruled out the possession of weapons of mass destruction as illicit under Islam, even as Iraq was inflicting horrific casualties on Iran with chemical weapons attacks. That episode makes the fatwa against nuclear weapons by the present supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, entirely credible.

The actual behavior of Iran in recent years has also belied the breakout narrative. By early 2010, breakout theory advocates were already claiming that Iran could produce enough highly enriched uranium for a bomb in just six months. The Ahmadinejad government leaned toward an extreme nationalist, anti-Western political constituency, and at the time there were neither active negotiations nor punishing sanctions on Iran's oil industry that would have provided an incentive to slow a race toward breakout capacity. But instead of using the years from 2010 to mid-2012 to begin enriching to weapons grade, Iran moved in the opposite direction. It did not use more than half the centrifuges it already had in place to enrich uranium, and it began converting much of its 20-percent-enriched uranium to oxide form, making it far more difficult and time-consuming to enrich to weapons-grade levels.

In fact, the breakout concept is based on an entirely implausible assumption—that Iran would deliberately invite confrontation with the United States by rushing to enrich enough uranium for a single bomb—one that would not even be available for use for as long as three or four years, according to US intelligence estimates.

The narrative that now threatens to plunge the United States into much more dangerous tensions with Iran is the most suc-



cessful example of a fundamental and persistent problem of US national security policy. Falsified intelligence was used to get the US public to go along with wars in Vietnam and Iraq. The falsehoods about the Tonkin Gulf incident before the Vietnam buildup and Iraq's alleged WMD programs before the Iraq War were eventually unmasked, albeit after US troops had been committed.

The success of the false narrative on Iran has been facilitated by the disappearance of the investigative function of Congress and the corporate media. Resistance to the manipulation of opinion on national security issues can only be successful if we strengthen the ability of independent media to alert Americans to strategic falsehoods early in their gestation.



The Washington Times

Rally of strange bedfellows : To change Iran, U.S. group backs former ‘terrorists’

June 2014

An array of high-level former U.S. officials, both Democrats and Republicans, were in France over the weekend calling for regime change in Iran and throwing their collective weight behind an Iranian dissident group once designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union.

“You’ve got an assortment of former generals and senior politicians from all over the world here,” Howard Dean said as he headed to the annual rally held by the National Council of Resistance of Iran. The group is an umbrella organization of Iranian opposition groups, the largest of which is the Mujahedin-e Khalq, which was removed from EU and U.S. terrorist lists in 2009 and 2012 respectively.

The event was scheduled to include former U.N. Ambassadors John R. Bolton and Bill Richardson, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, former Rep. Patrick Kennedy, former Sen. Joe Lieberman and others.

“I think the thing that brings us together is human rights,” Mr. Dean, a former Democratic National Committee chairman, told The Washington Times when asked how such a diverse collection of U.S. dignitaries agreed to speak at the rally.

MEK
Uncovered

659

Rally of strange bedfellows : To change Iran, U.S. group backs former 'terrorists'



Mr. Bolton went further, telling *The Times* that the event, which drew more than 30,000 Iranian dissidents to Villepinte, France, was about raising “the larger issue of the illegitimacy of Iran’s mullahs and their regime in Tehran.”

“My personal view,” Mr. Bolton said, “is that it ought to be U.S. policy to overthrow the regime in Tehran because I think it is still our principal opponent in the Middle East.”

support from the former U.S. officials, questions remain in the wider foreign policy community about the role the council might play if Washington ever pursues a policy of regime change rather than engaging the Iranian regime on targeted issues.

The organization’s leader, Maryam Rajavi, said outright during a speech at the rally Friday that the message of the gathering was that the “religious fascism” governing Iran “must be overthrown.”

Although officials in many Western capitals may agree, the message is coming from an organization with ties to the MEK, which has emerged in recent years as perhaps the most organized Iranian dissident movement in the world outside of Iran. Although former French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner was among the dignitaries showing support, the French government raised alarm about the MEK’s involvement in the gathering.

French Foreign Ministry spokesman Romain Nadal was quoted by The Associated Press on Friday as condemning the MEK for having “violent and non-democratic inspirations,” for espousing a “cult nature” and an “intense campaign of influence and disinformation.”

A checkered past

Controversy over the MEK has long revolved around the question of why the State Department moved to list it as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997.

The MEK, which engaged in a power struggle against leaders of Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution, was known to have carried out terrorist attacks against Iranian government targets during the 1980s. Although U.S. officials say it also participated in attacks on Americans, MEK representatives have long argued that the terrorist listing was never driven by any legitimate U.S. national security concerns.

The group’s representatives in Washington say that during the late 1990s, officials within the Clinton administration engaged in a calculated smear campaign against the MEK and ultimately listed the group as a terrorist organization as part of an ill-conceived strategic attempt to improve relations between Washington and Tehran.

MEK fighters fled Iran for Iraq during the 1980s and, during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, joined forces with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Although the group was listed as a terrorist organization when U.S. forces invaded Iraq in 2003, its status and fate would soon become deeply entangled in the U.S. military mission.

Disavowing all violence and laying down their arms in Iraq, MEK supporters began living under the protection of U.S. military forces at an Iraqi compound known as Camp Ashraf. Over time, the group’s supporters outside Iraq engaged in a growing public relations campaign to get the organization removed from Washington’s terrorist list.

A central issue for the MEK is the plight of some 2,800 of its





members living inside Iraq. There once appeared to be momentum for airlifting the members out of Iraq, but finding another nation to accept them proved difficult because the group remained on the U.S. terrorist list until 2012.

Upon the departure of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011, Camp Ashraf was placed under the control of the Iraqi government. In the years since, repeated reports have suggested that Iraqi President Nouri al-Maliki — himself seeking to win the support of Iran — has authorized Iraqi military attacks on the camp, killing dozens of unarmed MEK members and forcibly relocating others to a new compound known as Camp Liberty.

Many MEK supporters say the group was dealt a duplicitous hand by Washington and argue that the Obama administration has essentially left its members to be massacred in Iraq, where Iranian government influence is now seen to be growing and even publicly supported by the White House.

Mr. Dean hammered that point last week, asserting that his own presence at the rally in France was driven by a feeling that the United States should be “keeping our word.”

“The 2,800 people at Camp Liberty are locked up essentially by al-Maliki,” he said. “We are supporting al-Maliki, who is basically a troupe for the Iranian government. Our Iran policy is in shambles, and I think the president is facing a moral dilemma. He’s going to have a foreign policy that’s going to kill nearly 3,000 people if he doesn’t do something to protect Camp Liberty.”

“The U.S. said to these people, ‘We’ll protect you,’ but we’ve actually walked away from them and basically hung them out to dry,” said former Army Gen. Hugh Shelton, who was among the U.S. dignitaries at Friday’s rally.

Gen. Shelton, who served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush, said he believes NATO should engage in “a massive airlift to fly them out of there to a place to be determined by the U.S. government.”

Who's using whom?

With the outcry over the MEK's treatment inside Iraq as backdrop, questions over the extent to which it may or may not be in Washington's best interest to support the group continue to swirl through Washington's foreign policy community.

The biggest question centers on whether the NCRI is truly representative of the wider Iranian opposition community — inside Iran and around the world.

Finding informed sources willing to speak openly on the question, however, is known to be difficult. One source approached by The Times said it was unthinkable to speak openly against the NCRI because doing so would result in "death threats from this group."

"Nothing signals cluelessness about Iran more than treating NCRI as a legitimate opposition group," said the source, who agreed to be quoted only on the condition of anonymity. "It sided with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, so its popularity in Iran is on par with that of the American Taliban who fought alongside Osama bin Laden against the U.S."

Ali Safavi, the NCRI's spokesman in Washington, said such characterizations are nonsense and argued that the organization's reach and popularity inside Iran are deep and were instrumental in bringing about the 2009 uprising against the government in Tehran that was ultimately and violently crushed by Iranian authorities.

"The National Council of Resistance of Iran has a widespread network of activists and supporters inside the country, which, given the state of absolute repression in Iran, operates clandestinely," said Mr. Safavi, who asserted that Iranians see the council as "representing the diverse political and ideological views inside Iran and the focal point of hope for a free and democratic Iran."

Asked about where the organization gets its funding, Mr. Safavi asserted that financing "has been and continues to be the Iranian people inside and outside Iran" and that "over the past

MEK
Uncovered

663



three decades hundreds of Iranian merchants, industrialists and businessmen have been executed by the Iranian regime for providing financial assistance to the Resistance.”

All of the former U.S. officials who spoke with The Times for this article acknowledged that their travel and accommodations expenses in France were being paid for by the NCRI. However, each also asserted that it is common practice for them to accept payment for speaking engagements and stressed that their support for Friday’s rally and the plight of the MEK had nothing to do with money.

Pressed for a deeper explanation, each also acknowledged that some of their respect for the MEK stems from the group’s history of having shared intelligence with Washington about Iran’s disputed nuclear program and the Iranian military activity inside Iraq.

The MEK has provided U.S. military officials and successive U.S. administrations with “all types of good intelligence,” said Gen. Shelton, who added that during the mid-2000s the group’s members revealed how the Iranian government was moving explosives and teams of fighters into Iraq to attack U.S. forces occupying the nation.

“We gained much more,” Gen. Shelton said, “including about the Iranian nuclear program based on sources that they had inside Iran.”

“Even at the State Department, people will quietly, off the record, admit that [the MEK’s] intelligence, not just on the nuclear program, but on other things as well, is much better than what we have,” Mr. Dean said. “They have people inside the regime, all over the place and are quite helpful.”



International meeting for ISIL in France

June 2014

The Mujahidin-e-Khalq (MEK) (Iranian armed opposition group financed by Washington) held a large rally in Villepinte, near Paris, on 27 June 2014. More than 80 000 people attended the event.

While the main objective of the meeting was to support the Mujahidin military base in Iraq, Camp Asharaf and their fight against Iran, MEK president Maryam Rajavi seized the opportunity to violently lash out against Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and rejoice over the progress achieved by the Islamic Emirate in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

French politics nowadays are profoundly schizophrenic: on one hand France (as the U.S.) officially condemns the destabilization of a State by a terrorist organization, while on the other hand, the Élysée participates alongside the U.S. in the secret war in the Middle East and details Foreign Legion officers to oversee the ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

More than 600 political figures from NATO member countries turned up for the this meeting. This list included:

- Gen. Hugh Shelton, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff;
- Gen. George William Casey, former commanding general for Operation Iraqi Freedom;
- Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives;

MEK
Uncovered

665



- Senator Joseph Lieberman (his friend Senator John McCain was unable to make the trip, but adressed the gathering via video);
- Rudy Giuliani, former Mayor of New York;
- José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, former Socialist Prime Minister of Spain;
- Mich le Alliot-Marie, former French Defense Minister;
- Bernard Kouchner, former French Foreign Affairs Minister;
- Rama Yade, vice president of the conservative Radical Party of France.

Members of the Mujahidin-e-Khalq have been fighting in Syria and Iraq for three months alongside the ISIL. On 23 May 2014, Maryam Rajavi met with the President of the Syrian National Coalition in Paris.

COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK)

June 2014

Introduction

The People's Mujahedeen of Iran, more commonly known as the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq or MEK, is a controversial Iranian resistance group; it was once listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the United States for its alleged killing of U.S. personnel in Iran during the 1970s, and for its ties to former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Recognizing the group's rejection of violence, the State Department delisted the MEK in late 2012 but voiced ongoing concerns about its alleged mistreatment of its members.

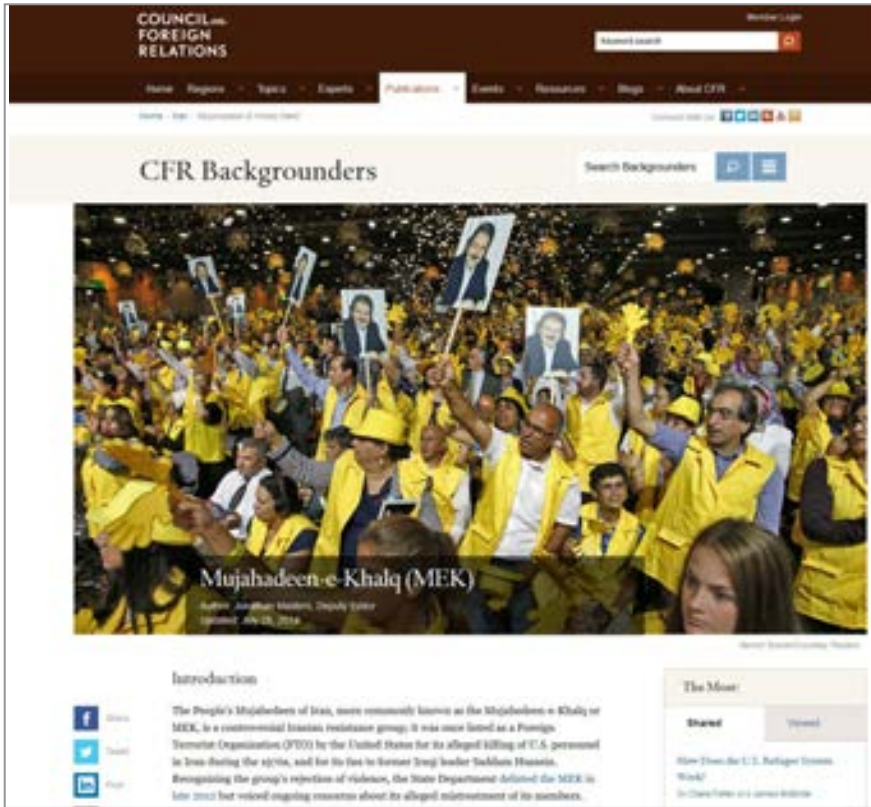
The MEK helped Islamists overthrow the Western-backed Shah in 1979, but broke violently with the clerics shortly after the revolution and were forced into exile in France in 1981. The group moved its base of operations to eastern Iraq in 1986, but in recent years the pro-Iranian government of Nouri al-Maliki has pushed for the exiled group to relocate. In mid-2014, some 3,000 MEK members resided at Camp Hurriya (Liberty) near Baghdad, awaiting resettlement to third countries.

Roots of Resistance

The MEK was founded in 1965 by leftist Iranian students opposed to the monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and its supporters in the West, including the United States. Many of the MEK's most influential founding members—including leader Massoud Rajavi—were imprisoned by the Shah in the 1970s, and several were executed.

MEK
Uncovered

667



Throughout the decade, the MEK orchestrated terrorist attacks against the state that killed several Americans working in Iran, including military officers and civilian contractors, according to the U.S. State Department. (By 1978, some 45,000 of the 60,000 foreigners working in Iran were Americans.) The MEK denies any involvement with these incidents, asserting that they were the work of a breakaway Marxist-Leninist faction, known as Peykar, which hijacked the movement after the arrest of Rajavi.

Some analysts support this. “Rajavi, upon release from prison during the revolution, had to rebuild the organization, which had been badly battered by the Peykar experience,” said Patrick Clawson, director of research at the Washington Institute, in a CFR interview.

The MEK participated in the 1979 revolution that swept Ayatollah Khomeini into power, but refutes U.S. government claims

that it also supported the hostage-taking raid on the U.S. Embassy in November of that year. “Though denied by the MEK, analysis based on eyewitness accounts and MEK documents demonstrates that MEK members participated in and supported the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and that the MEK later argued against the early release [of] the American hostages,” said a 2011 State Department report on terrorism.

Experts say MEK’s ideology—initially a blend of Marxism, feminism, and Islamism—as well as its popular support in the initial post-revolutionary period put it at odds with the new clerical regime, which cracked down violently on the potential political rival. The mullahs arrested and executed thousands of Mujahedeen, who retaliated by assassinating dozens of senior government officials, including the president and prime minister in August 1981, according to the U.S. State Department. The month prior, Rajavi established in Tehran the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), also known as the MEK’s “parliament in exile,” but he and the group’s leadership were quickly driven into exile in Paris.

Support for Saddam

In 1986, the government of Jacques Chirac expelled Rajavi and much of the MEK as part of a deal with Tehran that freed French hostages held by pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon. According to the U.S. State Department, the MEK was then welcomed into Iraq, where it supported Saddam Hussein’s war against Iran (1980-88) and reportedly helped quash Kurdish uprisings in the north and Shia unrest in the south (1991). Saddam armed the MEK near the end of the Iran conflict “with heavy military equipment and deployed thousands of MEK fighters in suicidal, mass wave attacks against Iranian forces.” Iran’s Revolutionary Guards killed some two thousand MEK in the ill-fated assault known as Operation Eternal Light. (The MEK denies any role in the suppression of Kurdish and Shiite unrest in Iraq in 1991.)



The MEK's campaign against the Islamic Republic, including multiple targeted attacks on high-ranking officials, continued throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The group demonstrated its global reach in April 1992 with coordinated raids on diplomatic missions in ten countries, including the Iranian Mission to the United Nations in New York. (The MEK said that the attacks were retaliation for Iranian air strikes on the group's base outside Baghdad.) In 2003, French police arrested more than 150 MEK members for allegedly plotting and financing terrorist attacks. The EU had labeled the MEK a terrorist organization the prior year (it was delisted in 2009). The Iranian government blames the MEK for the deaths of more than 12,000 Iranians over the past three decades.

Searching For a New Home

As part of the 2003 invasion, U.S. forces initially attacked MEK military targets in Iraq despite the group's claims of neutrality. The two sides eventually negotiated a cease-fire that disarmed MEK members and confined them to Camp Ashraf, a 14-square-mile former Iraqi military base in the country's northeast. In 2004, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld designated the group as civilian "protected persons" under the Geneva Convention—a designation that ran against the recommendations of the U.S. Department of State, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

According to a 2009 RAND report, the decision was "extremely controversial because it appeared that the United States selectively chose to apply the Geneva Conventions to a designated terrorist organization and, further, to grant it special status." That designation expired after Iraq regained full sovereignty in January 2009.

The MEK had long feared that a transition to Iraqi control of Ashraf (PDF) would result in their eviction. As U.S. forces pulled out of Ashraf in April 2011, violence broke out between the Iraqi military and camp residents. Thirty-five MEK were

killed, according to the UN. After the incident, Iraq reiterated its vow to close Ashraf following full U.S. withdrawal at the end of 2011.

Iraq and the UN reached an agreement with MEK in December of that year that would relocate Ashraf residents to Camp Liberty outside Baghdad, a “temporary transit station” from which group members could eventually be taken in by other countries. As of May 2014, approximately 3,000 MEK members resided at Camp Hurriya (Liberty), near Baghdad, awaiting resettlement to third countries.

Leadership & Ideology

The MEK has long been led jointly by husband-and-wife team Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, and is reputedly the largest militant Iranian opposition group committed to the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. It is also “the only army in the world with a commander corps composed mostly of women,” said former CFR press fellow Elizabeth Rubin. Maryam Rajavi joined the resistance as a student in Tehran in the early 1970s and, at the behest of her husband, assumed joint control of the group in 1985. Feminism and allegiance to the Rajavi family are pillars of MEK ideology, which was founded on both Islam and Marxism—though the group has denied its affiliation with the latter. Many analysts, including Rubin, have characterized the MEK as a cult, citing the group’s fealty to the Rajavis. Older women were reportedly required to divorce their husbands in the late 1980s, and younger girls cannot marry or have children.

The NCRI elected Maryam Rajavi as “Iran’s future president” in 1993 and, according to the group’s website, expects to oversee a six-month democratic transition in Iran “once the mullahs are toppled.” Based out of Paris, she also serves as the group’s chief international ambassador. NCRI’s political platform includes support for human rights, women, capitalism, religious freedom, minority rights, and Iran’s integration into the global community.

Massoud Rajavi disappeared following the U.S. invasion of



Iraq in 2003; his whereabouts and current status are unknown. Some analysts believe he is dead. “Cult leaders generally don’t retire,” said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in a CFR interview. “They either die or go to prison. I’d be surprised if Massoud Rajavi is still alive.”

Size & Support Structure

The U.S. State Department, in an August 2011 report, put MEK global membership between 5,000 and 10,000, with significant contingents in Paris and other European capitals where the group maintains offices.

The group operates a well-funded, highly sophisticated network of advocates in the United States, enlisting in recent years the support of dozens of high-profile officials from both political parties, including former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former governors Edward Rendell and Howard Dean. Much of this advocacy was centered on a campaign to delist the MEK as a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization. In September 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton removed the group from the FTO list and thereby unfroze the MEK’s U.S. assets and allowed it to transact with U.S. entities. The NCRI opened a Washington, DC, office in April 2013.

Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Saddam was the MEK’s primary financier, experts say. But in recent years, the group claims to rely on the largesse of wealthy Iranian expatriates in the United States and Europe, and others opposed the clerical regime in Tehran.

Continuing Controversy

The debate over the MEK’s legitimacy as a peaceful Iranian resistance group has attracted both critics and supporters over the years. The group’s advocates assert that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright listed the MEK as a foreign terrorist group in October 1997 as part of a diplomatic effort to open dialogue with moderates in Tehran. Some reporting at the time attests to this. “One senior Clinton administration official said



inclusion of the People’s Mujahedeen was intended as a good-will gesture to Tehran and its newly elected moderate president, Mohammad Khatami,” wrote Norman Kempster in the LA Times.

Some Western backers believe the group serves as a strategic counterweight to the clerical regime in Iran. Writing in The Hill in 2014, Raymond Tanter, president of the Iran Policy Committee, a Washington, DC-based advocacy group, argued that MEK “dissidents [in Camp Liberty] have historic ties in the area that can help tilt the balance against radical Sunnis and counter an extremist ‘Shiite arc’ of Tehran and its counterpart in Damascus.”

Critics of the MEK question the group’s motives and commitment to nonviolence and human rights. The State Department noted such reservations upon delisting the group in September 2012: “With today’s actions, the Department does not overlook or forget the MEK’s past acts of terrorism...The Department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organization, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members.”

As tens of thousands gathered for an annual rally for the NCRI in France in June 2014, a spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry condemned the group for its “violent and non-democratic inspirations,” “cult nature,” and “intense campaign of influence and disinformation.”

Others believe Western support for the MEK distracts from or, worse, undercuts the efforts of more mainstream Iranian opposition groups like the Green Movement, which assembled millions of peaceful protestors in the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential election.



Beware of the MEK

August 2014

The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Based on news reports, a number of U.S. officials and former officials have adopted this motto in recent months. They seem to believe the prospect of the nuclear issue being solved and rapprochement with Tehran so threatening that they have rushed to Iran's great foe: the People's Mojahdein Organization (MEK).

The MEK is a cult-like dissident group, based outside of Iran, primarily in Iraq and France for much of the past three decades. It was considered a terrorist group by the United States until 2012 and by the European Union until 2009, when it was removed from the list of terrorist organizations and became increasingly viewed as an alternative to Iran's current regime. This shows that the MEK's campaign to galvanize support in the West has been relatively successful.

A more careful examination of the MEK provides evidence of the group's problematic nature.

First, the MEK has no viable chance of seizing power in Iran. If the current government is not Iranians' first choice for a government, the MEK is not even their last—and for good reason. The MEK supported Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War. The people's discontent with the Iranian government at that time did not translate into their supporting an external enemy that was firing Scuds into Tehran, using chemical weapons and killing hundreds of thousands of Iranians, including many civilians. Today, the MEK is viewed negatively by most Iranians, who would prefer to maintain the status quo than

MEK
Uncovered

674



rush to the arms of what they consider a corrupt, criminal cult. Second, what Iranians understand, but the American MEK supporters choose to ignore, is the MEK's track record of human-rights abuses. The MEK controls every aspect of its members' lives and tortures them. Some of these human-rights abuses include: mass, compulsory divorces, beatings and torture, costing some members their lives, and solitary confinements so extreme that some members preferred to take their lives than be subjected to them.

Third, to understand the origins of anti-Americanism in pre-revolutionary Iran, look no further. The MEK was responsible for the assassination and failed attempts to kidnap and assassinate Americans in Iran in the 1970s. It was also the MEK that pressured the Islamic revolutionaries to take a stronger stance against the United States. The MEK further supported the 1979 U.S. embassy hostage crisis in Tehran.



Fourth, on the surface, the MEK has evolved since the '70s into a democratic alternative to the Islamic Republic and a potential ally for the West and Israel. However, the organization is merely manipulating the West, hoping it will rush to it for fear of the greater enemy: the Islamic Republic. To do so, the MEK has teamed up with Israel, while it is as anti-Israeli as the Iranian regime, criticizing the Shah's support for Jerusalem as much as the Islamic revolutionaries. This is not a real ideological shift, but rather a smart, tactical move by the MEK.

Fifth, the MEK may appear as a modern organization on the surface, but it is, in fact, a crypto-Shiite Communist group. In effect, it is the product of the Leninist-style party and the eleventh-century Ismaili order, the Assassins: a religious, Communist cult based around the myth of an invisible leader, Masoud Rajavi, who has not been seen for years (and who is said to be dead or hiding).

Sixth, the MEK claims that it would dismantle Iran's nuclear program, which has led some in the United States to believe its empowerment to be a viable solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis. Even if the MEK had a real chance of coming to power in Iran, which it does not, it would most likely not dismantle the nuclear program. In fact, it would have even more incentive to pursue nuclear weapons and would be less likely to engage with the international community. The MEK is a far less accountable organization than the Islamic Republic is, as, unlike the latter, it is a cult-like organization, rather than an established government that has certain checks and balances. As such, sanctions and deterrence would be less effective on the MEK than on the current government.

The voices supporting the MEK are ignoring the lessons of some of the most catastrophic U.S. foreign-policy mistakes in the past few decades, urging Washington to repeat history. Overhyping the threat of an adversary and blindly supporting groups opposing it led to the creation of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Supporting the MEK is neither in accordance with Ameri-

can values, nor beneficial to U.S. interests. Instead, the United States should pursue the diplomatic track, which is what most Americans favor. Diplomacy will not only promote U.S. interests in the Middle East, but also help empower Iranians to improve their lives by normalizing the Iranian political climate.



677

Global Research

Center for Research on Globalization
globalreserch.ca / globalreserch.org

US War on Iran Takes Bizarre Turn. US Covert Support to Mujahedeen-e-Khalq

October 2014

It is not merely hyperbole when it is said the US created terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda or the so-called “Islamic State.” It is documented fact. The current conflict in the Middle East may appear to be a chaotic conflagration beyond the control of the United States and its many eager allies, but in reality it is the intentional, engineered creation of regional fronts in a war against Iran and its powerful arc of influence.

It is not Western policy that indirectly spurs the creation and perpetuation of terrorist organizations, but in fact, direct, intentional, unmistakable support.

This support would manifest itself in perhaps the most overt and bizarre declaration of allegiance to terrorism to date, US Army General Hugh Shelton on stage before terrorists of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) and their Wahabist counterparts fighting in Syria, hysterically pledging American material, political, and strategic backing. MEK was listed for years by the US State Department as a foreign terrorist organization, but has received funding, arms, and safe haven by the United States for almost as long.

General Hugh’s speech titled, “Making Iranian mullahs fear,

MEK
Uncovered

678



the MEK, come true,” was most likely never meant to be seen or fully understood by Americans. In titled alone, it is clear that US foreign policy intends to use the tool of terrorism to exact concessions from Tehran. If the true nature of America’s support for terrorist organizations like MEK were more widely known, the current narrative driving US intervention in Iraq and Syria would crumble.

Image: MEK is just one of many terrorist organizations, that despite being listed by the US State Department as such, still receives weapons, training, cash, and political support from the US government. This is a pattern seen repeated in Libya and most recently in Syria – each case spun and excused with a myriad of lies wrapped in false, constantly shifting narratives. MEK Has Killed US Servicemen, Contractors, and Iranian Civilians For Decades

MEK has carried out decades of brutal terrorist attacks, assassinations, and espionage against the Iranian government





and its people, as well as targeting Americans including the attempted kidnapping of US Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II, the attempted assassination of USAF Brigadier General Harold Price, the successful assassination of Lieutenant Colonel Louis Lee Hawkins, the double assassinations of Colonel Paul Shaffer and Lieutenant Colonel Jack Turner, and the successful ambush and killing of American Rockwell International employees William Cottrell, Donald Smith, and Robert Krongard. Admissions to the deaths of the Rockwell International employees can be found within a report written by former US State Department and Department of Defense official Lincoln Bloomfield Jr. on behalf of the lobbying firm Akin Gump in an attempt to dismiss concerns over MEK's violent past and how it connects to its current campaign of armed terror – a testament to the depths of depravity from which Washington and London lobbyists operate.

To this day MEK terrorists have been carrying out attacks inside of Iran killing political opponents, attacking civilian targets, as well as carrying out the US-Israeli program of targeting and assassinating Iranian scientists. MEK terrorists are also suspected of handling patsies in recent false flag operations carried out in India, Georgia, and Thailand, which have been ham-handedly blamed on the Iranian government by the United States and Israel.

MEK is described by Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow Ray Takeyh as a “cult-like organization” with “totalitarian tendencies.” While Takeyh fails to expand on what he meant by “cult-like” and “totalitarian,” an interview with US State Department-run Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty reported that a MEK Camp Ashraf escapee claimed the terrorist organization bans marriage, using radios, the Internet, and holds many members against their will with the threat of death if ever they are caught attempting to escape.

Besides providing MEK terrorists with now two former US military bases in Iraq as safe havens, the US has conspired to

arm, fund, and back MEK for years in a proxy war against Iran. Covert support for the US-listed terrorist group Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK) has been ongoing since at least 2008 under the Bush administration, when Seymour Hersh's 2008 New Yorker article "Preparing the Battlefield," reported that not only had MEK been considered for their role as a possible proxy, but that the US had already begun arming and financing them to wage war inside Iran:

The M.E.K. has been on the State Department's terrorist list for more than a decade, yet in recent years the group has received arms and intelligence, directly or indirectly, from the United States. Some of the newly authorized covert funds, the Pentagon consultant told me, may well end up in M.E.K. coffers. "The new task force will work with the M.E.K. The Administration is desperate for results." He added, "The M.E.K. has no C.P.A. auditing the books, and its leaders are thought to have been lining their pockets for years. If people only knew what the M.E.K. is getting, and how much is going to its bank accounts—and yet it is almost useless for the purposes the Administration intends.

Seymore Hersh in an NPR interview, also claims that select MEK members have already received training in the US. More recently, the British Daily Mail published a stunning admission by "US officials" that Israel is currently funding, training, arming, and working directly with MEK. The Daily Mail article states:

U.S. officials confirmed today that Israel has been funding and training Iranian dissidents to assassinate nuclear scientists involved in Iran's nuclear program. Washington insiders confirmed there is a close relationship between Mossad and MEK. In 2009, an extensive conspiracy was formulated within US policy think-tank Brookings Institution's 2009 "Which Path to Persia?" report, proposing to fully arm, train, and back MEK as it waged a campaign of armed terror against the Iranian people. In their report, they openly conspire to use what is





an admitted terrorist organization as a “US proxy” (emphasis added):

“Perhaps the most prominent (and certainly the most controversial) opposition group that has attracted attention as a potential U.S. proxy is the NCRI (National Council of Resistance of Iran), the political movement established by the MEK (Mujahedin-e Khalq). Critics believe the group to be undemocratic and unpopular, and indeed anti-American.

In contrast, the group’s champions contend that the movement’s long-standing opposition to the Iranian regime and record of successful attacks on and intelligence-gathering operations against the regime make it worthy of U.S. support. They also argue that the group is no longer anti-American and question the merit of earlier accusations. Raymond Tanter, one of the group’s supporters in the United States, contends that the MEK and the NCRI are allies for regime change in Tehran and also act as a useful proxy for gathering intelligence. The MEK’s greatest intelligence coup was the provision of intelligence in 2002 that led to the discovery of a secret site in Iran for enriching uranium.

Despite its defenders’ claims, the MEK remains on the U.S. government list of foreign terrorist organizations. In the 1970s, the group killed three U.S. officers and three civilian contractors in Iran. During the 1979-1980 hostage crisis, the group praised the decision to take America hostages and Elaine Sciolino reported that while group leaders publicly condemned the 9/11 attacks, within the group celebrations were widespread.

Undeniably, the group has conducted terrorist attacks—often excused by the MEK’s advocates because they are directed against the Iranian government. For example, in 1981, the group bombed the headquarters of the Islamic Republic Party, which was then the clerical leadership’s main political organization, killing an estimated 70 senior officials. More recently, the group has claimed credit for over a dozen mortar attacks, assassinations, and other assaults on Iranian civilian and

military targets between 1998 and 2001. At the very least, to work more closely with the group (at least in an overt manner), Washington would need to remove it from the list of foreign terrorist organizations.”

Besides US Army General Hugh Shelton, other prominent US politicians to literally stand before crowds of baying MEK terrorists and their supporters include former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Howard Dean, Tom Ridge, John Lewis, Ed Rendell, former ambassador John Bolton, former FBI Director Louis Freeh, retired General Wesley Clark, Lee Hamilton, former US Marine Corps Commandant General James Jones, and Alan Dershowitz. US Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi would also stand in front of MEK terrorists to deliver to them an Iranian New Year “greeting.”

Blind Lust for Global Hegemony is Leading America Over a Cliff

What it says about American foreign policy, to trick US servicemen and women into dying in far off lands to “fight terrorism” when US politicians in the highest positions of power openly pledge support to terrorism – using it as a battering ram against its enemies abroad, and failing to topple them by proxy, using their own terrorist hordes as a pretext for direct military intervention to do so – is that such policy is underpinned by nothing more than blind lust for power, wealth, and influence in senseless pursuit of global hegemony. There is no guiding principles of peace, stability, democracy, freedom, or any confining principles of humanity that prohibit US foreign policy from exercising the most abhorrent practices in order to achieve its goals.

For America and the Western aligned nations and interests caught in its orbit, there is no future. Chasing hegemony for the sake of hegemony alone leaves no room for actual progress. When anything and everything obstructing the path to hegemony is seen as an “enemy” to be destroyed by any means necessary, that includes setting aside resources and atten-



tion to solving some of the most pressing issues of our time – health care, infrastructure, education, better jobs, peace, and prosperity. All of these are seen as obstacles toward hegemony, and the very same interests standing before MEK terrorists pledging America’s resources to their campaign of terrorism against Iran, are the same interests calling for and implementing austerity upon the American people to continuously fuel its foreign adventures.

Failure to identify these interests blindly chasing hegemony at the cost of global peace and prosperity leads not only America over a cliff into a ravine of madness, but the entire world as well. That a US general can stand before terrorists even as the US bombs two nations in the name of fighting terrorism, is but a glimpse into this madness.



2015



Mujahedin-E Khalq (MEK)

January 2015

Aliases

Muslim Iranian Student's Society; National Council of Resistance of Iraq (NCRI); People's Mujahideen of Iran (PMOI); National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA); Sazeman-e Mujahadin-e Khalq-e Iran

History

The Mujahedin-E Khalq (MEK) was formed in 1965 by a group of leftist students in Iran who opposed the regime under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.[1] Its leaders are Massoud Rajavi and his wife, Maryam Rajavi.[2] Its military wing, the National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA) and its political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), facilitate the goals of the MEK.[3]

Throughout the 1970s, the MEK targeted U.S. forces and offices in Iran.[4] Although the group denies any involvement, the U.S. State Department alleged that the MEK assisted in the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.[5] Following the overthrow of the Shah, the MEK was initially supportive of the new regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini.[6] However, the MEK did not agree with Khomeini's post-revolutionary politics, which eventually caused a falling out between the MEK and the new administration, forcing the leaders to flee to Paris.[7] In 1981, Massoud Rajavi started the NCRI.[8] The NCRI was conceived as an umbrella organization for dissident Iranian groups that would lobby western governments and presented itself as a government-in-exile. [9] In 1986, the NCRI and

MEK
Uncovered

686



the leadership of MEK were expelled from France following a warm up in relations between Iran and France; they subsequently relocated to Iraq. [10]

Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the MEK received support primarily from Saddam Hussein and was granted patronage in Iraq along the border shared with Iran.[11] MEK forces were involved in bloody exchanges during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, and from their new base in Iraq they were able to organize and execute several large scale terrorist operations over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s. [12] After the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the MEK negotiated a ceasefire with coalition forces following which they surrendered the weapons. [13] The group's members were confined to Camp Ashraf. [14] Following years of lobbying by pro-MEK figures in the United States and the Iranian diaspora around the world, the MEK finally succeeded in being removed from the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization list in 2012. [15]

Home Base

- 1965-1979: Iran[16]
- 1979-1981: France[17]
- 1981-present: Iraq[18]

Founding Year



1965

Ideology

Leftist-Marxist

Specific Goals

- Prior to 1979: Overthrow of the western backed Shah in Iran. [19]

- Post-1979:

- o Overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[20]

- o Abolition of programs for weapons of mass destruction – specifically nuclear – in Iran. [21]

- o The institution of a democratic government with universal suffrage. [22]

- o Freedom to practice any religion. [23]

- o Abolition of sharia law in Iran. [24]

Political Activity

- The NCRI currently has political operations in Europe and the United States and has also benefitted from a great deal of support from high profile advocates on both sides of the political aisle in the U.S. as well as financial assistance from wealthy members of the Iranian diaspora.[25]

Financing

- Fraud: [26]

- o Fake charities.

- o Benefits and social welfare fraud.

- Donations/Charities:

- o Prior to the group's expulsion from Iran and their later involvement in the Iran Iraq war, which turned many former supporters against them, the group sought funding from the Iranian middle classes. [27]

- o Following the fall of Saddam Hussein the group has looked to Iranian expatriates for financial backing. [28]

- State Sponsorship: The Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein provided financial support, safe haven and equipment to the group.[29]

Leadership and Structure over Time

MEK
Uncovered

688

- The group is composed of a paramilitary wing (National Liberation Army of Iran or NLA) and a political wing (National Council of Resistance of Iran or NCRI).
- 1979-2003: Massoud Rajavi, one of the original founders, [30] leads until he goes missing in 2003 [31]
- 1985-Present: Mayam Rajavi becomes co-leader in 1985 and was elected as president of the government-in-exile in 1993.[32]

Strength

- 1998: Several thousand.[33]
- 2003: 3,000.[34]
- 2004: 3,000.[35]
- 2010: 5,000- 10,000.[36]
- 2011: 5,000-10,000 members worldwide.[37]
- 2014: 3,000 members in residence at Camp Liberty. [38]

Allies and Suspected Allies

- The Iraqi Government under Saddam Hussein (state sponsor):
 - o Following the group's expulsion from France they were welcomed to Iraq in 1986. [39]
 - o The regime provided financial and physical support including weapons, training and bases. [40]
 - o The group fought alongside Iraq during the Iran Iraq War. [41]
 - o MEK fighters were deployed in attacks against Iranian troops in the later phase of the conflict. [42]
 - o They are also implicated in actions taken against the Shia and Kurdish uprisings in the early 1990s. [43]

Rivals and Enemies

- The Shah of Iran prior to 1979 (target). [44]
- The current Islamic Republic of Iran (target).[45]

Counterterrorism Efforts

- Domestic, Law Enforcement:
 - o The group's first planned attack in 1971 was thwarted by the Shah's secret police who infiltrated the group. [46]
 - o After the group fell out with the new regime, the Ayatollah



instigated a brutal suppression of MEK, the Revolutionary Guard arrested and executed many of their members.[47]

- Domestic, Political:

- o The Iranian government exiled and outlawed the MEK after they broke away from the Islamic clerical regime.[48]

- International, Military:

- o The United States government employed troops in Iraq in 2003 and on several occasions attacked the MEK military bases in Iraq.[49]

- International, Political:

- o France expelled the group in 1986. [50]

- o The EU listed the group as a proscribed terrorist organization in 2002. [51]

- o The EU removed the MEK from the proscribed terrorist organizations list in 2009.[52]

- o U.S. Department of State delisted the MEK as a terrorist organization in 2012 when the group publicly denounced violence.[53]

- o The Iraqi government is seeking to have the group's members resettled outside Iraq. [54]

- International, Law Enforcement:

- o The United States and several European countries have sought to stifle MEK funding by identifying and closing down fake charities and other schemes the group was utilizing to fund itself. [55]

- o In 2003, French police arrested members of the group for suspected terror offences.[56]

United States Government Designations

- Designated terrorist organization, October 8, 1997.[57]

- o Delisted, September 28, 2012.

Other Governments' Designations

- European Union (2002): Designated terrorist organization in 2002

- o Delisted in 2009.[58]

- Iran: Designated terrorist group.[59]



[1] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[2] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[3] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[4] “Iran Primer: U.S. Terrorism Report: MEK and Jundallah,” U.S. Institute of Peace, August 23, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/aug/23/us-terrorism-report-MEK-and-jundallah>.

[5] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[6] “Iran Primer: U.S. Terrorism Report: MEK and Jundallah,” U.S. Institute of Peace, August 23, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/aug/23/us-terrorism-report-MEK-and-jundallah>.

[7] “Iran Primer: U.S. Terrorism Report: MEK and Jundallah,” U.S. Institute of Peace, August 23, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/aug/23/us-terrorism-report-MEK-and-jundallah>.

[8] “About the National Council of Resistance of Iran,” National Council of Resistance of Iran: Foreign Affairs Committee, February 16, 2009, <http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/about-ncri>.

[9] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[10] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[11] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq





(MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[12] “Iran Primer: U.S. Terrorism Report: MEK and Jundallah,” U.S. Institute of Peace, August 23, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/aug/23/us-terrorism-report-MEK-and-jundallah>.

[13] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[14] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[15] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[16] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[17] “Iran Primer: U.S. Terrorism Report: MEK and Jundallah,” U.S. Institute of Peace, August 23, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/aug/23/us-terrorism-report-MEK-and-jundallah>.

[18] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[19] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[20] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[21] “Maryam Rajavi’s Ten Point Plan for Future Iran,” National Council of Resistance of Iran: Foreign Affairs Committee, April, 2006, <http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/issues/ten-point-plan>.

[22] “Maryam Rajavi’s Ten Point Plan for Future Iran,” Nation-

al Council of Resistance of Iran: Foreign Affairs Committee, April, 2006, <http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/issues/ten-point-plan>.

[23] “Maryam Rajavi’s Ten Point Plan for Future Iran,” National Council of Resistance of Iran: Foreign Affairs Committee, April, 2006, <http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/issues/ten-point-plan>.

[24] “Maryam Rajavi’s Ten Point Plan for Future Iran,” National Council of Resistance of Iran: Foreign Affairs Committee, April, 2006, <http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/issues/ten-point-plan>.

[25] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[26] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[27] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[28] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[29] “Iran Primer: U.S. Terrorism Report: MEK and Jundallah,” U.S. Institute of Peace, August 23, 2011, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/aug/23/us-terrorism-report-MEK-and-jundallah>.

[30] “Factbox: Who Are the People’s Mujahideen of Iran?” Reuters, December 28, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/12/28/uk-iran-exiles-mujahideen-idUSTRE5BR34420091228>.

[31] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[32] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq





(MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[33] U.S. Department of State, Patterns of Global Terrorism 1998, Background Information on Terrorist Groups, April 1999, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1998Report/appb.html>

[34] “Selected Non-State Armed Groups,” Military Balance 103 (2003): 344-354, doi: 10.1093/milbal/103.1.344

[35] “Selected Non-State Armed Groups,” Military Balance 104 (2004): 362-377, doi: 10.1080/725292356

[36] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[37] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2011, Terrorist Organizations, July 31, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195553.htm>

[38] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[39] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[40] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[41] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[42] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[43] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[44] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq

(MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[45] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[46] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[47] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[48] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[49] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[50] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[51] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[52] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[53] U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, Terrorist Organizations, August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170264.htm>

[54] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.



www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158.

[55] Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, “The Mujahedin-E Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf.

[56] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[57] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[58] Jonathan Masters, “Backgrounder: Mujahadeen-E-Khalq (MEK),” Council on Foreign Relations, July 28, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/mujahadeen-e-khalq-MEK/p9158>.

[59] Michael Theodoulou, “US Move to Delist MEK as Terror Group Worries Iran’s Opposition,” The National, July 26, 2011, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/us-move-to-delist-MEK-as-terror-group-worries-irans-opposition>.



Global Research

Center for Research on Globalization
globalresearch.ca / globalresearch.org

Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MKO): US-Israel Sponsored Terrorist Entity directed against Iran

January 2015

In their abortive effort to assassinate another Iranian nuclear scientist, Israeli officials only sustained desperation and disgrace in their dastardly elimination campaign against Iran which was apparently in sync with ISIL inhumane brutalities inside Iraq and Syria.

More alert than ever, security forces are diligently tasked with protecting the lives of the Iranian scientists wherever they are. A top Iranian military official said on Saturday that in the last two years, “the Zionist entity has been making clandestine efforts to assassinate an Iranian nuclear scientist, but the timely presence of the IRGC security forces thwarted the terrorist operation.”

It is now common knowledge that Tel Aviv has been carrying out covert ops inside the Iranian soil for a couple of years, assassinating Iranian nuclear officials and scientists although Israel has constantly declined to admit to its unjustified iniquity against the Iranian nation.

Translating suspicion into conviction, a report carried by CBS

MEK
Uncovered

697



MEK
Uncovered

698

News in March 2014 revealed that Obama has pressured Israeli espionage apparatuses to put an end to their assassinations inside Iran against the country's nuclear scientists.

The terrorist Mujahedin Khalq Organization AKA MKO or MEK seems to be a ubiquitous agent any time there is an assassination in Iran. A shadowy cult with myriad of financial, military and intelligence connections to Tel Aviv and Washington, the MKO works in league with Kidon, the assassination unit within the Mossad. There are solid reports which indicate that the MKO members have received military and intelligence training both from the US forces as well as from the Mossad.

In 2012, Seymour M. Hersh revealed that at a secret site in Nevada, the US Special Operations Command (JSOC) conducted training, beginning in 2005, for members of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, "a dissident Iranian opposition group known in the West as the M.E.K." According to the report, the training ended sometime before President Obama took office. A retired four-star general says, "They got the standard training, in comms, crypto [cryptography], small-unit tactics, and weaponry—that went on for six months.... They were kept in little pods."

Within the US government, the cult enjoys a rather immense support for their sabotage activities against the Islamic Repub-

lic. Among their skills are former top Bush officials and other Republicans (Michael Mukasey, Fran Townsend, Andy Card, Tom Ridge, Rudy Giuliani) as well as prominent Democrats (Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Bill Richardson, Wesley Clark).

A revealing report by NBC News report by Richard Engel and Robert Windrem cites two anonymous senior US officials with two interesting claims: 1) that it was MEK which perpetrated the string of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists and 2) the terrorist group “is financed, trained and armed by Israel’s secret service.” So the report testifies to the veracity of what Iranian officials have asserted about the involvement of MEK and Israel in murdering nuclear scientists on the Iranian soil.

Interestingly, a few weeks ago, I received a threatening email from Ali Safavi, the notorious MKO spokesman (through a western publisher of mine) in which he had pontificated about the virtues of the MKO terrorists and the so-called ‘vices’ of the Islamic Republic, accusing me of serving as a mouthpiece for the Islamic Republic. I strongly believe that revealing the murky realities of a terrorist group responsible for the deaths of 17000 innocent Iranians is only my ethical obligation. Besides, Ali Safavi and the likes

of him should come to their senses and realize that their efforts to whitewash their crimes will eventually prove pointless and that there is no way at all for them to lend a cloak of legitimacy to their unnamable crimes against the Iranian nation. During the Iraq-Iran war, the MKO joined hands with Saddam Hussein, the tyrannical ruler of Iraq in attacking and killing Iranian combatants. However, a bloodier chapter in the history of the cult can be traced in their collusion with Saddam in crushing the popular uprisings in 1991. No doubt, their tanks took an inconceivable reprisal on thousands of innocent civilians. The callous command of Maryam Rajavi is still gnawing and tearing at the hearts and minds of the Iraqis: “Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.”





Unfortunately, the MKO, long considered a terrorist organization, was delisted thanks to the unflagging endeavors of former US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

In 2011, Mohamed Ali Lobnani, a Lebanese national, who was arrested on charges of spying for Mossad confessed that he had spied for Israel under the cover of a Shiite cleric in Lebanon.

In a court hearing session, Lobnani said he had phone contacts with Mohammad Alizadeh, an MKO ringleader, claiming that had no idea that the number was a Mossad contact number.

Asked about the link between MKO and Mossad, he noted, "As far as I know, the group (MKO) has been collaborating with Israel for several years and has massive interactions with Mossad."

The MKO is the artifact of a corrupt ideology which is in many respects comparable to that of the ISIL cult. No wonder they are fighting shoulder to shoulder with the ISIL terrorists in Iraq and Syria.

The fact that these two curious cults are thriving rigorously, that the West caters – either publicly or secretly – to their cravings, that they are being bigheartedly financed by the puppet regional regimes and that they receive sophisticated military and intelligence training from Mossad and CIA evinces a believable bond between the two.

That the MKO and the ISIL cults are pursuing the selfsame path of perversion is no coincidence at all. The reason is simple: they are cut from the same cloth. And that Mossad is dispatching assassins into Iran to liquidate Iranian scientists is only meant to strike fear and beyond that, to secretly make up for what the ISIL and MKO terrorists feel emasculated to do in Iran.



How To Stop Being Terrorists: A Guide For ISIS, Courtesy Of The MEK

January 2015

WASHINGTON — While the world's eyes are focused on ISIS [the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] and rising tensions in the Middle East, a former terrorist group from Iran is tromping through the halls of Congress, and garnering support from some of America's most powerful and prominent politicians and officials.

Speaker: "Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Patrick Kennedy, and many others."

The group is the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, or the MEK, in its Persian acronym. It was taken off of the State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organizations list [in 2012] after demonstrating that it had not been engaged in terrorist activities for the last 10 years.

The group is led by Massoud Rajavi, who has been in hiding since 2003, when the United States and Britain invaded Iraq, and Maryam Rajavi, who acts as the president-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the group's political wing. According to the FBI, the MEK murdered American citizens in Iran during the 1970s, allied with the ayatollahs to help overthrow the Iranian government, participated in the American embassy hostage crisis in 1979, and teamed up with Saddam

MEK
Uncovered

701



Hussein to fight their own countrymen during the Iran-Iraq War. They are responsible for the deaths of thousands of Iranians and a campaign of bombings, assassinations, and military attacks, as well as collusion with Iraq.

The goal of the group now is to overthrow the current Iranian regime and take power for themselves.

So how does a group go from being one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world to having an office on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., with backing from the likes of the former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton and former Director of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, among many others?

CNN: "There's been a lot of pressure in the United States both from the group and from its supporters in Congress, and very high-paid former officials speaking on their behalf to delist the group."

In 2011, groups around the country acting as front organiza-

tions for the MEK — including the Iranian American Community of Northern California — hired lobbyists to help remove the MEK from the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list.

They recruited the likes of Howard Dean, who is a former Democratic presidential candidate; Michael Hayden, the former CIA director; Newt Gingrich, who is the former Speaker of the House; and the lobbying firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, among many others. They [MEK] often paid five-figure speaker fees to individuals, and six figures to the firms lobbying on their behalf.

Jeremiah Goulka: “They’re just thorough PR jobs, that do a very good job of making lawyer-like arguments based on taking very nit-picky looks at wording.”

That’s Jeremiah Goulka, the author of “The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” a report published by the Rand Corporation in 2009 that assesses the status of the MEK at a camp called Ashraf in Iraq.

Goulka: “I was asked to join the Rand Research Team. ... Who are the MEK? Why are they there in Iraq? What should the detainee operations command do, if anything?”

However, following publication, the Rand report came under fire by the MEK and its paid lobbyists in Washington.

Lincoln P. Bloomfield: “Well, I’m a former policy official and one of my roles is as a consultant to a law firm in Washington. An American citizens group hired the law firm to help them advocate to remove the MEK from the terrorism list.”

That’s Ambassador Lincoln P. Bloomfield, the former deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs from 1992 to 1993. He wrote a book, entitled “The Mujahedin-e Khalq, MEK: Shackled by a Twisted History,” that posits that the MEK has been severely misunderstood over time.

Bloomfield: “I found out that there’s a gap between what everyone was saying about the MEK and what the information seemed to show, that there was a gap, something was amiss.





So that really piqued my curiosity and I just kept digging for the next two years.”

Ambassador Bloomfield’s law firm, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, was reportedly paid \$620,000 dollars by a group supportive of the MEK during those two years, according to the Senate Office of Public Records.

But are his claims — which match those of the MEK — true? Bloomfield: “As I began to examine what think tanks were saying, what the press was saying, a very consistent set of allegations arose: that they’d killed Americans in the 1970s in Iran, that they had helped with the embassy hostage takeover during the revolution in 1979, that they were a violent, left-wing, Marxist group that was speaking about democracy but didn’t really mean it, and that they’d engaged in a whole series of violent actions, and that they were also human rights abusers in their own midst.”

In June 1973, Lt. Col. Lewis Hawkins of the U.S. Army was the first American assassinated by the MEK, as he walked near his home in Tehran, according to The Associated Press.

Ambassador Bloomfield claims that Hawkins was murdered by a man named Vahid Afrakhteh, citing two Washington Post articles from 1976.

This is significant because the MEK narrative has attempted to gain credibility in the United States by separating itself from the killing of Americans.

Bloomfield: “Other activists who were impatient with the MEK took the Mujahedeen name and weren’t interested in Islam, and they wanted a secular Marxist, violent revolution, and they were the ones who killed the Americans. They were caught. I have put The Washington Post articles from those days in my report.”

The Washington Post articles are referenced as proof that a U.S. State Department report on the MEK is problematic — and possibly untrue — because it says Reza Rezai, not Afra-

khateh, “was arrested and executed by the Shah’s government for the murder of Colonel Hawkins.”

The MEK and its supporters are trying to separate Rezai from the killing of Lt. Col.

Hawkins because even though he is dead, he is still idolized by the current MEK as a hero.

However, while it may be true that Afrakhteh committed the actual murder of Hawkins, two separate reports from The Associated Press in 1973, obtained by MintPress News, named Reza Rezai as the “man alleged to have planned the murder of... Lieutenant Colonel Lewis Hawkins” and as the leader of the group. One of the reports says, “The gunman who killed Hawkins still is at large.”

That person who was “still at large” very well could have been Afrakhteh, so the fact he is named as the actual gunman does not in any way absolve Rezai from responsibility for the murder, nor does it contradict the State Department report.

The MEK also claims, as does Ambassador Bloomfield, that it is separated from the murder of the seven Americans, including Lt. Col. Hawkins, because there was a schism in the group between a Marxist-leaning faction, and the Muslim faction led by Massoud Rajavi.

Bloomfield: “There was blood between the two factions. The one that wanted Islam is the one that we see today, and for their commitment to Islam a couple of people were gunned down by these leftist revolutionaries, who were using the name Mujahedin.”

However, that schism did not happen until 1975, according to Ervand Abrahamian, author of “The Iranian Mojahedin,” and one of the foremost scholars of the group. Therefore, in the words of Muhammad Sahimi, “Hawkins’ assassination, at least, was irrefutably the work of the original” MEK.

Another problem with the narrative of the MEK not being involved with the killings of Americans is that the group bragged





about those murders in its very own newspaper called “Mojahed,” seen here.

The text states:

“It was the Mujahedin-e Khalq that killed with guns American Generals and also blew up nests of spies, like America’s information office... ”

[Mojahed – Number 77, Page 2]

The MEK and its supporters also claim that the group was not involved with the U.S. Embassy hostage crisis and that it did not support it in any way.

Bloomfield: “This one is very black and white, and misunderstood. And, frankly, allegations that the MEK were behind the embassy takeover, and were promoting keeping the Americans hostage only surfaced in detail a few years ago.”

The problem with this statement is that the MEK clearly promoted the 1979 embassy takeover in its newspaper.

The headline to the article in this issue of “Mojahed” says:

“We are happy that this time they targeted the real Shah, which is America’s imperialism; The nest of the spies has been seized!”

[Mojahed – Number 10, Front page, November 12, 1979]

Further, despite an intense campaign to expunge the MEK’s troubled history toward the safety and well-being of American citizens and the way it treats its own members, the State Department, the FBI, Human Rights Watch, and the Rand Corporation have not changed their stance on any of these issues. So, what is the MEK? The aforementioned organizations claim that not only is it an opposition group to the current Iranian regime, but it is a kind of cult.

Goulka: “At the MEK camps, there’s a whole set of practices that are all textbook out of cult theory – sleep deprivation, make-work projects, which is one of the reasons why Camp Ashraf has all this — surprisingly, it’s pretty. I mean there’s all of these beautification projects there. There’s fountains and

there's gardens, and there are all of these statues and memorials to things. Make-work projects. Sometimes food limitation. But one of the big things I didn't know about them, the stuff that gets at people, um: 1) forced celibacy; 2) forced divorce; 3) gender segregation. They will claim that the divorce was not forced. One of their representatives told me that, I don't remember his exact words, but that in the desert, it just doesn't support family life. And I'm sure that Iraqi families feel just the same way."

Masoud Banisadr was an MEK member for 20 years and served as the group's representative to the United Nations and the United States during that time. He now ardently denounces the group. His account of what it's like on the inside supports Goulka's claims.

Masoud Banisadr: "Not only me, all members were forced to divorce their spouses, and later they have to send their children abroad to Europe and United States to be adopted by supporters and other members. The final stage was self-divorce, which meant that you have to divorce your own personality, your own individuality. You had to prove to the group that your whole individuality and personality before you become member of the group were devilish and wrong and corrupt and so-on."

The MEK and its supporters claim that the group is not a cult, though, and that former members have been coerced into saying that it is a cult by Iran's intelligence services.

Goulka: "This is what's important to remember: Even if there are Iranian efforts to paint the MEK as terrible, which there are — I mean, the Iranian regime is always trying to make the MEK look terrible. But, it's easy to make the MEK look terrible because the MEK looks terrible."

Part of Goulka's job in Iraq when assessing the MEK camp was to interview members of the group.

Goulka: "I mean, I interviewed loads of people, and, I mean,

MEK
Uncovered

707



were they all agents? I doubt it. Were they Iranian agents, were they sneaking into the locked-off refugee camp off of F.O.B. [Forward Operating Base] Grizzly, and planting information to somehow feed me when they did not know I was coming?”

In response to the MEK’s claims, Human Rights Watch even went back and re-assessed their reporting and re-interviewed the original people from their report.

The second time around, they made the same claims that the organization is a cult and that they [members of the group] were tortured and abused by MEK’s leaders.

Human Rights Watch found no evidence of influence by Iranian intelligence services.

Despite all the documented history behind the group’s nefarious claims, it still came off the [Foreign Terrorist Organizations] list. And that’s because the single most important thing it did was end all acts of violence. And on this point, both Goulka and Ambassador Bloomfield agree.

Bloomfield: “In September of 2012, when Secretary of State Clinton removed the MEK from the U.S. terrorism list, the announcement said that the MEK had conducted no acts of violence for at least 10 years.”

Goulka: “I was actually thinking they should come off the list. I don’t think the U.S. made the decision for the right reasons, but I think they made the right decision. I think they needed to come off the list because I think the list, as written — I mean, the statute as written — they no longer really satisfied. And I think it’s important that there be some kind of incentive to terrorist groups in the world to say, ‘You know, if you stop being violent, we will take you off the list.’”

So now that the MEK is no longer officially considered a terrorist group, what is it? How are they any different from other Iranian opposition groups, such as the National Front, or supporters of the previous monarchy?

Banisadr: “This is the problem which they are facing. I mean,

the kind of questions that they face from ordinary Iranians outside of Iran, or their supporters outside of Iran is: How do you want to go back to Iran? How do you want to overthrow this government? The only answer which they have is that, 'We are lobbying the United States. We are lobbying Western countries to fight against the Iranian government. First to put sanctions, put hardship on Iranian government so they cannot solve the problems of [the] Iranian people. And this might create some resistance on the opposition within Iran, and create an environment of revolution, perhaps, inside of Iran. At the same time, we are inviting Western countries, especially [the] United States to attack Iran because of [the] nuclear issue, because of [the] Israeli issue, and so on. So, when [the] United States attacks Iran the only the only people that can govern the country are us. There is nobody else.'"

Goulka agrees with Banisadr's assessment of the group. He echoed his remarks about the MEK trying to grab power in Iran through pressuring the American government, but from a perspective rooted in the shame behind the horrors of America's invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Goulka: "We're always trying to make it sound like Iran is so super powerful as a military force. And it's nothing compared to Israel, which is nothing compared to us. Yet we're going to get ourselves up into a lather where the only, the only end result of that, the only logical end result if you let it keep going, is that we get violent with Iran. And that doesn't suit anybody's interests, without even questioning the actual morality of it. I mean, do I support the Iranian regime? No. But when you look at what we did to Iraq, where now people in the media constantly talk about 100,000 civilians dying as if that's something we should accept. And most evidence suggests that's like one-tenth of the people that actually died. And that's death — that's not the number of people who are just displaced, or injured, or had their lives ruined. The millions of people who were displaced



and had to leave the country, or just displaced in the country – I mean, we wrecked that country because some people here wanted to do it, and you had fools like Ahmed Chalabi saying that they could go in and take over the place, and our fools who followed it. And the number of deaths for our people, too, and the way we’ve ruined lives here, and the way we’ve, you know, the money we’ve spent on it. Why would we repeat that in Iran? I mean, it’s insane. But, of course, insanity is the whole notion, you know, thinking you can do it again right this time. And it’s just frightening to watch us go down that path if we keep listening to the MEK.”



710

A thin, light gray line that starts from the right side of the page and extends diagonally down and to the left, ending near the bottom left corner.

Intercept

Long March of the Yellow Jackets

February 2015

How a One-Time Terrorist Group Prevailed on Capitol Hill
T A SENATE Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Iran's nuclear program in October 2013, more than a dozen men and women in yellow rain jackets sat in the gallery seats of the wood-paneled room, a bright presence amid the standard-issue dark suits of Washington. It wasn't raining.

They were supporters of the Iranian exile opposition group the Mojahedin-e Khalq, often referred to as the MEK, but known to most Iranians as the Mojahedin. Activists distribute all manner of yellow paraphernalia at the group's demonstrations: hats, banners, flags, inflatable rubber clapper sticks, and, most of all, the jackets. The yellow jackets — often emblazoned with portraits of the group's two co-leaders, Massoud and Maryam Rajavi — have become its calling card.

During the hearing, the powerful then-Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Menendez, a Democrat from New Jersey, spoke out for the Mojahedin. About an hour and a half into the proceedings, Menendez issued an explicit threat to Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman over attacks against the group's members in Iraq.

Another assault had been lodged against a camp in the Iraqi desert where former Mojahedin fighters were holed up — dozens of the unarmed, expatriate Iranians had died in the raid, with conflicting accounts of who was responsible. Menendez,

MEK
Uncovered

711



a hard-line opponent of the Iranian regime and skeptic of nuclear negotiations led by Sherman, blamed Iran's allies, the Iraqi government, for letting the attacks happen. He expressed preparedness to use his clout as chairman of the committee to pressure the Iraqis.

“One thing that this committee can do,” Menendez said, wagging his pencil at Sherman, “since it has jurisdiction over all weapons sales, is that I doubt very much that we are going to see any approval of any weapons sales to Iraq until we get this situation in a place in which people’s lives are saved.”

The threat sounded like a hypothetical, but it wasn’t: as Menendez spoke, he was blocking a major weapons deal with Iraq — a sale that would eventually be worth more than \$6 billion in Apache helicopters and associated equipment and support, marking, perhaps, the first major Capitol Hill achievement for the Mojahedin since being removed from the U.S. list of designated terrorist organizations the year before.

On Capitol Hill, Mojahedin sympathizers clad in yellow jackets frequently appear at hearings dealing with Iran — or Iraq, where thousands of the groups’ fighters ended up in the 1980s, and where, beginning in the late 2000s, they came under a series of attacks that killed dozens. “You couldn’t show up at an Iraq hearing without lots of people wearing yellow jackets,” one former Congressional staffer said.

The group’s supporters try to arrive early to take their seats

in hearing rooms, but “because people didn’t want every Iraq hearing to be a U.S. Ambassador with 40 people in yellow jackets sitting behind them,” the former staffer recalled, offices would dispatch interns to arrive before the Mojahedin followers “to fill those seats and push the MEK back.”

Members of MEK look on as U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry testifies on agreements over Iran’s nuclear programs, before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington, December 10, 2013.

Not least because of the yellow jackets, the group’s many critics — including foreign policy-oriented Hill staffers — view the Mojahedin as “wacky”; they remain obscure beyond the Beltway and battle persistent criticisms that the group is a cult of personality, with adherents prone to blindly following the directives of the Rajavis. Already unpopular with Iranians, the Mojahedin’s international stock plummeted when the U.S. government officially designated them as a terrorist group in 1997, due to their history of attacks against Iranian government targets and, dating back to the Shah’s era, American civilian and military personnel stationed there.

In the intervening years, even while constrained by their terrorism designation, the group and its affiliates poured millions of dollars into a sophisticated effort to rehab their image, creating an influential lobbying effort on Capitol Hill. Via an opaque network of Iranian-American community organizations, supporters circumvented anti-terrorism laws to garner many fans in Washington, at least in some quarters, where they quietly pressed their case for hard-line policies against the Iranian regime through meetings with sympathetic members of Congress. “It’s their Hill outreach strategy that accomplishes nearly everything they’re able to do,” the former staffer explained. “Given how small they are and how marginal they actually are, the amount of influence they wield is actually kind of amazing.” Congressional hawks like Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., and the





frequently eye-roll-worthy Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif., and Ted Poe, R-Texas, could be counted on to bring up the Mojahedin again and again. But not everyone on the Hill was initially convinced. As long as the terrorist designation was in place, many influential members of Congress wouldn't speak out for the group. In 2012, after that steady drumbeat and an intense public relations effort, the Mojahedin successfully overturned the terrorist designation.

Since being legitimized, the Mojahedin's influence on Capitol Hill spread from the fringes of Congress to include more mainstream and respected Republicans and Democrats. Most of the group's lobbying focuses on its members' well-being in Iraq, said a current Hill staffer, who works in foreign policy. But, the staffer added, "undergirding this is all this neocon-friendly warmongering, this intense push for regime change, this intense hatred for [Iranian president Hassan] Rouhani — they're not subtle about this at all."

Menendez's advocacy for the Mojahedin at the October hearing wasn't new, but it signaled that by 2013 the group had come full circle: from an outlaw terrorist outfit to a player on Capitol Hill. How that happened is a classic story of money, politics and the enduring appeal of exile groups promising regime change.

THROUGHOUT ITS 50-YEAR struggle, the Mojahedin has operated by the principle that the enemy of its enemy is its friend, giving rise to a past littered with ill-conceived alliances, tactical missteps and eventually, its designation as a terrorist group.

The group's origins date to the mid-1960s, when a small circle of mostly middle class university students pored over revolutionary and religious tracts, creating a unique Islamo-Marxist ideology and eventually forming the Mojahedin-e Khalq, meaning "Holy warriors of the people." After recruiting among young intellectuals, the Mojahedin sent some of its members to train in desert camps in Jordan and Lebanon belonging to

the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In 1971, the group sought to launch its revolution by bombing a major power plant that supplied Tehran with electricity. But the Shah's notorious security services foiled the plot, and around half the group's early membership ended up in the Shah's prisons. The next year, nine leaders were executed.

Yet the group continued its small-scale strikes against the monarchist regime and its allies. Between 1973 and 1976, the Mojahedin assassinated six Americans in Iran: three military men and three civilian contractors with the American manufacturing conglomerate Rockwell International. "Widely credited in Tehran for these attacks at the time, the Mojahedin themselves claimed responsibility for these murders in their publications," said a 1994 State Department report on the group's activities. Initially, a "leadership cadre" ran the Mojahedin by committee, according to a 2009 Rand Corp. report about the group. By the late 1970s, however, the Mojahedin rallied around Masoud Rajavi, a charismatic figure sporting a thick mustache and coiffed black hair who was one of the group's only surviving early leaders. YouTube videos of his old speeches capture a rousing orator, with thoughtful, soft-spoken passages punctuated by intense stem-winding that brings the crowd to applause, often chanting "Rajavi, Rajavi!"

With unrest percolating in Iran, Rajavi sought to cooperate with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the revolution's leader, but shortly after the Shah fell, Khomeini, a conservative cleric not fond of lay radicals, carried out a ruthless crackdown against the group. Rajavi and his followers fled into exile, initially to Paris, where his sway grew more authoritarian and he married his third wife, Maryam, appointing her co-leader.

By 1986, Rajavi began forging his next alliance, with Saddam Hussein. He relocated to Iraq and reorganized the 7,000 members who followed into an army, which Hussein supplied with heavy weapons and tracts of land, including a desert base that would be called Camp Ashraf. The group joined the Iraqi



dictator's bloody war against Iran, engendering much antipathy among Iranians. Out of favor with Khomeini and isolated in the Iraqi desert, the Marxism of the group's early years began to dissipate, replaced by the singular goal of overthrowing the Islamic Republic and installing the Rajavis as Iran's leaders. The group also turned further into cultish behavior; Rajavi and Maryam mandated divorces and celibacy for their soldiers, even as they elevated their own partnership.

After the First Gulf War, Hussein reportedly used the Mojahedin as a militia to quell sectarian and ethnic uprisings, alienating many Iraqis. "Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards," Maryam Rajavi told her followers during the attacks, according to the *The New York Times Magazine*.

In the meantime, the Mojahedin turned to attacking the Iranian regime abroad. "In April 1992 the MEK carried out attacks on Iranian embassies in 13 different countries, demonstrating the group's ability to mount large-scale operations overseas," said a 1997 State Department report.

That year, then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright designated the Mojahedin a Foreign Terrorist Organization, among 29 other groups, barring it from fundraising in the U.S. "We are aware that some of the designations made today may be challenged in court," Albright said. "But we're also confident that the designations are fully justified."

Under pressure, Maryam Rajavi eventually sought to remake the Mojahedin's image by renouncing violence; after being linked to 350 attacks between 2000 and 2001, according to Rand Corp., the group has not claimed responsibility for any subsequent violent offenses. That about-face did little good, at least in the eyes of the U.S. government. In the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the White House cited the group's presence in the country to buttress claims that Saddam Hussein was harboring terrorists.

But when the U.S. arrived at the Mojahedin's camps, after

conflicting reports of an initial skirmish, the group's leadership waved a white flag, then signed a ceasefire — paving the way for its members to receive protection under the Geneva Conventions. Massoud Rajavi has not been publicly seen since, and Maryam Rajavi became the sole face of the group to the outside world.

For years, the Mojahedin languished at Camp Ashraf — guarded by U.S. forces — and refused to be moved, except en masse. The U.S. military eventually handed over control of its perimeter to the Iraqi government, and in July 2009, Iraqi security forces raided the camp, resulting in the deaths of at least nine refugees, according to Amnesty International. Dozens more were allegedly detained and tortured. Another raid took place in April 2011. The Mojahedin claimed 34 were killed and more than 300 injured. “With the threat of another Srebrenica looming in Ashraf, intervention is absolutely essential,” Maryam Rajavi said at the time. But no intervention came.

In September 2012, the U.S. agreed to remove the Mojahedin from the terrorist list; a key factor would be the group's cooperation in relocating to a former U.S. military base called Camp Liberty, closer to Baghdad. The United Nations facilitated the move to Liberty, with plans for eventual third-country resettlement. Most of the few thousand remaining ex-fighters relocated, but about 100 stayed behind. In September 2013, according to Foreign Policy, Iranian-backed Shia militias reportedly killed at least 50 unarmed Mojahedin, about half of those still at Ashraf.

Pro-Mojahedin activists were outraged. Their exact numbers can be hard to divine: the Mojahedin themselves often won't declare their membership. In the U.S. today, an umbrella organization of groups declaring allegiance to Maryam Rajavi — the innocuously named Organization of Iranian-American Communities — claims its network covers over 30 states. That does not include a bevy of small Washington-based pro-Mojahedin groups, or the organization's official office, which,



long-dormant, reopened near the White House after the 2012 de-listing. After the slaughter at Ashraf, the activists sprang into action.

“I remember the day of the attack at Camp Ashraf,” said Shirin Nariman, a pro-Mojahedin activist based in the Washington area. “Three of us, we just went to the Senate. We started going door to door. Nobody told us to do it. We were upset.” Not all the offices welcomed the activists. But “Menendez responded very well,” Nariman said, adding that Sen. John McCain, R-Az., also gave them time. “At least they are opening their ears and hearing us. But [the] White House is closing its ears and doesn’t want to hear.”

Not all Capitol Hill overtures by the group’s supporters have worked, however. In late 2013, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., returned \$2,600 from a supporter of the Mojahedin in Virginia. “During routine due diligence by campaign staff, it was discovered that a few donors had associations the campaign was uncomfortable with,” a spokesman for Graham’s campaign told Politico. “In an abundance of caution, the contributions were refunded.”

And some Hill staffers, while sympathetic to the Mojahedin’s plight in Iraq, remain wary of their broader agenda. “We should be concerned about human rights violations anywhere,” explained the Congressional staffer who works on foreign policy. “But a key tenet of President Obama’s foreign policy has been de-escalating our relationship and to get a peaceful resolution to the nuclear issue with Iran. And the MEK has been working against that agenda on the Hill.”

The staffer went on: “They lead with Camp Ashraf. Back in the day it was an immediate pivot to let’s get them off the terrorist list.” Now, he said, they segue from the group’s situation at Camp Liberty into regime change in Iran.

While many Congressional aides may have viewed the yellow vest-wearing activists as shrill voices for regime change in Iran and an annoyance at hearings, the Mojahedin, over the

course of nearly two decades, had cultivated a valuable relationship with Menendez, one of the Senate's most influential foreign-policy voices.

IN THE EARLY days of the group's efforts to be removed from the U.S. terrorist list, the most vocal support came from a few members of Congress who viewed the Mojahedin as a cudgel to use against the Islamic Republic, such as Poe and Rohrabacher, who joined longtime stalwart Ros-Lehtinen. (In 2011, a Congressional delegation chaired by Rohrabacher was reportedly asked by the Iraqi government to leave the country after raising the massacres against Mojahedin members in a meeting.)

Menendez remained largely silent on the Mojahedin while it was on the State Department's terrorism list; during his first term as a Senator, from 2006 through 2012, he rarely, if ever, brought the group up.

Since the State Department took the Mojahedin off the list, however, Menendez has raised and defended the group, highlighting its efforts against the Iranian regime. Menendez spoke out most forcefully after the September 2013 attack on Camp Ashraf: "I hold the Iraqi government directly responsible to protect the community, to investigate this matter thoroughly, and to prosecute the perpetrators of this heinous act," he said in statement.

In June 2014, Menendez delivered a video address to a Mojahedin rally in Paris. He reassured Maryam Rajavi and her followers that aid to Iraq would depend on the country's treatment of the several thousand former Mojahedin fighters left stranded there. "I told [then-Iraqi] Prime Minister Maliki in person last year that his commitment to the safety and security of the MEK members at Camp Liberty is a critical factor in my future support for any assistance to Iraq," he said in the video, to the cheering, yellow-clad Mojahedin throngs.

The outspoken advocacy for the group coincided with the rise



of campaign contributions from Mojahedin supporters to Menendez, according to an analysis conducted by The Intercept. Assisted in part by the work of independent researcher Joanne Stocker, The Intercept compiled a cross-section of political giving by supporters of the organization in the U.S. between 2009 — when the campaign to de-list the Mojahedin ramped up — and the present. The Intercept’s study examined giving by people listed by the pro-Mojahedin OIAC network, as well as supporters and activists identified by other news articles, and a former Congressional staffer who has tracked the group. Never a pronounced player in campaign donations, Mojahedin supporters have nonetheless put hundreds of thousands of dollars into American electoral politics. Since 2009, those included in The Intercept study sent around \$330,000 into politicians’ and election committees’ coffers.

Before de-listing, from the start of 2009 until September 2012, John McCain and Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., topped The Intercept’s survey of Mohajedin-related campaign contributions, receiving \$11,350 and \$11,150, respectively.

Menendez only received two donations from supporters tracked by The Intercept before September 2012, but after the State Department removed the group from the terrorist list, the money started to flow. In the past two years, Menendez took in more than \$25,000 from donors with ties to the Mojahedin, making him the largest recipient in the study over this period. (The next two top recipients received less than half of Menendez’s total during the same period. McCain, still top recipient of the study’s Mojahedin-related donations after de-listing, received \$10,800, and Rohrabacher received \$10,300.)

But the campaign contributions alone don’t explain Menendez’s advocacy for the Mojahedin. The first former Hill staffer, who described efforts to move the Mojahedin back at hearings, said some Congressional offices were wary of the group, but described an alternative approach where “even if your constituent is crazy, you take the meeting and you listen carefully

and you try to help them.”

The former staffer said of Menendez, “Sometimes it gets him into trouble when his staff doesn’t vet people well enough.” He also noted another dynamic at play: “Menendez is sort of known for these immigrant minority groups. He has a special place in his heart for them, based on his Cuban background, and I think sometimes it clouds his judgment — sometimes he doesn’t make the best decisions.”

EVEN BEFORE THE group was put on the terrorist list, another prominent senator got involved with the Mojahedin. During the 1990s, first as a Democratic House member and then a Senator from New Jersey, Robert Torricelli had been an outspoken opponent of Iran’s Islamic regime and a supporter of the Mojahedin, hoping the latter would deliver a deadly blow to the former, an enemy government of the United States.

The advocacy attracted the attention of a Congressional staffer named Kenneth Timmerman, who had followed Iran issues before his time on the hill. “Torricelli was already one of a handful of people who were notorious for their support of the MEK,” Timmerman told *The Intercept*. “Torricelli’s involvement as a supporter of the MEK was very well known, certainly to people who work on the Hill.”

Timmerman described a robust Mojahedin lobbying operation at the time. “They would come to Congressional offices in a very intimidating fashion, to young staffers who were inexperienced and didn’t know who they were,” he said. The support they received rested on three pillars, Timmerman added: ignorance about the group, a handful of campaign contributions, and “a kind of widespread view that we really don’t like the Iranian regime, so let’s help anybody that’s against the Iranian regime.”

Timmerman’s description of yesteryear matched that of the current Congressional staffer who works on foreign policy. “They’ll send grassroots staffers to meet with you and then





just wait in your office to ambush you,” the current staffer said. “They’d basically filibuster you for an hour.” He added that the “the lack of institutional knowledge on the Hill and turnover in staffs” left an opening for the group’s supporters.

Timmerman, for his part, wholeheartedly supports regime change in Iran, but nonetheless rejects the Mojahedin, whom he considers terrorists. When he left the House, Timmerman launched a foundation dedicated to democracy in Iran and wrote extensively on the subject, mostly for right-of-center outlets (his other writing has included raising questions about President Obama’s birth certificate). One of his pieces, published in 1998 in *The American Spectator*, focused on contributions to Torricelli’s campaigns from “MEK officers, supporters and sympathizers.” Using FEC records listing campaign contributions, Timmerman recalled, he compiled his own database and then queried it for people known to be affiliated with the Mojahedin, as well as those named by his sources.

According to Timmerman’s analysis, Torricelli received some \$136,000 between April 1993 and November 1996 — before the Mojahedin was designated as a terrorist group. (In a 2002 *Newsweek* report, Torricelli’s aides dismissed the alleged amount as exaggerated.)

“In his House days,” Timmerman wrote in the *American Spectator*, Torricelli “sponsored more than a half-dozen resolutions and letters of support for the organization.” Timmerman also cited Mojahedin promotional materials that claimed Torricelli introduced several of the group’s members to President Bill Clinton during a fundraising dinner in late 1997.

Support for the Mojahedin caught up with Torricelli during his failed 2002 bid for reelection to the Senate. His Republican challenger, Douglas Forrester, attacked Torricelli during a debate for supporting the group’s removal from the terrorist list, and for taking money from the Mojahedin’s supporters. The embattled incumbent defended himself — justifying his support for “Iranians who oppose the Iranian government” — but

backed down the next day. Torricelli told the New Jersey newspaper, The Star-Ledger that he wouldn't continue to advocate for the group's de-listing. "If the organization is engaging in activities against civilians that are of terrorist nature, the State Department has every right to ban their activities and have no contact with them," he told the paper.

In an interview the following day with The New York Times, Torricelli elaborated. "Sometimes the enemy of my enemy is my friend," he said.

Timmerman responded dryly when asked by The Intercept about Torricelli's change of heart: "I'm not sure how sincere it was."

By 2011, the law firm Mayer Brown retained Torricelli as part of the team working on the Mojahedin's legal challenges to its place on the terrorist list. And Torricelli again took up vocal and active support for the Mojahedin, calling for the group to be de-listed at public forums organized by pro-Mojahedin American groups. "Does it have benefit that we continue to ostracize and label opponents of the regime as terrorists, when the facts say otherwise?" Torricelli said at a 2011 event on U.S. policy toward Iran. "Is it even possible to oppose a terrorist state, and be a terrorist yourself?"

The Intercept made several attempts to contact Torricelli for this article. When reached by phone, Torricelli declined to answer any questions about his relationship with the Mojahedin, and hung up the phone.

Dozens of former American officials, ranging from politicians to bureaucrats, have spoken at events organized by Mojahedin supporters. Some received staggering sums — as much as \$40,000 — to give an address, and many called for the Mojahedin's removal from the terrorism list, praising the organization as a viable democratic government in exile of Iran. According to data collected by the Huffington Post, the pro-Mojahedin roster included former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Bush White House chief of staff Andy Card, former Ver-



mont governor Howard Dean and former Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I., among many others.

By early 2013, after the Mojahedin was wiped from the terrorist list, Torricelli found new employment with the group — as its Washington lobbyist. Rosemont Associates LLC, the ex-Senator's consulting firm, took up a contract with the Mojahedin's Paris-based political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran. According to federal filings, Torricelli's Capitol Hill lobbying for other clients ended between 2012 and 2013; only the Mojahedin were left. Disclosures for foreign lobbies indicate his firm planned to take in \$35,000 per month for its work on behalf of the organization.

Most of Torricelli's interactions with Washington, according to the filings, involved State Department offices that dealt with the Mojahedin or its areas of interest, frequently revolving around the refugees' security in Iraq. But Torricelli also, however, made contact on Capitol Hill on the group's behalf, though he didn't cast a wide net: the lobbying disclosures reveal that as of late 2014, Torricelli had only reached out to a single Congressional office about the Mojahedin: that of former Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Menendez.

"For 20 years," Menendez said at a recent Senate hearing, "I have been working on the issue of Iran, when people were not paying attention." Back in 1998, the two New Jersey politicians appeared at a Mojahedin demonstration at the U.N.'s New York headquarters, a year after the group was designated a terrorist organization. Torricelli was still in the Senate, and Menendez held a seat in the House. "At the rally," the Associated Press reported at the time, Torricelli, Menendez and another lawmaker "supported the group's call for a new democratic regime in Tehran."

Between April 2013 and January 2014, Torricelli reached out to Menendez's then-Chief of Staff Dan O'Brien seven times. Three separate contacts, however, were with Menendez himself: phone calls in April and August of 2013, and an in-per-

son meeting last January — at the same time Menendez was coming under administration pressure to release his hold on the Apache helicopters.

DURING THE SUMMER of 2013, the Iraqi government faced growing sectarian strife. The militant group Islamic State — a Sunni radical outfit formed during the spring, and still going by the moniker Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) — organized camps in Iraqi territory to expand their presence in the country and regroup for the fight in Syria.

The Mojahedin, perhaps chastened by their own labeling as terrorists, rely heavily on the word “extremism” in conjunction with ISIS, warning that the Iranian regime, with its “puppet” government in Iraq, represents the most significant terrorist threat.

Iraq, meanwhile, had been pushing its main military supplier, the United States, for more weapons to combat ISIS, specifically advanced attack helicopters called Apaches. The Obama administration advanced a proposal to supply Iraq with the Apaches — a deal that would eventually involve 24 by a sale and six by a lease that would allow the Iraqis to field the equipment more quickly.

When it comes to foreign military sales, the executive branch gives the Senate Foreign Relations and the House Foreign Affairs committees advance notification, and chairs and ranking members can object. After Obama officials apprised the relevant committees of its proposal, in July, several members blocked the sale over skepticism of then-Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The administration launched a back-room offensive on Capitol Hill to clear the way for the deal. Officials from the Departments of State and Defense “in their briefings before Congress made it very clear that sending these Apaches to the Iraqis was crucial to beating back the threat coming from ISIS to Iraq from Syria,” said another former Hill aide, who attended the briefings. “State was terrified that without these helicopters,”



the Iraqis “didn’t have the capability to kill these guys.”

Most would eventually be convinced to lift their holds, but Menendez held firm, creating palpable tension with the administration. Anonymous sniping between the Senator’s aides and White House officials appeared in the press, with Senate staffers telling Defense News the administration was failing to make Iraq a priority, and an administration official calling the accusation “offensive and incorrect.” Menendez’s public explanation centered around Maliki’s record of attacks against civilians and tacitly allowing Iran’s use of Iraqi airspace to support the Syrian regime; many in Washington at the time were sour on Maliki’s growing authoritarianism, sectarian patronage and failure to professionalize the Iraqi military.

“There are a lot of good reasons they” — Congress — “might have held up a sale,” said Sam Brannen, recently a fellow with the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former Pentagon employee. But Brannen, who said he has no special insight into Menendez’s reasoning, added, “That there might be some more parochial reasons, that aren’t as good, would not surprise me.”

A U.S. official, who also wouldn’t speak to Menendez’s motivations, confirmed Congress’s focus on the Mojahedin. “The MEK issue was clearly a concern for members of Congress,” the official said. “Whether that played a role holding up the arms sales, I don’t know. But it was certainly an issue for Congress.”

Senators “raised lots of issues — among them the MEK — with the Apaches,” Lukman Faily, the Iraqi Ambassador to the U.S., told The Intercept. “The issue of the MEK,” Faily said, “came up in most of my meetings with the House and Senate, especially the Foreign [Relations Committee].”

Six months into the hold on the helicopter sale, in January 2014, ISIS forces swarmed Iraqi cities in the Sunni west, at least briefly holding two major urban areas. It’s doubtful the Apaches could have been in action soon enough to stave off

ISIS's territorial gains. "It would have taken months and months to train the Iraqis to use them," said Brannen, the former CSIS fellow, of the helicopters intended for lease.

Michael Wahid Hanna, an expert at the Century Foundation with extensive experience on Iraq, explained, "I don't know if [the Apaches] would have had a strategic effect, maybe a tactical one. Hitting, basically, IS camps obviously would've helped."

After ISIS's battlefield successes, Menendez consulted with the administration and received a letter from the Iraqi government. "He was looking for an out," recalled the former Hill aide who attended the briefings. Menendez said he got assurances from the Obama administration promising oversight of the Apaches — and lifted his objections on January 25, leaving the Mojahedin in Camp Liberty under the ultimate control of the Iraqi government.

Adam Sharon, a spokesman for Menendez, did not respond to any questions about the senator's relationship with the Mojahedin. "The direct concern with the Apaches was what safeguards were in place to ensure that minorities weren't being attacked," Sharon said.

The Apache deal, however, eventually stalled. The ISIS advances amplified Maliki's largely self-induced political crisis. A State Department official, who asked not to be identified because he was not authorized to speak officially, cited fiscal and capacity issues on Iraq's end, and said the U.S. was working it over with the new Iraqi government. (In August, Maliki's party ousted him as prime minister.) "While we're still supportive of the sale," the State Department official told *The Intercept*, "Iraq hasn't been in a position to accept the sale."

ISIS took over more Iraqi cities starting last June, and the United States began its own air war to beat the group back in August. In October, the U.S. military ended up using its own Apache attack helicopters in raids against ISIS positions.

FOR THE MOJAHEDIN, stalling the Iraq Apache deal was just





a small victory. The real goal has always been regime change in Tehran. Last September, the moderate Iranian president Hassan Rouhani arrived in New York for his second U.N. General Assembly, accompanied by nuclear negotiators to engage in another round of the now-extended talks. Mojahedin supporters organized a protest against Rouhani's appearance. Several hundred braved a sporadic rain in yellow ponchos distributed by organizers, holding aloft yellow umbrellas. (Mojahedin supporters have been known to recruit volunteers on expense-paid trips for such events.) The pro-Mojahedin demonstrators — some of them non-Iranian, with cursory knowledge of the group — listened to a morning of speeches at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza, nestled between demonstrations against the ouster of former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, and by devotees of the persecuted Chinese spiritual movement Falun Gong.

Along the barricades that sectioned off the protesters from the dignitaries on stage — which included former Democratic Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, and former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton, a frequent speaker at Mojahedin events — demonstrators held up a pair of cut-out placards. One, in black, read, "No 2 Rouhani"; the other, naturally in yellow, said, "Yes to Rajavi." Massoud Rajavi still hasn't been seen publicly since 2003.

For his part, Torricelli's advocacy for the Mojahedin has only become more fervent. "My name is Bob Torricelli and I am a soldier in the liberation of Iran," he thundered at a Mojahedin conference in Paris during the summer of 2014, to a huge crowd of yellow-clad supporters who interrupted his speech with applause and chants.

"First we gathered in Frankfurt, in London and Paris and New York by the hundreds. Then we came to Paris by the thousands. Hear me well, Mullahs: soon we will come to the streets of Tehran by the millions, and take back the future of the people of Iran."

“The mullahs may talk to Merkel, or Obama or Hollande,” Torricelli continued, referring to three of the heads of state — Germany’s Angela Merkel, Obama and France’s François Hollande — now in nuclear negotiations with Iran. “They can talk all they want. We as a people of those nations know: There’s nothing left to say. The regime must go.”





Poe's Financial Ties To MEK May Explain Maryam's House Testimony

April 2015

Wednesday's scheduled congressional hearing on "ISIS: Defining the Enemy" is rapidly shrinking in size. Two key witnesses are refusing to attend due to the invitation to testify that Ted Poe (R-TX), the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, extended to Maryam Rajavi, leader of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK).

Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford and former State Department counterterrorism director Daniel Benjamin have both said that they won't appear for the hearing after learning that Rajavi would also be a witness on the same panel. She is scheduled to participate via videoconference from Paris, the headquarters the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a MEK front.

MEK, which the State Department removed from terrorism list in 2012 following a lengthy and expensive lobbying campaign, is believed to have been responsible for the killing of six Americans in Iran between 1973 and 1976.

The group, which went into exile after losing a violent power struggle in the early years of the Islamic Republic, aligned itself with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war and, despite claims to being Iran's viable democratic government in

MEK
Uncovered

730



exile, is widely believed to have little or no grassroots support in Iran. The group has long faced criticism from Iran specialists and rights groups such as Human Rights Watch that it has devolved into a cult based on devotion to Maryam and her long-missing husband, Massoud Rajavi. According to numerous accounts, the group exerts a high degree of control over its followers, going so far as to mandate divorces and celibacy for their soldiers.

But, as Ali Gharib and I documented in February, MEK's influence in Washington, particularly with Iran hawks, has coincided with a flow of money from the group to American politicians, in particular, to embattled Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) who is currently under indictment on unrelated federal corruption charges.

So why did Poe and the Republican majority on the terrorism subcommittee decide to invite Rajavi (a copy of whose testimony was obtained by Ali who previewed it Tuesday on The



Nation's website) Campaign finances may offer at least part of the answer.

Poe received \$17,900 in campaign contributions from supporters of the MEK between 2009 and 2014, according to an analysis I conducted of campaign finance data. Surprisingly, nearly half—or \$8,600—of the total flowed into his campaign while the group was still on the State Department's terrorism list between 2009 and its delisting in 2012.

In 2013 and 2014, the group also paid for \$19,671 in travel expenses (including business-class plane fare) for Poe's travel to MEK events in France.

In contrast, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), returned a \$2,600 campaign contribution from a MEK supporter in Virginia in 2013. "During routine due diligence by campaign staff, it was discovered that a few donors had associations the campaign was uncomfortable with," a spokesman for Graham's campaign told Politico. "In an abundance of caution, the contributions were refunded."

Poe seems less concerned about the association. His insistence on inviting Rajavi adds to the irony of his chairmanship of the terrorism subcommittee (shades of Sen. James Inhofe's chairmanship of the Senate Environment Committee).

With Ford and Benjamin out, Rajavi will be joined on Wednesday by only one other witness: Walid Phares, a pro-Israel Lebanese-American Maronite Christian with a long association with hard-line neo-conservatives and a terrorism "expert" for Fox News. During Lebanon's civil war that raged from 1975 through the 1980's, Phares served as an ideologue for the Lebanese Forces, an umbrella group of various Christian militias. Some of these militias carried out the Sabra and Shatila massacres in September, 1982, in which at many as 3,000 Palestinians—mostly women, children and the elderly—were killed following Israel's conquest of Beirut. Among other positions, he served as co-chairman of the Middle East working group of Mitt Romney's foreign policy advisory team.

Cult Leader Will Tell Congress: Fight ISIS by Regime Change in Iran

April 2015

A controversial exiled Iranian opposition figure's testimony shows how wacky the MEK is—and why Congress loves them so much.

Last week, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade announced that a controversial Iranian exile opposition figure would be testifying via video uplink at a hearing on the Islamic State, known as ISIS. What does the witness, Maryam Rajavi, a co-leader of the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), have to say about the subject at hand? Rajavi's written testimony, a copy of which was obtained by The Nation, focuses on an unexpected way of bringing ISIS to heel: by fostering regime change in Iran. "The ultimate solution to this problem" of Islamic extremism, such as ISIS, Rajavi says in the written statement, "is regime change by the Iranian people and Resistance"—a reference to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the MEK's political wing.

It sounds counter-intuitive—Iran's aid to the Iraqi government and various Iraqi militias, after all, is widely credited with stopping ISIS's advances there—but not when you know about the MEK's tortuous past. Over the years, the MEK has been nothing if not opportunistic; animated by the twisted logic that the enemy of its enemy is its friend, the group seizes whatever

MEK
Uncovered

733



political angle is fashionable at the moment to bring them relevance (Congress is happy to oblige). But more to the point, the MEK has always had only one goal: the overthrow of the Iranian regime. For decades, it has tried to shoehorn regional and geopolitical dynamics into its aim, irrespective of any salient connections.

The plan to bring down ISIS by toppling Iran's government, then, is little more than the latest chapter of group's 50-year history of monomaniacally trying to install itself atop the Iranian government. Indeed, Rajavi is testifying at Congress with the title of "president-elect" of the NCRI, which hopes to run a transitional government immediately upon the fall of the Islamic Republic.

Founded as an Islamo-Marxist revolutionary group in the 1960s, the MEK spent its early years pursuing its quixotic aims by opposing the Shah's government with a vengeance: through student organizing, outright terrorism—including against American targets when the United States was allied with the Shah, helping to earn its 1997 American designation as a terror group—and fighting at the vanguard of the Islamic Revolution. By the 1980s, after the leader of the revolution, Ruhollah Khomeini, kicked the group out of Iran, critics were regularly deriding the MEK as a cult of personality—not least because of its continuing "wacky" behavior, as a former con-

gressional aide put it to me for a feature I wrote this winter with Eli Clifton.

So how do Rajavi and MEK plan to end the threat from ISIS by upending the Iranian regime? That's not so clear. But it definitely involves ignoring, despite the current clashes, the distinction between Sunni and Shia extremism—including, for example, propagandistic exaggerations like saying that "Shiite militias act more viciously than their Sunni equivalents, such as ISIS"—and pointing out several times that Iran went Islamist before anyone else. That's about it.

It's worth noting, however, that the MEK does have some experience in Iraq: after going into exile, its leaders gathered their fighters in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, to take his side in the Iran-Iraq war—earning the enmity of many Iranians. After the war ended, the MEK, led by Maryam Rajavi and her husband Massoud (who hasn't been seen in public for a dozen years), stuck around and enjoyed Hussein's largesse, acting, periodically, as mercenaries to crush incipient uprising against the Iraqi strongman—earning, in turn, the enmity of many Iraqis.

After Hussein's fall in 2003, the American invaders stripped the MEK of its multitude of arms. (Curiously, for a group that claims to have renounced violence in 2001, Rajavi cites in her Congressional testimony the "disarming" of the MEK as a "misguided polic[y]" that helped give rise to Muslim extremism—but not the invasion that toppled their benefactor itself.) The MEK then languished in its camps, coming under periodic attack by a murky combination of the Iraqi army and, reportedly, government-aligned Shia militias. Dozens of MEK adherents were slaughtered.

The period also marked the growth of an ardent pro-MEK lobby in the United States. As Eli Clifton and I detailed in our Intercept piece this winter, a multimillion-dollar campaign kicked into gear to remove the MEK from the US State Department's terrorist list. Once that hurdle was cleared, the MEK—despite its cult-like practices—began to accumulate more mainstream



MEK
Uncovered

735



power in Congress, where super-hawkishness against Iran is guaranteed to attract powerful bedfellows, including large amounts of pro-Israel donor money and more modest cash from MEK supporters themselves.

Meanwhile, the massacres of the MEK's ex-fighters at its Iraqi desert bases fueled the group's hatred of the Iraqi government led by Nouri al-Maliki, which had failed to protect them. Just as the MEK had grown close to Hussein because he was an arch-enemy of the Iranian regime, the group likewise reviled Maliki's government, and vice-versa, for its closeness to the Iranians—the Islamic Republic had hosted and fostered Maliki's movement in exile before the 2003 war, and supported his Shia government after its rise to power in Iraq.

When ISIS began to rip apart what was still then Maliki's Iraq, the MEK's prevailing logic seemed to again fall back on the enemy of its enemy. Perhaps chastened by their own labeling by the US as a terrorist organization, the group seldom uses the word "terrorism" in conjunction with ISIS. Instead, MEK propaganda refers to ISIS as "extremists," in some instances. At other times, the language is more ambiguous: Last June, when ISIS took the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, one MEK website gave a triumphalist account of the conquest, referring to ISIS as "revolutionary forces."

Historical revisionism of the ISIS assault started almost immediately. "These forces have taken over the Badoush prison and they had hundreds of prisoners that had been proclaimed to be terrorists and they freed them," read a Persian-language post on the website Mojahedin.org. HRW, however, collected survivor testimonies from the prison takeover that told a different story: "After seizing Badoush Prison near Mosul, the gunmen from Islamic State, also known as ISIS, separated the Sunni from the Shia inmates," an HRW release said, "then forced the Shia men to kneel along the edge of a nearby ravine and shot them with assault rifles and automatic weapons."

Herein lies the MEK contradiction behind its early positions.

On the one hand, ISIS, like the MEK, is militantly opposed to Iranian influence in the region. But Rajavi needs to gin up support in Washington. So she poses herself in opposition to ISIS, claiming the best strategy for fighting the marauding Sunni terrorists is to... overthrow the first regime in the region to commit blood, money and heavy weaponry to the fight against ISIS.

As ISIS became the world's most famous terrorist group, the MEK eased its whitewash and adopted the stances Rajavi will bring to Congress on Thursday: namely, that ISIS is an extremist group—whose model and inspiration is Iran, however nonsensical that point is. That Congress would invite these ex-terrorists—Rajavi's past prevents her from getting a visa, the reason for her video testimony—speaks ill of their commitment to shaping serious policy on either ISIS or Iran. Rajavi's participation proved such an embarrassment that a distinguished diplomat, Ambassador Robert Ford, and another witness withdrew from the hearing rather than speak alongside her on the dais—just as the top UN official for human rights in Iran withdrew from a program last year in Canadian parliament where Rajavi was set to appear.

The MEK's story is a tragic one of sustained failure, of being massacred and massacring, of being abused and abusing its own people, of terrorizing and being terrorized, and of a constantly morphing politics consistent only in its oddness and toxicity. That story needs to be heard, but as a cautionary tale, not as expert advice. Instead, Congress is asking one of the groups most hated in Iraq and Iran what to do about those countries' woes. What could go wrong?



MEK
Uncovered

737

Why Is Congress Listening to an Ex-Terrorist Iranian Cult Leader?

April 2015

MEK
Uncovered

738

In what one member of Congress called a “historic hearing” yesterday, Maryam Rajavi, leader of the controversial Iranian dissident group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or MEK, testified via satellite before a congressional subcommittee on the threats posed by ISIS and Iran, which she sees as one and the same. The MEK is considered a dangerous cult by many, and until three years ago was labeled a terrorist organization by the U.S. government. But after years of concerted lobbying, it enjoys a surprising amount of support on Capitol Hill. And yesterday the MEK displayed its growing influence in U.S. foreign policy debates.

It’s been a long and winding road for the MEK. Ideologically, the MEK originally sought to fuse revolutionary Marxism with Islam, but it has largely abandoned that rhetoric today for something more palatable to Western supporters. The group was formed in the 1960s by leftist Iranian students opposed to the Shah’s regime. During the 1970s it carried out attacks that killed several Americans working on defense projects in Iraq, and supported the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in 1979. After the Iranian Revolution, the group fell out with the new Islamic state and went underground, carrying out a series of high-pro-

Slatest YOUR NEWS COMPANION APRIL 20 2015 10:31 AM Slate

Why Is Congress Listening to an Ex-Terrorist Iranian Cult Leader?

By Joshua Krating

3.4k 24

An aggressive free press is the only check on the abuse of power. [Support Slate's Journalists.](#)



Maryam Rajavi testifies to Congress via satellite on April 29, 2015.

Screen grab from the feed of House Subcommittee on Terrorism, Hazardous Materials, and Space

In what one member of Congress called a "historic hearing" yesterday, Maryam Rajavi, leader of the controversial Iranian dissident group Mujahedeen-e Khalq, or MEK, testified via satellite before a congressional subcommittee on the



739

file attacks against the Iranian government while its leaders fled to Paris. During the 1980s and 1990s, the MEK fought as a private militia on behalf of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. But things changed after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the MEK renounced violence (after being disarmed by the American military) and cast itself as supporters of the democratic opposition in Iran. Not everyone bought the group's transformation into defenders of liberty, secularism, and women's equality. Critics say the group began to transform into a cult centered around its leaders, the married couple Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, after the Iran-Iraq War, when thousands of its fighters were killed.

In 2003, New York Times reporter Elizabeth Rubin visited the group's Iraqi compound at Camp Ashraf and described it as resembling a "fictional world of female worker bees ... dressed exactly alike, in khaki uniforms and mud-colored head scarves, driving back and forth in white pickup trucks, staring ahead in a daze as if they were working at a factory in Maoist China." Followers at Ashraf were reportedly cut off from the outside

media, required to attend regular self-criticism sessions, and barred from personal friendships and emotional relationships. But the group played its cards well as Western concerns grew over Iran's nuclear program, reportedly passing information from its supporters within the Islamic Republic on nuclear facilities to the U.S. and, according to some reports, cooperating with Mossad to assassinate Iranian scientists. It also began a multiyear, multimillion-dollar lobbying campaign to remove itself from the terrorist list, including paying American figures like Rudy Giuliani and Howard Dean to give speeches on its behalf. It worked, and in 2012, Hillary Clinton took the MEK off the list.



740

Since then, the group's influence has been growing. Its supporters regularly crowd hearings on Capitol Hill dealing with Iran and its increasing influence in Iraq. The Iraqi government has long viewed the MEK with hostility and has carried out several brutal attacks on its compound. U.S. officials also believe Iranian troops participated in a 2013 attack that killed at least 50 MEK members in 2013. One of its staunchest supporters on Capitol Hill, Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey, held up a planned arms sale to former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government in part over concerns about the treatment of the MEK.

Ted Poe, R-Texas, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, which held Wednesday's hearing, is another prominent MEK backer. Shaylyn Hynes, a spokeswoman for Poe, told me by email that Rajavi has a "long history of speaking against what she calls 'Islamic fundamentalism,'" and "can speak to how ISIS' ideology is both similar to and different from the mullahs leading Iran." Asked if there were any concerns given the MEK's history, Hynes replied, "the administration does not consider them a terrorist group and neither do we."

Rajavi was certainly feeling the love from Congress on Wednesday, testifying before an overflow crowd at the hear-

ing, which was titled “ISIS: Defining the Enemy.” Rep. Brad Sherman, D-California, compared her appearance to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s address to Congress that day, noting that Japan had also once been an enemy of the United States. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, is not a member of the subcommittee but dropped in to refer to Rajavi as a “great leader.” Still, not everyone was as welcoming. Former State Department counterterrorism director Daniel Benjamin, who had been scheduled to testify, dropped out of the hearing rather than appear with Rajavi. Another, former ambassador to Syria and prominent administration critic Robert Ford, told Foreign Policy he was “shocked” to learn she was on the panel and demanded that the subcommittee “put me on a panel without the MEK or I wouldn’t appear.” He wound up speaking earlier in the day.

In her appearance, via satellite from Paris, Rajavi made a case familiar to anyone who listened to Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech to Congress in March: that ISIS and Iran are two sides of the same coin, despite the fact that Iranian-backed militias are fighting the group in Iraq. “The Mullahs regime is not part of any solution to the current crisis. Instead, it is the heart of the problem,” she said, referring to the Iranian government as the “Godfather of ISIS.” She referred to the current fight between ISIS and Iran as merely an “internal power struggle” within Islamic fundamentalism and warned that “fundamentalism of the Shiite kind is more dangerous than the Sunni one” because Shiites already have a state, Iran, which is projecting its power in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.

While the support for Rajavi was a bipartisan affair, her message seemed to resonate in particular with critics of the Obama administration’s Iran policy. Hynes denied to me that the timing of the hearing had anything to do with the ongoing debate over nuclear diplomacy and Iran sanctions, saying “There is no relation. Ms. Rajavi is an expert on radical Islamist extremism and is being called to testify in that capacity.” Still, Rep. Lee



Zeldin, R-New York,, who praised Rajavi and the MEK as the legitimate democratic opposition of Iran, said during the hearing that when he listens to the administration’s rhetoric on the Iranian regime, “I honestly do not know if my president is on the same team as I am.”



742



THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Why Congress Is Embracing Former Iranian Terrorists

May 2015

WASHINGTON — As the U.S. continues to grapple with the threat of the Islamic State group, Republicans in Congress have argued that Iran should be a higher priority than the militant organization. Now, lawmakers have embraced an unlikely partner to argue that case: the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or MEK, an exiled Iranian opposition group that was until 2012 considered a foreign terrorist organization by the United States.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee this week became the latest power broker to conflate the U.S.-led fight against the Islamic State, sometimes known as ISIS, with the nuclear diplomacy efforts between the U.S., its international partners and Iran. A counterterrorism subcommittee invited Maryam Rajavi, who leads the MEK with her husband Massoud, to argue via teleconference that the theocratic Iranian government is to blame for the Islamic State's rise.

"If it were not for the Iranian regime's domination of Iraq, the sectarian policies of its puppet Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, and the massacre committed against the Sunni population in Iraq, and if it were not for the slaughter of 250,000 people in Syria by the Assad regime and the Iranian regime's Quds force, ISIS would have never been able to find such a fertile breeding ground for its emergence and expansion," Rajavi said

MEK
Uncovered

743



in her official testimony Wednesday. Rajavi's recommendation for how best to defeat the Islamic State was music to the ears of Iran skeptics: regime change in Tehran. Supporters of the nuclear negotiations with Iran suspect that hawks both in Congress and abroad feel the same way as Rajavi. Comments earlier this year from Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), of the Senate Committees on Intelligence and Armed Services, have reinforced that impression. The House Foreign Affairs Committee's invitation to Rajavi raised eyebrows among Middle East watchers, and even prompted two other expert witnesses invited by the committee to back away from the panel that featured her. "The committee handled this abysmally," said Robert Ford, the U.S. ambassador to Syria until 2014 and a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, in an interview with Al-Monitor this week. "What the fuck do the MEK know about the Islamic State?" Ford ultimately agreed to testify before the committee in a panel separate from Rajavi. "I think this is a discussion that our people in uniform deserve," he told HuffPost after his remarks.

Maryam Rajavi gestures as she arrives to attend the annual meeting of the MEK's political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, near Paris, on June 27, 2014. (Miguel Medina/AFP/Getty Images)

Rajavi's depiction of how Shiite-led Iran bolstered Sunni extremism by backing sectarian Shiite allies in Iraq and Syria matches some of the conventional wisdom around the Islamic State. Yet skeptics argue that it doesn't quite make sense for the House committee to have invited Rajavi to testify, given that her focus is on Iran and that the MEK has had little direct experience with the Islamic State's onslaught. To these skeptics, the move seems politically calculated.

Thousands of people in Iraq and Syria have actually experienced the group's brutality firsthand, critics of Rajavi's appearance note, and those victims have not been invited to testify. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights announced on Tuesday that the Islamic State has killed more than 2,000 Syrians off the battlefield since it declared its caliphate last June, using methods like beheading and stoning. The group has been especially fierce in targeting dissenters among its main constituencies, foreign fighters and Sunni Arabs unhappy with the Iraqi and Syrian governments.

A spokeswoman for subcommittee chairman Rep. Ted Poe (R-Texas) told Foreign Policy this week that Rajavi is qualified to comment on the Islamic State because she is a Muslim woman who knows the "prejudices inherent in radical Islamist ideology," and because of her group's association with Iraq, where it was sheltered by then-President Saddam Hussein after being expelled from Iran in the 1970s.

The Obama administration, which revoked the MEK's terrorist designation in 2012 after the group renounced violence and cooperated with the United States' plans for its members in Iraq, did not publicly condemn the invitation to Rajavi. But a State Department official speaking on background echoed the question of whether the House Foreign Affairs Committee truly





wanted to hear about the Islamic State, or whether the committee members were simply looking to promote an anti-Iran voice.

“We believe that there are other relevant witnesses who could speak more credibly to the threat posed by ISIL,” the official said, using the administration’s preferred acronym for the Islamic State group.

Iran is itself fighting the Islamic State, which believes that Shiites, including the ayatollahs who rule in Tehran, are infidels. The U.S. is tacitly cooperating with Iran and its controversial proxies to combat the Islamic State in Shiite-run Iraq.

In her remarks Wednesday, Rajavi urged lawmakers to reject what she called an “artificial dichotomy” between Iran’s government and the Islamic State. According to the MEK leader, Iran’s support of Iraqi Shiite militias and its tolerance of Islamic State beheadings show that both Iran and the militants seek to spread Islamic extremism.

Members of the Iraqi paramilitary Popular Mobilization units, which are dominated by Iran-backed Shiite militias, celebrate after regaining control of the village of Albu Ajil from the Islamic State group on March 9, 2015. (Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP/Getty Images)

Lawmakers defended the decision to invite Rajavi despite the controversy, and even the irony, of a counterterrorism panel hosting a woman recognized by the U.S. as a former terrorist. “Whatever the MEK did or is accused of, it was against a terrorist regime,” said Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.), referring to the Iranian government. “Trying to defeat the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be branded as terrorism under some circumstances, but most of the time it’s thought of as policy.”

Sherman pointed to what MEK advocates consider the group’s greatest triumph: its revelation to Congress in 2002 that Iran was running an undeclared uranium enrichment facility in the city of Natanz.

“The MEK has actually been a useful source of information to Congress, unlike an awful lot of the witnesses we have,” Sherman told HuffPost.

That moment has since been eclipsed, however, by revelations that the U.S. intelligence community and the International Atomic Energy were privy to the site before the MEK’s public disclosure, and by a series of other MEK claims that ultimately did not hold up to scrutiny. The most recent MEK allegation, presented in Washington by the group’s political arm in early March before a deadline for the nuclear diplomacy with Iran, was debunked once Foreign Policy revealed that the site the MEK identified as a secret Iranian nuclear facility was in fact a production center for identification cards.

Though now welcome guests in the U.S. Capitol, the MEK once led chants of “death to America” and celebrated the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979. Maryam Rajavi’s husband, Massoud, was then the head of the organization and an ardent critic of Iran’s U.S.-backed king, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Rajavi viewed himself as the rightful leader of Iran, and throughout the 1970s, the MEK effected a bombing campaign against the shah’s government, assassinating at least six Americans in the process.

When the shah fell, it was the Islamist Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, not Rajavi, who assumed power. Khomeini’s government cracked down on its potential rival, conducting mass executions of MEK members. Rajavi’s group responded with a steady stream of terror attacks against the nascent government, ultimately killing dozens of Iranian parliamentarians as well as the country’s president and prime minister.

The MEK eventually moved to a compound in Iraq called Camp Ashraf, seeing Hussein as a friend because he, like the MEK, opposed the ayatollahs. The MEK’s legacy in Iraq is a key reason why the U.S. is careful about directly condemning the group today. The U.S. has treated MEK members in Iraq as “non-combatants” and “protected persons,” out of concern



that Shiite Iran-influenced fighters might target them. In 2012, the Obama administration, alongside the United Nations, the European Union and the Iraqi government, agreed to resettle a number of MEK members at a former U.S. base called Camp Liberty. And since September 2013, senior State Department adviser Jonathan Winer has been responsible for a humanitarian effort to resettle “Iranian persons found to be in need of international protection out of Iraq.”

With Iranian influence in Iraq now at new heights, though, the MEK is at greater risk than ever before — and the need for members to travel outside Iraq for their own safety is especially real, which makes it difficult for the U.S. to continue to speak of them as terrorists or liars.

The risks faced by MEK members based in Iraq have formed the core of the group’s powerful, yearslong lobbying campaign on Capitol Hill, according to investigations by The Huffington Post and The Intercept. The campaign has won the dissidents access to lawmakers from around the country, and is thought to have played a key role in the MEK’s removal from the terror list. Poe, the chair of the panel that heard Rajavi speak on Wednesday, has received more than \$17,000 from MEK supporters since 2009, according to an analysis by LobeLog’s Eli Clifton. From left to right: Former Rep. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), Callista Gingrich, former Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani (R) attend the annual meeting of the MEK’s political wing in Villepinte, France, on June 22, 2013. (Jacques Demarthon/AFP/Getty Images

Asked Wednesday if he was concerned about Rajavi’s extreme views — specifically, her overt desire for regime change in Iran — Sherman responded: “OK, let’s establish a policy in Congress that we don’t have any witnesses with axes to grind and point of view or political agendas. If we establish that policy, I get to sleep till noon every morning. Because there are no witnesses at any hearing that aren’t trying to influence public policy for their own purposes.”





MEK in the European Parliament: The Well-Funded Exile Group's Desperate Attempts to Sabotage Diplomacy on Iran

May 2015

A month ago, intense negotiations in Lausanne, Switzerland, resulted in a framework for a final nuclear deal between six world powers and Iran. As negotiators from Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United States and United Kingdom, plus Germany) continue nuclear talks to reach a comprehensive deal before the end of June, opponents of diplomacy and potential détente have intensified their efforts to derail any accord.

Prominent in this effort is exiled Iranian dissident organization, the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK or MKO, also known as the People's Mujahedin of Iran, or PMOI) which was classified as a terrorist organization by the EU until 2009 and by the United States until 2012. MEK is bitterly opposed to the current Iranian government and seeks its overthrow.

The cult-like organization has spent vast sums of money to lobby political elites on both sides of the Atlantic for recognition as an alternative to the current Iranian government. Since

MEK
Uncovered

749



a negotiated, multilateral deal with Iran would effectively bury prospects of Western-led regime change in Iran, the MEK is attempting to leverage its extraordinary influence to sink talks. Regime change in Iran, by any means, is the only item on the MEK agenda. Like experienced salesmen, its members employ different tactics to “sell” this approach to various audiences.

In testimony before the House Subcommittee on Terrorism, Non-proliferation and Trade last month (delivered via video-conference from Paris), Maryam Rajavi, the self-proclaimed “president-elect” of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), which serves as the MEK’s front office, suggested the best way for Western nations to combat the threat posed by ISIS is to oust the regime in Iran. Of course, no reference was made of the fact that Iran was one of the first countries to commit blood and treasure to the fight against ISIS. Nor did Rajavi mention that, when ISIS first overtook Mosul in the summer of 2014, the MEK hailed the militant group and its supporters as “part of a popular revolution against the Maliki regime” in Iraq, which the MEK views as an Iranian pawn. Once the U.S.

military joined the fight against ISIS, however, it became politically untenable to defend or minimize its crimes. So, the MEK quickly changed its tune, suddenly portraying ISIS as Iran's creation.

Exploiting local political sensitivities in Europe, the MEK has chosen a different tactic to advocate for government overthrow. To European audiences, the MEK has emphasized Iran's human rights issues, such as the high number of executions in the country, as well as issues to do with women rights and infringements on religious liberty. In mid-April, MEK operative Firouz Mahvi, a member of NCRI's so-called "Foreign Affairs Committee" and a fixture at the Brussels-based European Parliament (EP), sent an e-mail to parliamentarians (MEPs) calling on them to adopt an urgent resolution on capital punishment in Iran. The proposed resolution would have almost certainly led to the cancellation of a scheduled visit by members of the Majles, the Iranian parliament, to Brussels. In fact, this very thing happened last year: following the adoption of a different resolution on Iran critical of its human rights record, the Majles delegation cancelled a planned trip in protest.

Inter-parliamentary dialogue is one of the only institutionalized platforms for interaction between officials from the EU and Iran. For progress in EU-Iranian relations to occur, whether on the nuclear issue or otherwise, it is essential to keep Iranian conservatives at the table.

Realizing the issues at stake and familiar with the MEK's modus operandi, the parliamentary majority read the situation correctly: The MEK's push for a resolution on capital punishment had little to do with genuine concern for the human rights of Iranians, and everything to do with ongoing attempts to sabotage the nascent EU-Iran dialogue.

When their plan failed, MEK associates, this time under the guise of the dubious "Iranian Refugee Association in Belgium" (it has neither an e-mail address nor a website) launched a call for MEPs to boycott the May visit from the Iranian delegation.





While the call was not heeded by Polish conservative Janusz Lewandowski, chair of the EP delegation for relations with Iran, other MEPs fell into the MEK's trap. For example, Beatriz Becerra, a Spanish MEP from the centrist Alliance of Liberals and Democrats of Europe (ALDE) challenged her colleagues to raise new legislation in the Iranian parliament, which is said to limit the sexual and reproductive health rights of Iranian women, with delegation members. She also tabled a written question on the issue to the Council of the EU and the European Commission. Becerra may be a well-intentioned defender of women rights, but her aggressive advocacy on behalf of the MEK and Maryam Rajavi certainly does more harm than good. Another common MEK strategy is to hold public hearings in the EP, like the one organized last month on religious freedom in Iran by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group. ECR is a strange mix of seemingly respectable mainstream parties such as British Conservatives and fringe right-wing outfits, such as the Dutch Calvinist party (which until recently forbade women from becoming members) and the Islamophobic, anti-immigrant Danish People's Party. When it comes to foreign policy, what binds these disparate forces together is their fervent support for Israel, extreme hostility to Palestinians and hardline hawkishness on Iran. In the recent past, even after the election of Iranian president Hassan Rouhani, the ECR tried to block the first official visit of European parliamentarians to Tehran. The bid failed and the delegation visited Iran in mid-December 2013.

In light of this, it is unsurprising the ECR yielded the floor to Sanabargh Zahedi, chair of NCRI's so-called "Judicial Committee." Presenting himself as an "Islamic scholar," even though there was no evidence of his scholarship on Islam or any other field for that matter, Zahedi asserted that, "unless all countries put improvement of human rights as a pre-condition to doing business and trade with this regime, we will not see any real progress in any area, including the nuclear issue."

None of this is to say that human rights in Iran should not be a matter of grave concern. The UN Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of Ahmed Shaheed, special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, who has been denied entrance to the country for four years. In his latest report, Shaheed noted that the number of executions in Iran in 2014 had reached its highest level in twelve years, and cited other problems like the deterioration in women's rights and online freedoms, and the ongoing imprisonment of prisoners of conscience.

Still, there are more effective ways to address these crucial issues than calling for regime change, undermining nuclear negotiations, or following the agendas of those with obvious ulterior motives. Ultimately, the nuclear deal and the possibility of engagement with Iran hold a better promise for achieving real progress in the human rights sphere than any delusions about "regime change." This is certainly how respectable human rights organizations and activists see it.

Hadi Ghaemi, director of the New York-based International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran welcomed last month's Lausanne agreement as an important step toward creating better conditions for discussing human rights with Iran. Those in the West who genuinely care about the human rights of Iranians would do well to listen to these voices rather than let themselves become puppets in the MEK's destructive schemes.





The MEK Is a Cult, Not a Viable Iranian Opposition Group

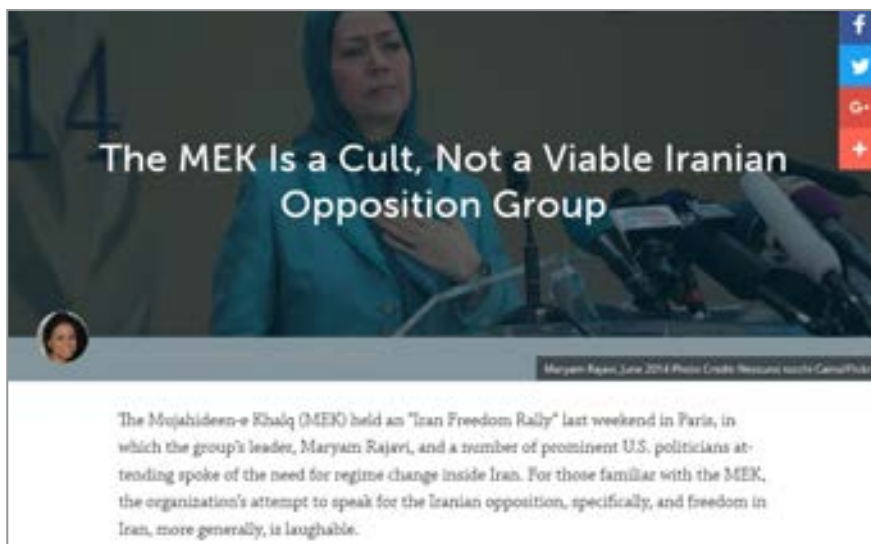
MEK
Uncovered

754

The Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) held an “Iran Freedom Rally” last weekend in Paris, in which the group’s leader, Maryam Rajavi, and a number of prominent U.S. politicians attending spoke of the need for regime change inside Iran. For those familiar with the MEK, the organization’s attempt to speak for the Iranian opposition, specifically, and freedom in Iran, more generally, is laughable.

Originally founded in 1965 by leftist Iranian students opposed to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his Western supporters, the MEK has since become a cult-like organization, despised by a majority of the Iranian population and diaspora. Following the Iranian revolution, the MEK relocated to Iraq in the 1980s, where it reportedly helped quash Kurdish uprisings in the north as well as Shiite unrest in the south. Former MEK members recall Maryam Rajavi’s infamous command at the time: “Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.”

Doing even more damage to its reputation, the group sided with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War. Near the end of the conflict, Saddam armed the MEK “with heavy military equipment and deployed thousands of MEK fighters in suicidal, mass wave attacks against Iranian forces.” Needless to say, since then, Iranians have not looked fondly upon the organi-



zation.

Human Rights Watch has been clear on the MEK's abuses, which range "from detention and persecution of ordinary members wishing to leave the organization, to lengthy solitary confinements, severe beatings, and torture of dissident members." Masoud Banisadr, the group's former head of PR, recently spoke about the MEK's troubling practices against its own members and general cult-like nature with VICE News. "There was a charismatic leader, [Massoud] Rajavi," explained Banisadr. Massoud Rajavi was the original leader of the MEK, before marrying Maryam Rajavi and assuming dual leadership of the organization with his wife. "There was a black-and-white world view imposed; followers cutting themselves off from family; followers losing their personality. There was mind manipulation. At Camp Ashraf in Iraq [the MEK's military headquarters] there were talks lasting for days on end. I remember one task where we had to write down our old personality in one column on a board, and the new personality in a different column," Banisadr said.

Banisadr also told VICE News that the group's members were forced to divorce their spouses, abstain from any sexual thoughts, refrain from interacting with members of the op-

MEK
Uncovered

755

posite sex, and treat suicide bombings and killings in Iran as “revolutionary acts.” Having grown disillusioned with the group, Banisadr eventually escaped in 1996 and went into hiding, until the MEK stopped searching for him.

The MEK’s cult-like behavior was also documented in The New York Times by Elizabeth Rubin, who visited Camp Ashraf, which is located near the Iraq-Iraq border, in 2003. She noted the brainwashing of kids as young as one or two years old, mandatory public confessions of sexual fantasies, and prohibitions on developing friendships.

Vocal proponents of the MEK (however few in number) are willing to put aside these human rights violations, in the belief that the group has support among Iranians. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth. A 2013 survey of Iranian-Americans found that seventy-nine percent of respondents did not support any Iranian “opposition groups or figures.” Of the fifteen percent that did, only five percent supported the MEK. That means the MEK’s claim to being the “largest opposition group” is based on less than one percent support from among Iranian-Americans. There is little indication support for the MEK is any greater among other Iranian diaspora communities, or in Iran itself.

The MEK may be good at PR in the West. But to Iranians around the world, it is nothing but a sham.



The MEK and the Deal with Iran

August 2015

AIPAC has been lobbying against the nuclear deal as one would expect, and this week they are touting the opposition of a handful of former military officers to the agreement. The first one that they cite is Hugh Shelton, who recently penned an op-ed objecting to the deal while praising the virtues of the “former” terrorist group Mujahideen-e Khalq’s political umbrella organization, the so-called National Council of Resistance of Iran. It is telling that they edited the quote to leave out his reference to the latter, since they probably know it would discredit what Shelton says.

Shelton is a longtime MEK booster, and was cheering them on even before they were removed from the official list of foreign terrorist organizations. The MEK seeks to overthrow the Iranian government, as do the cult’s many American fans, so they are predictably opposed to any agreement with Tehran. Anyone that sides with this group is pushing a regime change agenda that is extremely unpopular among Iranians, and so shouldn’t be taken seriously on anything related to Iran.

As he has done before, Shelton presents the cult and its allies as Iran’s “main opposition,” but this is plainly false. The group is widely hated inside Iran and has almost no support in the Iranian diaspora. It is wildly unrepresentative of what most Iranians in Iran and elsewhere want for their country, and it is also at odds with what most Iranians think about the nuclear deal.



757

The screenshot shows a Facebook post from Daniel Larison. At the top, there are navigation icons for 'The Left's Make a Right', 'The Immature Generation', 'Cities Without Children', and 'The Fed's Can't Keep Track of Reinforcing'. The post title is 'The MEK and the Deal with Iran' by Daniel Larison, dated August 13, 2015, 3:48 PM. Below the title is a photo of a large assembly hall with many people seated at desks, facing a stage with a map of Iran. To the right of the post are two promotional banners: one for 'DEMAND JUSTICE ON AMERICAN CORRUPTION' with a 'SIGN THE PETITION NOW' button, and another for 'Get updates from The American Conservative' with a 'Sign Up' button.

Most Iranians support the deal, as do most dissidents inside Iran, so it is dishonest in the extreme to assert that the MEK's rejection of the deal represents the wishes of "the Iranian people." Shelton is recycling the propaganda of a fanatical exile group and trying to pass it off as something radically different in order to influence a major policy debate here in the U.S.

Congressional invite to MEK sparks furious backlash

April 2015

A House panel's invitation to the leader of an Iranian dissident group has caused a furious backlash from former State Department officials who refuse to testify along with her.

Former ambassador to Syria Robert Ford and ex-counterterrorism coordinator Daniel Benjamin told Al-Monitor that they did not want to give a platform to the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK), a group that the United States considered a terrorist organization until three years ago. Ford said he would not testify at the same time as Maryam Rajavi, while Benjamin has pulled out altogether from Wednesday's terrorism subcommittee hearing on the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS).

"The committee handled this abysmally," Ford told Al-Monitor in a phone call late Monday. "What the fuck do the MEK know about the Islamic State?"

Ford said he got the committee to agree to host Rajavi on a second panel after other witnesses testify as a condition for his participation. She is set to appear via teleconference from Paris, where the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella group of Iranian opposition groups that includes the MEK, has its headquarters in exile.

Benjamin, who helped delist the MEK while serving as coordinator for counterterrorism in 2009-12 under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, called the invitation from panel chairman Ted Poe, R-Texas, "disgraceful." The MEK is widely believed to have been added to the terrorism list under President Bill Clinton as a goodwill gesture to reinforce the relatively moderate presidency of Mohammad Khatami, and the NCRI has since spent millions of dollars lobbying to get it delisted and boost its

MEK
Uncovered

759



standing on Capitol Hill.

Benjamin told committee staff that he “did not believe the MEK had anything to contribute to a discussion of [IS], and that this would be a distraction from an important issue,” he told AI-Monitor. “I said the story of the day would be the rehabilitation of the MEK, and I did not want to be associated with that in any way.”

Poe has defended his invitation to Rajavi, which AI-Monitor first reported last week, saying hundreds of MEK members who remain at Camp Liberty in Baghdad could be at risk of being massacred by IS militants. Proponents of regime change in Iran have applauded the invitation, calling Rajavi and the NCRI a viable, democratic alternative to both Sunni and Shiite Islamists.

“Is Maryam Rajavi the right person to testify?” asked Raymond Tanter, who served on the National Security Council under President Ronald Reagan, at the conservative website Townhall.com. “She is the right person: As a pro-democracy woman

with a moderate view of Islam, Rajavi represents the opposite of the misogynous Iranian regime's rulers; they are authoritarian, suppress women and hold an extreme view of Islam."

The MEK did not respond to a request for comment.

Its defenders say the decades-old allegations against the group are misinformed and rely excessively on propaganda from Tehran.

"Now freed from the restrictions and stigma of [the terrorist] designation, the MEK's members and supporters will have the opportunity to contest not only the factual record but assessments dismissive of the group's political potential," Lincoln Bloomfield, a former State and Defense Department official, wrote in a 2013 book about the MEK. "Their first and obvious point will be that no one knows how Iranians would vote in a free and open election."

Bloomfield and other MEK defenders argue that MEK attacks against Iranian targets were a form of legitimate armed resistance against a religious dictatorship, and that the killings of a half-dozen American citizens inside Iran in the 1970s were carried out by factions with no connection to the current leadership. They point out that support for the MEK within Iran is impossible to gauge since advocating on its behalf is punishable by death.

The group's detractors, of which there are many among current and former State Department officials, think banking on the MEK is delusional. They say the MEK is little more than a Rajavi cult and that supporting it publicly undermines pro-democracy activists within Iran.

"Although I participated in and supported the decision to delist the MEK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization — in part because of real humanitarian concerns about the plight of its members in Iraq — I continue to have serious concerns about the group," Benjamin told Al-Monitor in an email. "No one can seriously dispute that the MEK has plenty of American blood

MEK
Uncovered

761

on its hands. In addition to killing US civilians and military personnel, participating in the 1979 takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran and serving as a strike force for Saddam Hussein, the group treats its own member abysmally and coercively.”



762

Brace Yourself, New York! The Annual Anti-Iran Terrorist Freak Show Is Back in Town!

September 2015

You would think that individuals claiming to be “Islamic Marxists” -- former members of an illegal Zionist terrorist organization -- and Republican elected officials would generally not associate with each other. However, once a year for the last decade or so, they all gather together in front of the United Nations during its General Assembly to display their insanity to the world by calling for greater hostility between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Already on September 21, some of the early arrivals were out in front of the United Nations. With sandwich boards and like carnival barkers, a few blocks down from where the Lyndon LaRouche movement was set up, a group of elderly, agitated Persians tried to pass themselves off as “Human Rights Activists.”

All it takes is a little bit of research to discover that the psychologically disturbed protesters in bright yellow shirts with “No to Rouhani” on them are members of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (People’s Holy Warriors). This is a violent cult whose members claim to be “Islamic Marxists” while they openly collaborate with Israel’s Mossad and the US Central Intelligence Agency.

MEK
Uncovered

763



(<http://www.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/09/12/abdi.dont.delist.MEK/>)

Mass Murderers as “Human Rights Activists”

Led by Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, this group of fanatics has killed at least tens of thousands of innocent people since the Iranian revolution of 1979. When the group discovered that it would not win out in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, it went on a killing spree, bombing meetings of the Iranian parliament and assassinating elected officials throughout the country.

During the Iraq-Iran, war the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) befriended Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Hussein’s forces air-dropped bands of MEK fighters into Iran where, as the self-named “Iranian National Liberation Army,” they slaughtered entire villages. After the Iraq-Iran war, the MEK set up shop in Iraq where Saddam Hussein utilized them as his personal goon squad, sending them out to slaughter Kurdish villages. In the 1990s the group officially ordered all of its members to divorce their spouses, as marriage was considered to be a distraction from the goal of overthrowing the Iranian government. The group has long departed from the foundations of the Islamic faith. MEK cadre now consider its founder Massoud

Rajavi to be a prophet -- at once existing on the same spiritual level as Mohammed and Christ while offering more revolutionary brilliance than Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin. (US extremist Reverend Jim Jones of the People's Temple, whose followers committed mass suicide in Guyana, had a similar claim, describing himself as the combined reincarnation of Jesus and Lenin.)

Masoud Rajavi hasn't been heard from since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, but his spouse, Maryam Rajavi, is now the public face of the organization. From exile in France, Rajavi declares herself the president of Iran, even though virtually everyone in Iran considers her a traitor and mass murderer for her atrocities during the Iraq-Iran war.

Though it doesn't make any real political sense, the Rajavi cult has fallen into favor among the Likud Party of Netanyahu and the Republican Party of Jeb Bush. MEK and the Mossad carried out joint operations assassinating nuclear scientists in Iran. As Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton officially legalized the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq in 2013, despite its record of killing Americans and routinely torturing and arbitrarily executing people inside its camps. (<http://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/iran0505/>)

The group now openly operates in the United States, paying figures like former New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani and former Governor of Pennsylvania Tom Ridge tens of thousands of dollars to act as their paid representatives.

Racist Street Thugs Who Support Israel

Another regular of the annual anti-Iran song-and-dance extravaganza outside the United Nations is New York State Assembly member Dov Hikind. Hikind openly brags that he was once a member of the Jewish Defense League. (<http://www.thenation.com/article/former-terror-suspect-leading-attack-brooklyn-college-bds-panel/>)

The Jewish Defense League originated as a group of anti-Black





racists who wanted to prevent African-Americans from moving into heavily Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens. When there was widespread criticism of Israel during the 1967 war, the group suddenly developed an interest in international politics and began attacking Israel's opponents. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, the JDL carried out a string of bombings and assassinations. The Black Panther Party, Jews who criticized Israel and the organized political left were among its primary targets.

Though the JDL frequently invoked the holocaust to justify its terrorism, in the 1980s the group decided to focus its attacks on the country which defeated Nazi Germany and liberated most of the concentration camps. When the Soviet orchestra performed in New York City, JDL bombed the theaters. Soviet diplomats at the United Nations frequently found themselves dodging JDL attacks as they tried to negotiate and prevent nuclear war.

Dov Hikind, now a kingmaker among Orthodox Jews in the Democratic Party, admits he was one of the rank-and-file who bowed at the feet of Rabbi Meir Kahane and carried out his orders as a member of what is widely recognized to have been a terrorist organization.

In more recent times, Hikind has focused more on trying to ban books from Brooklyn's public libraries (<http://brooklyn.news12.com/news/eyebrows-raised-over-access-to-erotic-books-at-brooklyn-public-library-1.5662870>) and dressing in racist blackface costumes for Purim celebrations (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/nyregion/hikind-defends-wearing-blackface-to-purim-party.html?_r=0) than on bombing or shooting people with whom he politically disagrees. He still proclaims he has "no regrets" about joining a violent organization that even the Israeli government has outlawed.

Hikind recently got intentionally arrested outside the office of Chuck Schumer in a demonstration against the P5+1 Nuclear conclusion. The video shows Hikind, clearly inexperienced

when it comes to street protests that don't involve lead pipes or Molotov cocktails, trying to get a reluctant group of supporters to chant "Chuck, Chuck the Deal" as he positions himself for a planned symbolic arrest. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dL0ODfbr4nY>)

Desperate Rage Against Prospects for Peace

The admitted terrorists Dov Hikind and the Mujahideen-E Khalq will only be sideshows at the upcoming display of insanity outside the UN headquarters. The mainstream of the crowd will be rank-and-file New York Republicans, Donald Trump supporters, and members of the World Zionist Organization. These forces have already made a point of countering the peaceful rallies supporting the nuclear deal at congressional offices in New York.

While having less of a violent history, the small crowds of elderly right-wing New Yorkers protesting the nuclear deal are equally delusional. In response to moveon.org protesters supporting the deal on the Upper East side of Manhattan, elderly Republicans shouted bizarre statements like "Iran is responsible for 9/11," "Iran is part of ISIS," and "Osama Bin Laden was an Iranian."

The knowledge of global politics, history, or even basic geography among this angry, hateful crowd is extremely limited. Their analysis of the Middle East consists of "The Arabs are bad, and they are all in it together, so let's kill them all." Many of them do not even realize that Iranians are Persians, not Arabs. Though their lack of knowledge of anything to do with Islam is very apparent, these FOX news junkies strut around pretending to be experts, beginning each and every hate-filled rant with "I've read the Koran." Almost every New York City workplace has one of these socially awkward, hate-filled Islamophobes. Office managers across the city love the token office Republican; he keeps people hard at work in their cubicles, because when he gets up for a drink no one wants to be anywhere near the watercooler.

George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2004 depended on such ignorance. Educated people throughout the world would never be convinced that the Iraqi Baath Arab Socialist Party and Al-Qaeda had tag-teamed to bring down the World Trade Center, but the racism and ignorance of certain sectors of the US public can never be underestimated.

The tragic part of this annual hatefest against the Islamic Republic is the double standard. As the UN General Assembly rolls around once again, we can expect the mainstream US press to treat the anti-Iran, pro-war hate circus as a gathering of "responsible Americans" who are "deeply concerned about terrorism." One or more of the Republican presidential candidates is expected to attend to join the extremist mob outside the United Nations. The double standard is rather blatant. One can only imagine what would be said if President Obama or Bernie Sanders were to address a crowd of unapologetic terrorists and individuals who claim to be "Islamic Marxists."

As Rouhani continues his call for a "World Against Violence and Extremism" from inside the UN General Assembly hall, the group of violent extremists will be outside screaming louder than ever. However, US public opinion and the sentiments of people all over the world are against them. The tone of this year's rally is likely to be far more desperate.

Global Research

Center for Research on Globalization
globalresearch.ca / globalresearch.org

The Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK): The US Prepares to Back a New Terrorist Army in Iran, Prelude to a Wider War?

October 2015

As US attempts to extort a settlement in Syria built on regime-change, US senators and generals conspire to arm and back a new terrorist army aimed at Iran.

An October 7, 2015 hearing before the US Senate Committee on Armed Forces (SASC) titled, "Iranian Influence in Iraq and the Case of Camp Liberty," served as a reaffirmation of America's commitment to back the terrorist organization Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK) and specifically 2,400 members of the organization being harbored on a former US military base in Iraq.

Providing testimony was former US Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, former US Marine Corps Commandant and former Supreme Allied Commander Europe General James Jones, USMC (Ret.), and Colonel Wesley Martin, US Army (Ret.).

All three witnesses made passionate pleas before a room full of nodding senators for America to continue backing not only MEK terrorists currently harbored on a former US military base in Iraq, but to back groups like MEK inside of Iran itself to

MEK
Uncovered

769



MEK
Uncovered

770

threaten the very survival of the government in Tehran.

In the opening remarks by Lieberman, he stated:

It was not only right and just that we took them off the foreign terrorist organization list, but the truth is now that we ought to be supportive of them and others in opposition to the government in Iran more than we have been.

Lieberman would also state (emphasis added):

Here's my point Mr. Chairman, we ought to compartmentalize that agreement also, that nuclear agreement. We ought to put it over there, and not let it stop us from confronting what they're doing in Syria. Continuing the sanctions for human rights violations in Iran in support of terrorism. And here's the point I want to make about the National Council of Resistance of Iran and other democratic opposition groups that are Iranian - we ought to be supporting them.

This regime in Tehran is hopeless. It's not going to change. There's no evidence ... every piece of evidence says the contrary. So I hope we can find a way, we used to do this not so long ago, supporting opposition groups in Iran. They deserve our support, and actually they would constitute a form of pressure on the government in Tehran that would unsettle them as much as anything else we could do because it would threaten

the survival of the regime which from every objective indicator I can see is a very unpopular regime in Iran.

The United States, unrepentant regarding the arc of chaos, mass murder, terrorism, civilizational destruction it has created stretching from Libya to Syria, now seeks openly to extend it further into Iran using precisely the same tactics - the use of terrorist proxies - to dismantle and destroy Iranian society.

While Lieberman, General Jones, and Colonel Martin all failed categorically to accurately describe the true nature of the MEK terrorists they seek to support in a proxy war with Iran, the US policy papers these three lobbyists are reading from have done so and in great detail.

MEK is a Listed Terror Organization for a Reason

MEK has carried out decades of brutal terrorist attacks, assassinations, and espionage against the Iranian government and its people, as well as targeting Americans including the attempted kidnapping of US Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II, the attempted assassination of USAF Brigadier General Harold Price, the successful assassination of Lieutenant Colonel Louis Lee Hawkins, the double assassinations of Colonel Paul Shaffer and Lieutenant Colonel Jack Turner, and the successful ambush and killing of American Rockwell International employees William Cottrell, Donald Smith, and Robert Krongard. Image: MEK terrorists in Iraq, 1997. Saddam Hussein used MEK terrorists to wage proxy war on Iran. Ironically despite accusing Hussein of state-sponsored terrorism for just such a policy, the US eagerly inherited the terrorist organization and has since then aspired to use MEK in a similar fashion.

Admissions to the deaths of the Rockwell International employees can be found within a report written by former US State Department and Department of Defense official Lincoln Bloomfield Jr. on behalf of the lobbying firm Akin Gump in an attempt to dismiss concerns over MEK's violent past and how it connects to its current campaign of armed terror - a testament to the depths of depravity from which Washington and



London lobbyists operate.

To this day MEK terrorists have been carrying out attacks inside of Iran killing political opponents, attacking civilian targets, as well as carrying out the US-Israeli program of targeting and assassinating Iranian scientists. MEK terrorists are also suspected of handling patsies in recent false flag operations carried out in India, Georgia, and Thailand, which have been ham-handedly blamed on the Iranian government.

MEK is described by Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow Ray Takeyh as a “cult-like organization” with “totalitarian tendencies.” While Takeyh fails to expand on what he meant by “cult-like” and “totalitarian,” an interview with US State Department-run Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty reported that a MEK Camp Ashraf escapee claimed the terrorist organization bans marriage, using radios, the Internet, and holds many members against their will with the threat of death if ever they are caught attempting to escape.

Not once is any of this backstory mentioned in the testimony of any of the witnesses before the senate hearing, defiling the memories of those who have been murdered and otherwise victimized by this terrorist organization. The de-listing of MEK in 2012 as a foreign terrorist organization by the US State Department is another indictment of the utter lack of principles the US clearly hides behind rather than in any way upholds as a matter of executing foreign policy.

American Support of Anti-Iranian Mercenaries a Prelude to Wider War

MEK has already afforded the US the ability to wage a low-intensity conflict with Iran. MEK’s role in doing so was eagerly discussed in 2009, several years before it was even de-listed as a terrorist organization by the US State Department in the Brookings Institution’s policy paper “Which Path to Persia? Options for a New American Strategy Toward Iran” (PDF).

The report stated (emphasis added):

Perhaps the most prominent (and certainly the most contro-

MEK
Uncovered

772

versial) opposition group that has attracted attention as a potential U.S. proxy is the NCRI (National Council of Resistance of Iran), the political movement established by the MEK (Mujahedin-e Khalq). Critics believe the group to be undemocratic and unpopular, and indeed anti-American.

In contrast, the group's champions contend that the movement's long-standing opposition to the Iranian regime and record of successful attacks on and intelligence-gathering operations against the regime make it worthy of U.S. support. They also argue that the group is no longer anti-American and question the merit of earlier accusations. Raymond Tanter, one of the group's supporters in the United States, contends that the MEK and the NCRI are allies for regime change in Tehran and also act as a useful proxy for gathering intelligence. The MEK's greatest intelligence coup was the provision of intelligence in 2002 that led to the discovery of a secret site in Iran for enriching uranium.

Despite its defenders' claims, the MEK remains on the U.S. government list of foreign terrorist organizations. In the 1970s, the group killed three U.S. officers and three civilian contractors in Iran. During the 1979-1980 hostage crisis, the group praised the decision to take America hostages and Elaine Sciolino reported that while group leaders publicly condemned the 9/11 attacks, within the group celebrations were widespread.

Undeniably, the group has conducted terrorist attacks—often excused by the MEK's advocates because they are directed against the Iranian government. For example, in 1981, the group bombed the headquarters of the Islamic Republic Party, which was then the clerical leadership's main political organization, killing an estimated 70 senior officials. More recently, the group has claimed credit for over a dozen mortar attacks, assassinations, and other assaults on Iranian civilian and military targets between 1998 and 2001. At the very least, to work more closely with the group (at least in an overt manner), Washington would need to remove it from the list of foreign



terrorist organizations.

Proof that Brookings' policy paper was more than a mere theoretical exercise, in 2012 MEK would indeed be de-listed by the US State Department with support for the terrorist organization expanded. The fact that former senators and retired generals representing well-funded corporate think tanks even just this week are plotting to use MEK to overthrow the Iranian government should raise alarms that other criminality conspired within the pages of this policy paper may still well be in play. Lieberman himself suggests that proxy war and regime-change should proceed regardless of the so-called "nuclear deal" - with the 2009 Brookings report itself having stated that (emphasis added):



774

...any military operation against Iran will likely be very unpopular around the world and require the proper international context—both to ensure the logistical support the operation would require and to minimize the blowback from it. The best way to minimize international opprobrium and maximize support (however, grudging or covert) is to strike only when there is a widespread conviction that the Iranians were given but then rejected a superb offer—one so good that only a regime determined to acquire nuclear weapons and acquire them for the wrong reasons would turn it down. Under those circumstances, the United States (or Israel) could portray its operations as taken in sorrow, not anger, and at least some in the international community would conclude that the Iranians “brought it on themselves” by refusing a very good deal.

Clearly, both Brookings in 2009, and Lieberman this week have conspired to use the so-called “Iranian Nuclear Deal” as cover for betrayal and regime change.

For those wondering why Russia has intervened in Syria in the matter that it has, it should be plainly obvious. The US has no intention to stop in Syria. With Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya behind it, and Syria within its clutches, it is clear that Iran is next, and inevitably this global blitzkrieg will not stop until it reaches

Moscow and Beijing.

Image: Russia is not in Syria to merely “prop up” the Syrian government - it is in Syria to stop a global blitzkrieg that has consumed several nations before Syria, and will consume all nations after Syria, including Russia itself.

Even as the US adamantly denies the obvious - that is has intentionally created and is currently perpetuating Al Qaeda, the so-called “Islamic State,” and other terrorist groups in Syria, it is openly conspiring to use another army of terrorists against neighboring Iran, live before a US Senate hearing. Should the US succeed in Syria, it would not be the end of the conflict, but only the end of the beginning of a much wider world war.



775

A thin, light gray line that starts horizontally and then angles downwards to the right, ending at the edge of the page.

How Do Terrorist Groups and Cults Attract Followers?

November 2015

Knowingly or unknowingly, we may be supporting and promoting groups like Daesh instead of crippling and destroying them. In the fight against terrorist groups or cults, we should take care not to promote them in any way or to make it easier for them to recruit. Our first line of defense should be to understand their strengths and weaknesses, in order to match their strengths and attack their vulnerabilities.

There are three Hs that matter most in people's lives: health (of body and soul), honor and happiness. Destructive and terrorist cults are masters of deception, with their black-and-white worldview. They appear to be offering a simple, strict and easily understood definition of these three concepts to their followers.

A cult's definition of the three Hs will infiltrate deep into the mind and soul of its followers and stay deep in their unconscious, even years after they leave the group. The promise of these three Hs can be very attractive, especially to young people, and this ability to convince and deceive is the cult's main strength, and one that should worry us most.

The formula for defining honor in most cults, especially those that may be called destructive or terrorist groups, is very simple: love/worship/praise (X) and hate/resist/fight (Y). The only

HOME | NEWS | ANALYSIS | OPINION | BLOG | MULTIMEDIA | INTERVIEW

FAIR OBSERVER®
MAKE SENSE OF THE WORLD

SUBSCRIBE TO NEWSLETTER

POLITICS | ECONOMICS | BUSINESS | CULTURE | MORE | REGION

HOME > CULTURE > INTERNATIONAL SECURITY > MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA > OPINION
> HOW DO TERRORIST GROUPS AND CULTS ATTRACT FOLLOWERS?



© SHUTTERSTOCK

Read more

- How Will Saudi Arabia Revamp its Education System? May 24, 2016
- Clinton Rossotti's Impeachment Was Not a Coup May 24, 2016
- The World This Week: Mergers, Mideast Murders, Rising Risks to Global Economy May 22, 2016
- Place of Israel Waters May 22, 2016

CULTURE | INTERNATIONAL SECURITY | MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA | OPINION

How Do Terrorist Groups and Cults Attract Followers?



777

thing that is needed to make this formula complete is to replace X and Y with a popular idea, which can later be defined and elaborated by the cult leader.

For example, all “religious” cults, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Moonies, al-Qaeda, Daesh (Islamic State) and Mujahdeen-e-Khalq (MEK), will substitute X with God/Christ/Islam and Y with the Devil/Satan/the anti-Christ/enemies of Islam. Political or nonreligious cults might replace God with the people/freedom/democracy and the devil with imperialism or dictatorship.

In order to recruit young Muslims, al-Qaeda, Daesh and MEK claim that their ideology is Islam and that they are fighting the enemies of the religion. They have all exploited two important Islamic concepts, jihad (struggle) and shahada (giving witness), and have developed a doctrine around these ideas by giving them twisted, wrong definitions.



Jihad (greater and lesser struggle), according to the majority of Muslim jurists (except the Wahhabi and Salafi), is defined as a struggle against wrongs in the mind and behavior of a Muslim or in a Muslim community (greater jihad), or defending a Muslim community against aggression by enemies (lesser jihad). Both greater and lesser jihad have many rules and conditions set in the Quran and hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad).

Shahada (giving witness or martyrdom) also has a very clear definition throughout all the different sects of Islam, but terrorist cults have given a new distorted meaning to both notions, changing them into “killing” and “dying,” even by suicide bombing. MEK, al-Qaeda and Daesh have violated all the norms and rules of jihad and shahada through acts of terrorism, such as killing of unarmed civilians, women, children and the elderly, and bombing places of worship.

However wrong or distorted and anti-Islamic their definition in the view of most Muslims, they have given a new meaning to the word honor, namely fighting and dying for the cause of the group and the desires of the leader. Of course, it is easy to show that what they do has nothing to do with Islam, jihad or shahada, but when the cult has manipulated a person’s mind, from then on he or she is utterly reliant on the leader for understanding the doctrine of the cult and the meaning of honor. What they replace those dots with is not as important as how they define them. For example, in MEK, along with the fluctuating whims and interests of its leader—Masoud Rajavi—how to love and worship God and resist and fight those who oppose them has changed many times. “God” has been substituted or supplemented by “the people,” “independence,” “freedom” or “human rights”; and the “devil” has become “exploitation,” “imperialism,” “Zionism” or “dictatorship.”

At the same time, Rajavi has been able to define these ideas as he wishes. For example, he has defined people and love for the people in such a way as to justify support for international

sanctions against Iran. He has defined honor as a fight for the independence of Iran and opposition to imperialism, while at the same time ordering his followers to join Iraq in fighting Iran during the Iraq-Iran war. And now he is encouraging war-mongering, right-wing Americans to attack Iran and ruin the country, as they did in Iraq.

MEK's definition of freedom rests on the notion that a person permanently suppresses his or her individuality, desires nothing personal, abandons family life and accepts celibacy. According to this definition of freedom, followers feel they are the freest people on earth, overlooking the fact that with this definition its subjects have no individual desire, ambition or want. These days, MEK defines honor for its followers simply as love, loyalty and obedience toward the Rajavis (husband and wife, the leaders of the group) and hatred toward the Iranian regime, which the Rajavis wish to overthrow in order to become the next leaders of the Iranian people.

This definition of honor sticks to the mind and mentality of followers and will direct and justify all their thoughts, feelings and behaviors even years after leaving the cult. Recently, I overheard about some ex-members of MEK insulting other former members, calling them traitors or mercenaries in the employ of the enemy, because they had abandoned the "honorable goals" planted in their minds when they were part of the cult. Years after leaving the group, the name-callers still feel they are honorable because of their "struggle" within

I noticed the same kind of argument being proffered by some ex-followers of other cults, claiming that the doctrine and goals of the groups were sound and only the leadership was wrong, and that they were going to stick to that doctrine. What they fail to realize is that these "goals," "honor" and "doctrine" are, in this context, nothing more than words without any substance. Whatever the words used—freedom, imperialism, justice—ex-members of a cult should know that they simply reflect the leader's interests.





It is very difficult for ex-members, who have made great sacrifices and paid an enormous price for being in the cult, to reject the concepts of the doctrine or the honor that they have learned within the cult, and instead seek new principles to live by. Unless they succeed in finding a better meaning of honor, they are condemned to be unhappy and, in many cases, to remain a follower at heart, without knowing how or why.

Health (physical, psychological and emotional) is another prerequisite for a happy life. Again, in destructive cults there is a very clear and strict, unequivocal definition of health. Physical health is important as long as one is struggling to pursue the cult's goals, but it can and should be sacrificed as a mark of honor when needed.

In destructive cults, followers do not need to think about their physical health (including their essential needs such as food and shelter), as the group acts as a kind of insurance, guaranteeing them the fulfillment of all their physical needs and lifelong care. They achieve this by, first, drastically reducing each person's personal expectations about his or her physical needs, and, second, by channeling the resources of the cult toward specific needs when necessary.

In addition, cults, by rejecting individuality, which they describe as the ugliness of selfishness, dramatically reduce the psychological needs of individuals, offering them a collective life, comradeship and brotherhood/sisterhood, common goals and the security of the cult's character.

Cults deal with the emotional health or needs of their followers by labeling outsiders as the enemy and dehumanizing them, thus psychologically isolating their followers from the outside world and their familiar social milieu, and neutralizing any feelings they may have for their loved ones. At the same time, the cult portrays itself as a family, cult leaders as parents and other cult members as friends/comrades or siblings, thereby creating a new set of feelings and emotions among the followers, which can easily be directed, controlled and satisfied by

the leader.

Cults also instill a new set of beliefs in their followers about their sexual needs, which can be met by free sex, arranged marriages or sex without emotion and family ties, or denied by eliminating sex from their lives altogether.

Destructive cults, by rejecting all the social and family responsibilities and expectations of their followers and their individual needs and desires, claim to provide the health component of happiness. More importantly, by creating a strong belief system and a clear, simple and achievable definition of honor and being honorable, they promise their followers an illusion of happiness, which seems satisfactory, although to outsiders it seems strange, wrong and unacceptable. This capacity to delude their followers is one of the great strengths of destructive and terrorist cults that enable them to recruit and hold on to their followers.

In the fight against terrorist groups or cults, we should take care not to promote them in any way or to make it easier for them to recruit.

Most of us would, of course, argue that this kind of happiness is a sham, an illusion, and is only achievable via some sort of mind manipulation or brainwashing. But the reality is that it can be and has been achieved within cults, and we have yet to find an answer or antidote for it.

For us in the West especially, it is very difficult to imbue young people with a sense of the three Hs, particularly honor, given that all three Hs have been commercialized and given ambiguous and sometimes unachievable meanings. The mass media and advertising give young people the impression that, to feel good, proud and honorable, they have to be rich, famous, good looking, with fit and beautifully proportioned bodies and, perhaps, endowed with immense artistic or scientific talent. It is almost impossible to define honor for an ordinary individual



by reference to an idea such as nationalism or a belief in a religion or philosophy, without pushing them toward becoming racist, dogmatist or superstitious. For other meaningful, achievable and admirable values, such as caring for nature and humanity or standing up against exploitation, there is a lack of teaching and incentives in our families, schools and the media.

With respect to health, again, the monopolization of its meaning by the mass media and its exploitation by the dollar is, to say the least, unfortunate. Similarly, happiness for our younger generation tends nowadays to mean joy, fun and lust.

Promoting Cults Instead of Destroying Them

In defining the three Hs, we in the West are, therefore, at our weakest, while destructive and terrorist cults are at their strongest. In this situation, the worst thing that we might do is to attack them from this angle.

This is why I believe that those who direct their attacks to the ideology of destructive cults—often by blaming Islam and portraying Islam and Muslims as the root causes of terrorism—are promoting and supporting these cults and, knowingly or unknowingly, facilitating recruitment to them.

I am not referring to groups that are themselves cults in some form and that feed on hate. For them, the existence of other destructive or terrorist groups gives them ammunition with which to promote their own philosophy and agenda and to recruit. Rather, I am referring to our governments, our police, our old and established media and even those who claim to be fighting cults and terrorism. They too, in some cases, by calling these groups Muslim or jihadist and by attacking their doctrine, knowingly or unknowingly support and promote them instead of crippling and ultimately destroying them.

Schaefer targets rival Hawley over terrorist group case

December 2015

Josh Hawley's work on behalf of an Iranian militant opposition group removed in 2012 from the list of foreign terrorist organizations should get a lot of scrutiny as he seeks the Republican nomination for attorney general, intraparty rival Sen. Kurt Schaefer said Friday.

Hawley said the debate should be over Schaefer's choice of discussion topics.

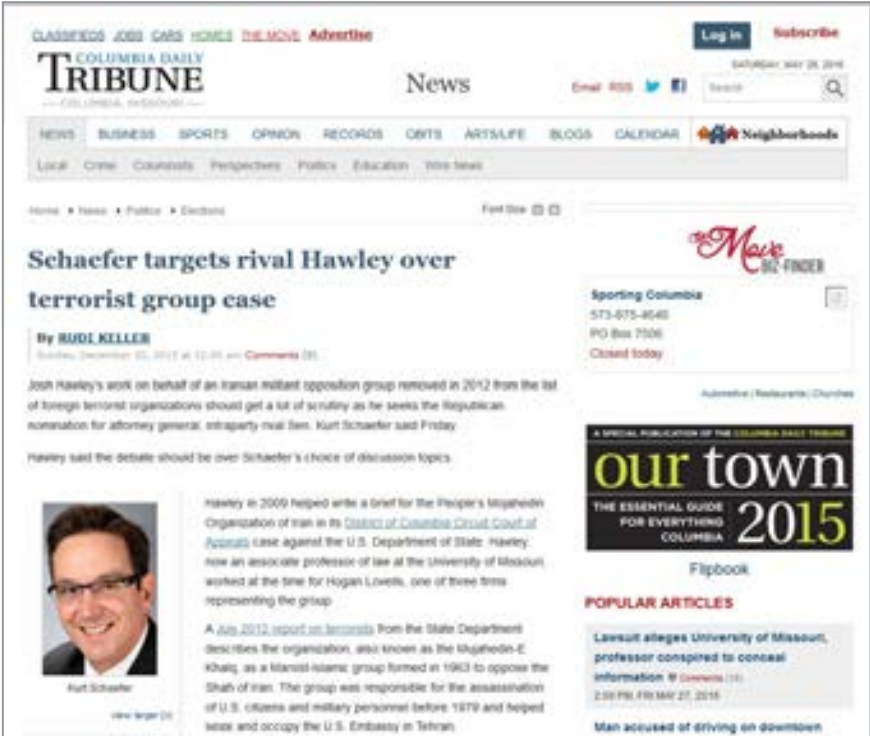
Hawley in 2009 helped write a brief for the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran in its District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals case against the U.S. Department of State. Hawley, now an associate professor of law at the University of Missouri, worked at the time for Hogan Lovells, one of three firms representing the group.

A July 2012 report on terrorists from the State Department describes the organization, also known as the Mujahedin-E Khalq, as a Marxist-Islamic group formed in 1963 to oppose the Shah of Iran. The group was responsible for the assassination of U.S. citizens and military personnel before 1979 and helped seize and occupy the U.S. Embassy in Tehran.

In 1981, the group began an insurgency against the Islamic regime that included attacks inside and outside Iran, including one that killed 70 high-ranking Iranian officials, including the

MEK
Uncovered

783



president, the prime minister and the chief justice. One plan, the State Department report stated, called for simultaneous attacks in 13 countries in 1992, including the Iranian delegation to the United Nations in New York City.

The group was based in Iraq after 1986 and renounced violence after turning its arms over to U.S. troops in 2003. The People’s Mojahedin is credited with revealing the Iranian nuclear program to the United States in 2003. The group was removed from the terrorist list in September 2012.

“Using your law license to represent a terrorist organization that is responsible for the deaths of American servicemen is inconsistent with being the top law enforcement officer in the state of Missouri, period,” Schaefer said.

The bipartisan group supporting the People’s Mojahedin petition for removal included more than 100 members of Congress, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former FBI Director Louis Freeh.

“By the time they came to my firm, Hogan Lovells, they had long since voluntarily disarmed, given up any kind of military action and were aiding the U.S. in material ways,” Hawley said. Others who have supported the group included two prominent Missourians: former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and former U.S. Sen. Kit Bond.

“The story here is that either he has not bothered to do the most basic legal research, or this is a political stunt,” Hawley said. “I have no idea of his motives or his thinking. I just think it is a cheap political hack move.”

Schaefer said he intends to use Hawley’s role to question his judgment as an attorney.

“You may have clients you don’t agree with,” Schaefer said. “This is in a league that is completely different than anything else.”

The Republican primary for attorney general has embroiled the Columbia rivals in a contest that has already seen supporters looking for dirt in University of Missouri records as well as intense competition for conservative Christian voters.

Hawley has been a member of MU’s law school faculty since 2011. He is on unpaid leave during the campaign.

He is running as an anti-establishment crusader for ethics in government and religious liberty, including work on the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty brief for Hobby Lobby.

Schaefer worked in top positions in Gov. Matt Blunt’s administration before winning election to the Senate in 2008. He has used high-profile investigations of concealed weapons records and Planned Parenthood to stake his claim for the nomination. St. Louis County Assessor Jake Zimmerman and former Cass County Prosecuting Attorney Teresa Hensley are running for the Democratic nomination to replace Attorney General Chris Koster, a Democrat who is running for governor.

Hawley graduated from Yale Law School in 2006 and worked as a clerk for two federal judges, including Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, before he joined Hogan Lovells.



The People's Mojahedin case likely will become the subject of campaign ads contrasting Hawley's early career with Schaefer's, who was an assistant attorney general in his first job.

Many of those who supported the petition were paid large speaking fees, the New York Times reported. Rival Iranian expatriate groups have accused the organization of continuing militant activity.

"If I had gotten a case, even as an associate, that I thought was inappropriate or didn't fit who I was, I would have said I wasn't doing this," Schaefer said. "They could have given me something else, or they could have fired me."

Hawley said he agreed to work on the brief after researching the organization and who was backing its petition. He said he was confident removing the organization from the terrorist list was the right thing to do.

"These are the kinds of allegations that a serious attorney would not make," Hawley said of Schaefer.





2016





THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Can Albania Meet its Obligations and De-radicalize an Influx of Terrorists into Europe?

January 2016

Situated on the east of Europe, Albania applied for membership of the European Union in 2009. As the poorest country in Europe and designated the most corrupt, there is a lot of work to be done before this country of 3 million people is accepted into the Union. A recent visit by US Secretary of State John Kerry does indicate that this work is well underway. But Albania's efforts to reform and strengthen its political, security, judicial and civic institutions after years of dictatorship, could be drastically undermined if the country ignores or underestimates the threat posed by the arrival of the Mojahedin Khalq (MEK) from Iraq.

Albania is the target location for the transfer of the notorious terrorist organization Mojahedin Khalq into Europe. Currently based in Iraq, the MEK is now being transferred to Albania under a deal struck with America in 2013.

Since the 1980s the MEK were paid and trained in terrorism by Saddam Hussein to effect regime change in Iran. After his ouster in 2003 the MEK aligned itself variously with the US army - during Senator Kerry's visit to Albania, the MEK was described as "a group that has supported the US in military operations in the Middle East and in its fight against terrorism"

MEK
Uncovered

788

HUFFPOST POLITICS

Date: 01/11/2016

FRONT PAGE POLITICS ENTERTAINMENT WHAT'S WORKING HEALTHY LIVING WORLDPOST HEADLINE HUFFPOST LIVE ALL SECTIONS

H Can Albania Meet its Obligations and De-radicalize an Influx ...

THE BLOG

Can Albania Meet its Obligations and De-radicalize an Influx of Terrorists into Europe?

© 2016 Huffington Post, Inc. All rights reserved. Updated on 01/11/2016

Co-authored by **Anne Khodabandeh**



Situated on the east of Europe, Albania applied for membership of the European Union in 2009. As the poorest country in Europe and designated the most corrupt, there is a lot of work to be done before this country of 3 million people is accepted into the Union. A recent visit by US Secretary of State John Kerry does indicate that

FOLLOW HUFFPOST

HuffPost



- as well as former Saddamists headed by Ezzat Ibrahim and more recently Al Qaida insurgents and Daesh in Iraq. Each successive government of the newly sovereign Iraq tried repeatedly to evict the group from their country, but the MEK leader Massoud Rajavi - himself a fugitive from justice - ordered his followers to put up violent resistance. Even if they would agree to go willingly, the United Nations refugee agency has struggled to find third countries to take them in. It seems that, although Western countries have benefitted openly from the MEK's sometimes violent anti-Iran activities, and found the group particularly useful as a thorn in Iran's side through the period of nuclear negotiations, the MEK



is deemed too dirty for them to willingly host any of them even as refugees.

In an attempt to encourage other countries to take some of the MEK, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton persuaded the then Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha in 2013 to take just over 200 MEK members on humanitarian grounds. That process got underway, but in 2016 Albania is now expected to take up to 3,000 MEK after the President of Romania, Traian Basescu, refused to take them in 2014.

This agreement has attracted surprisingly little attention from either inside Albania or even from a world media sensitive to terrorism and organized crime. The reason is partly because the transfers are taking place in small groups of around twenty at a time in a piecemeal fashion as the UNHCR is forced to defer to Massoud Rajavi's demands in order to circumvent threats of violence. Rajavi hand-picks the members he allows to be transferred, many using false identities. He ensures that each group of ordinary MEK members is accompanied by minders and enforcers to keep them under control and prevent them breaking loose. In order to accomplish their mandate to remove the MEK from Iraq, UN officials have had to accede to transferring the refugees under such conditions even though it reinforces the concept that the members belong to the MEK in conditions of modern slavery.

Once they arrive in Albania, the MEK leadership takes charge of the transferees. Although the US made a donation of \$20 million to the UN refugee agency to help resettle the MEK, and according to a State Department official the US has provided the Albanian government with "security and economic development assistance, to help the country build up its physical capacity to house the refugees", none of this benefits the individual refugees. In Tirana the MEK has purchased an abandoned university campus into which it has corralled the new arrivals and recreated the conditions of isolation and cultic control which have always prevailed for the membership.

What started out as a humanitarian gesture has turned into the mass relocation of a terrorist group to Europe. The MEK has created a de facto enclave in Albania which is outside the law, just as they did in Iraq.

This has put the refugees out of the reach of the Albanian authorities and because they are not free to mingle with Albania's citizenry, the influx of over a thousand trained terrorists has cleverly avoided detection and therefore controversy.

However, even though it appears that the MEK are somehow quietly contained, the citizens of Albania are entitled to ask whether the new refugees pose any actual threat to their civic life, to their security and to their ambitions to accede to membership of the European Union.

To answer this, we must ask why the Iraqi government is so desperate to expel them and why other Western countries are so extremely reluctant to accept them.

As a violent criminal organization, the MEK thrives where the rule of law is weak - in countries like Iraq and Albania which are emerging from past turmoil and troubles. In such conditions the MEK can be dangerous through criminal activity and violence.

As expert propagandists and manipulative persuaders, the MEK leaders have no problem making connections with and bribing government officials, power brokers and media types - let's be clear, the MEK has always been well financed. Former MEK have also reported that the MEK leaders are already vigorously pursuing links with Albania's mafia-like gangs. The MEK will work with these gangs for mutual benefit as they did with Saddam Hussein's regime. In the long run, if the MEK organization does become established Albania - with the quiet collusion of political circles who benefit from the cult's track record of terrorism - they will be better placed to do from Tirana what they can't do from Paris.

The CIA characterizes Albanian corruption as a 'transnational' problem involving drugs, money laundering and illegal aliens.



In this sense it is the very location of the country which makes it attractive to international criminal organizations and thereby creates huge problems for law enforcement agencies. Albania essentially acts as a gateway into Europe from the rest of the world.

Now, while the various routes to Turkey, Syria and Iraq are under stringent scrutiny, terrorist commanders from any mercenary group can slip beneath the radar and seek training and logistical support in Tirana. What better location to establish a clandestine terrorist training camp than in Albania? It is in Europe, but not in the EU and therefore not so open to scrutiny by the international community.

With the changed political mood following the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1, the MEK is looking for new friends and benefactors. The group has already aligned itself with the Syrian Free Army and has offered to help the Saudis fight against the Shias in Yemen. The MEK has over forty years of experience in terrorist activities. The real danger posed by this group is not only that they can re-arm themselves in Albania, but they can invite other groups in for training.

The worry is that the MEK has branched out and is open to do business with any terrorist group.

It is impossible to ignore the fact that MEK members are radicalized to the core. They are not ordinary refugees. Enough of them have been trained in Iraq by the former Saddam regime for terrorist activities as well as forgery, intelligence, military operations and even torture methods, to make them extremely dangerous. Above all, the nature of the MEK leadership style is cultic. This means the followers are not able to resist the orders of the leaders even if they wanted out. So there is a danger they will be used for a variety of criminal activities without their real consent. There are already examples of people trafficked by the MEK from Albania to Western Europe and used for money laundry activities in Germany.

However, the refugees could also be described as extremely



vulnerable. Another reason they have not attracted attention is that the MEK can easily be dismissed as a defunct fighting force; the average age of its fighters is sixty years old and many of them are ailing with mental and physical disease after years of punishing training in the Iraqi deserts. But while this is true of the majority, there are still many among them who are expert terrorist recruiters and trainers, people who know how to train others for suicide missions; strangely transferrable skills in today's world of global terrorism.

Not all the members who arrive in Albania do stay with the MEK. There is a growing community of formers - around two hundred to date - who have turned their back on the group and want to return to their families and to normal life. Interestingly, it is from this pool of former members that the US has carefully selected a quota of eighty individuals to be given asylum in America. They have undergone rigorous interviews to ascertain that they have completely rejected the MEK and so no longer pose any danger. Some others have been accepted by other European countries under the same conditions but the rest remain in Albania under conditions of hardship.

With the stakes set very high, Albania's authorities will need to stop this organization from covertly establishing a terrorist base in Europe. The first step would be to remove the MEK members from the source of their radicalization. If this doesn't happen, the problem will simply have been moved instead of being solved.

The authorities in Tirana can ensure that all the newly arrived refugees are treated as individuals, not as belongings of the MEK leader. They should be given protection and helped with accommodation and financial support as people entitled to determine their own future paths. Experience in Iraq has already shown that once these people are physically removed from the coercive atmosphere imposed by the MEK leaders and reinforced by their peers, they very quickly find that their commitment to terrorism evaporates and the de-radicalization



process can begin.

De-radicalization is greatly helped when they have contact with their families. There are numerous examples of former MEK who managed to leave the cult and establish new and successful lives. Some now live in various western European countries because they have family there who have been able to help them. Some have returned to Iran - even though Iran doesn't want them back - where they have been granted amnesty and lead normal lives under the supervision of the UN and ICRC. Some others now live in Iraqi Kurdistan and have transferred their family assets there from Iran there so they can set up in business.

Once they are out of the 'pressure-cooker' of the cult their lives can be sorted out through humanitarian organizations. As a Red Cross official told the authors, 'As individuals, three thousand is nothing, we sort out millions every year. But as a group, neither us nor any other organization can deal with or help them.' It is a choice the Albanian government cannot ignore, for to do nothing is to risk everything.



THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

From Iran to Nice, We Must Confront All Terrorism to End Terrorism

July 2016

France has unfortunately been the epicenter for two terrorism-related events in recent weeks. The tragic truck attack in Nice, which received international attention, and a rally recently held in Paris by a notorious Iranian opposition group — the “Mujahedin-e Khalq,” or MEK, which for years has committed acts of terrorism against Iran. While it might not be immediately evident, there is a connection between the events — the groups behind them have been accused of atrocities and have historical ties to Saudi Arabia.

Both the MEK and the self-proclaimed Islamic State, which claimed the attack in Nice, are groups with a history of terrorism, and both, in some way or another, are influenced by the kingdom.

People light candles at a makeshift memorial on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice on July 19, 2016 in tribute to the victims of the Bastille Day attack. (VALERY HACHE/AFP/Getty Images)

MEK’s Terrorism in Iran

While the group no longer has the distinction of a terrorist group in the United States and is not related to or as widely destructive as ISIS, in Iran the MEK is still very much a perpetrator of terror.

MEK
Uncovered

795



Since its founding in the late 1960s, the MEK's favored tactic has been terrorism, which for years it directed towards Americans. An MEK leader by the name of Massoud Rajavi stated in 1972 that the group's "main goal" was to "free Iran of U.S. imperialism." As I documented in my 2014 book, "Iran and the United States," the MEK's assassination campaigns in the 1970s claimed the lives of several high-profile Americans. Among the victims were one colonel and one lieutenant colonel of the U.S. Air Force, along with other servicemen.

The MEK's hands are tainted not only with American blood, but also with the blood of countless Iranians, Iraqis and Kurds. Since Iran's 1979 revolution, the MEK has been responsible for the deaths of upwards of 17,000 Iranians, including senior officials and ministers. During the Iran-Iraq War, the MEK also sided with Saddam Hussein, earning the enmity of the vast majority of Iranians. An Iranian NGO, the Habilian Association, has gone so far as to document all the Iranian victims of the MEK in a comprehensive database that includes photos and biographies of each of the victims.

In the '80s and '90s, the MEK was responsible for several terrorist campaigns within Iran, one of which killed some 70 Ira-

nian officials in 1981, including both the president and prime minister at the time.

While the group no longer has the distinction of a terrorist group in the United States, in Iran the MEK is still very much a perpetrator of terror.

After the Iran-Iraq War, the MEK resided in Iraq and took on the role of Saddam's henchmen. An October 1994 Wall Street Journal report quoted a Clinton administration official as saying, "Saddam looked on the Mujahedeen as more loyal than some of his own army units." After the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Massoud Rajavi lambasted the U.N. coalition that pushed Saddam out of Kuwait, stating, "Iranian national movements and their masses strongly denounce the Iranian regime's alliance with U.S. imperialism, world Zionism, and regional reactionaries to launch aggression against Iraq."

In recent years, Iranian nuclear scientists have been assassinated — in some cases murdered while driving to work. MEK is thought by many to be involved in these attacks, perhaps with the assistance of Israel. According to a 2012 NBC News report, Israel was "training MEK members" to carry out the killings. The group has also been held responsible for an April 2000 assassination attempt on the leader of the Iranian policy making center for the war in Iraq.

Mourners carry the coffin of an Iranian nuclear scientist on January 13, 2012. Some believe MEK is involved in the deaths of the nuclear scientists. (Atta Kenare/Getty Images)

The Saudi Connection

This year, the annual gathering of the MEK in Paris featured Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former director of Saudi intelligence, as a speaker. The conference typically draws the attendance of politicians of many nations, including the U.S., Egypt, and this year, Saudi Arabia. In his remarks, al-Faisal praised the pseudo-Islamist-Marxist group and emphatically supported its objective of toppling the Iranian government. Al-Faisal's comments, which come at a time when Saudi-Iranian relations are

at an all-time low and have even been compared to a “Cold War” state, will have serious consequences for the Tehran-Riyadh relationship going forward.

During my trip to Iran a few weeks ago, I spoke with a senior official about the necessity of improving Iran-Saudi relations. He told me that Iran was willing to engage the Saudis but that Riyadh had devoted itself to a confrontational approach. This official informed me that Iran had detailed intelligence about Riyadh’s financial support to the MEK, which he said had increased 800 percent in the past two years. He also noted that Saudi Arabia would cover the cost of this year’s MEK conference in Paris and that Prince Turki would be present to publicly declare Saudi Arabia’s support.

In the fight against terrorism, European and Saudi leaders should know better than to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ terrorism, or tolerate any form of terrorism in the service of cheap geopolitical gains.

With Prince Turki’s speech to the MEK, Saudi Arabia has elected to destroy any chance of de-escalating tensions between the two nations. In pursuing this approach, Saudi leaders should be cognizant that not only are they imperiling regional and global security, but they are also following in the footsteps of Saddam Hussein. Saudi Arabia has already separated itself from its traditional regional allies with its hyper-anti-Iranian posture, so much so that only Bahrain— which is effectively under Saudi occupation — is standing fully with it. Global powers, on the other hand, are pursuing ways to enhance ties with Iran. It is truly a shame that Prince Turki al-Faisal, a man of significant ability and experience, has committed himself to this doomed cause rather than searching for peace and friendship between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Riyadh’s now open alliance with the MEK only solidifies its position as the sponsor of yet another extremist group that espouses perverted views of Islam. The barbaric Nice terrorist attack— later claimed by the self-proclaimed Islamic State —

and Prince Faisal's endorsement of the MEK have a common denominator: a connection to Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's Prince Turki al-Faisal looks on during the National Council of Resistance of Iran annual meeting on July 9, 2016. (Alain Jocard/Getty Images)

Saudi Arabia and ISIS

It has long been evident to the global community that Saudi Arabia is a benefactor of Islamist militant groups, including likely the group that evolved into ISIS. Many U.S. officials have publicly acknowledged this reality. Even former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated at the Brookings Institution last year that, "Much of the extremism in the world today is the direct result of policies and funding undertaken by the Saudi government and individuals." A recent British parliament report also stated that it is "very likely" that individuals close to the royals of the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf have donated money to ISIS, though it is unclear how directly those funds have been given. Historically, too, the ideology of the group has ties to Saudi Arabia's own identity via Wahhabism. While ISIS wreaks havoc on the world with its global acts of terror, the MEK ravages Iran. In much the same way ISIS is a twisted offspring of the Sunni world that has ravaged, among others, Sunni-populated areas, the MEK is its counterpart for Iranians in the Shia world. Iranians thus expect the world community to confront the MEK just as it confronts ISIS. At the very least, the group should not be hosted by countries like France and endorsed by Saudi Arabia. In the fight against terrorism, European and Saudi leaders should know better than to distinguish between "good" and "bad" terrorism, or tolerate any form of terrorism in the service of cheap geopolitical gains.

The Nice truck slaughter — indeed the slaughtering by ISIS in general — and the MEK's killing of thousands of Iranians are both worthy of our attention and condemnation.

In light of the Nice terrorist attack, the international community should also view the threat from other groups such as

the MEK as an interconnected phenomenon. The scourge of terrorism currently threatening the whole world can only be alleviated if it is addressed in a holistic way. The Nice truck slaughter — indeed the slaughtering by ISIS in general — and the MEK’s killing of thousands of Iranians are both worthy of our attention and condemnation. The territory the perpetrators of such violence use to plan and launch attacks, as well as the flow of cash, equipment and ideology they draw their support and influence from should all be considered as pieces of the same terrorism “puzzle.” The global terrorist threat simply cannot be solved until all these pieces are recognized as being a part of the same puzzle and dealt with in an effective and simultaneous manner. This means not only increasing security to prevent attacks, but also seriously confronting those who aid terrorism in any way — from the MEK to ISIS.





Congressional Research Service Expert and Gulf Lobbyist Headline MEK Event

August 2016

By outward appearances, the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), the ex-terrorist Iranian opposition group hell-bent on regime change, appears to be losing their influence in the media. The group's allegations about Iran's nuclear program are met with increased skepticism after, for example, photographic evidence of "Lavizan-3," a secret uranium enrichment facility in suburban Tehran, was revealed to be a stock photo from an Iranian safe company. But their spotty track record on providing verifiable information from inside Iran hasn't stopped the group from gaining the support of Washington's biggest Iran hawks—and, more recently, anti-Iran ideologues associated closely with Arab kingdoms in the Persian Gulf.

The MEK's latest purported revelation, exclusively reported in the UK tabloid, The Daily Mail, is that Iran commands 60,000 pro-Assad fighters in Syria, has spent as much as \$100 billion in Syria since 2011, and maintains a secret command post near the Damascus airport. The fact that Iran is supporting the Syrian government comes as no surprise, but the scale of its involvement, if true, would mean Iran is far more deeply invested than was previously thought. But the Daily Mail's reporting

MEK
Uncovered

801



on the MEK’s allegations provides little evidence to back up the tough-to-swallow claim that Iranian led forces outnumber the Syrian army.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the MEK’s political front, will present its findings tomorrow at its Washington offices with a panel discussion featuring, among others, Dr. Kenneth Katzman, a prominent Iran expert at the taxpayer-funded Congressional Research Service (CRS), and Amb. Adam Ereli, a lobbyist for Qatar and former U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain.

Katzman’s participation in the panel is particularly surprising, given his previous critical writings about the group. In 2010, he authored a CRS report featuring a section on the MEK, which he characterized as advocating “Marxism blended with Islamic tenets,” a fact that the MEK—despite its well-documented history—now denies. Katzman cited a 2007 State Department report which “notes the group’s promotion of women in its ranks and again emphasizes the group’s ‘cult-like’ character, including the indoctrination of its members and separation of

family members, including children, from its activists.” And in 2012, Katzman warned about exiled opposition groups like the MEK, comparing them to the internal Iranian opposition Green Movement:

Some groups have been committed to the replacement of the regime virtually since its inception, and have used violence to achieve their objectives. Their current linkages to the Green Movement are tenuous, if existing at all, and some indications suggest these movements want to dominate any coalition that might topple the regime.

Katzman did not respond to questions about his decision to participate in the panel.

In contrast to Katzman, J. Adam Ereli, another MEK panelist, is an often-quoted critic of the Iran deal in the media and lobbyist for one of Iran’s biggest regional rivals, Qatar. Over the past year, news outlets have consistently failed to disclose his work on behalf of Qatar when publishing his attacks on the White House’s nuclear diplomacy.

Ereli, along with former Rep. Vin Weber (R-MN), is listed as “personally and substantially involved in the performance” of Mercury’s work on behalf of Qatar, according to the 2015 contract between Mercury Public Affairs, where Ereli is a vice-chairman, and Qatar. Qatar pays Mercury \$100,000 per month for Ereli and Weber’s services. That contract has been extended twice and now continues until the end of 2016. Ereli didn’t respond to a question about whether he was appearing on the panel in a personal capacity or as a lobbyist for Qatar. The Thursday appearance on the panel won’t be the first time that Ereli has participated in one of MEK’s events. In July, 2014, Ereli appeared at a Capitol Hill event hosted by the Organization of Iranian American Communities, a coalition whose sole purpose is supporting the MEK, and praised the NCRI. He noted, contra Katzman’s assessment, that the MEK was a voice for Iranians who are dissatisfied with the country’s leadership, saying, “Outside of Iran, and both inside of Iran, there is a



credible organization that helps channel that dissent, that is the NCRI or Mojahedin-e Khalq.”

While the MEK and many of its stateside boosters promote the group as the legitimate Iranian opposition, impartial Iran experts believe the group lost any popularity and legitimacy it once held inside Iran thanks to its decision to fight alongside Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war. Ereli also spoke at another pro-MEK Hill event in 2015 and attended the NCRI’s Nowruz (Iranian New Year) celebration in March.

Ereli wouldn’t be the first MEK-advocate with Sunni-Gulf ties to jump on the MEK’s bandwagon. Prince Turki bin Faisal al-Saud, the former head of the Saudi intelligence agency and longtime ambassador to the U.S., praised MEK leader Maryam Rajavi at the group’s annual gathering last July, in Paris. Prince Turki’s appearance, and his show of open support for the MEK, lends new credence to the rumors that the Sunni Gulf states are a possible source for the group’s mysterious funding.





Former Terrorist Group To Enjoy Close Ties to Rumored Trump Cabinet

November 2016

Donald Trump's rumored picks for key foreign-policy positions have already set off alarm bells about the future administration's embrace of war hawks and Islamophobes. Today, Washington Post columnist Josh Rogin pointed out that former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, who is currently reported to be under consideration for an appointment to secretary of state or attorney general, potentially violated the law when he made paid speaking appearances for the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), when the State Department listed the Iranian dissident group as a foreign terrorist organization.

Giuliani isn't the only likely member of the future administration to have maintained close ties and advocated on behalf of the former terrorist group, which assassinated six Americans in Iran between 1973 and 1976.

John Bolton (another rumored choice for secretary of state), Clare Lopez (who is reportedly short-listed for deputy national security adviser), and Newt Gingrich (who allegedly turned down an offer of secretary of state but has shown interest in serving as a policy adviser in the Trump administration) have all advocated for the former terrorist group and praised its cultish leader, Maryam Rajavi.

MEK
Uncovered

805



Shortly after the overthrow of the Shah, the group experienced a falling out with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and fled into exile. Over the following years, the group's leaders, Maryam and Massoud Rajavi, aligned with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war (7,000 members fought alongside Saddam Hussein, against Iran) and shifted toward increasingly cultish behavior, mandating divorces and celibacy for their soldiers while cultivating a cult of personality around themselves. Massoud Rajavi hasn't been seen since overseeing the surrender of MEK forces to the U.S. following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This summer, the former head of Saudi Arabia's intelligence agency, Prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud referred to Massoud Rajavi as "the late Massoud Rajavi," suggesting that he may be deceased. Turki's participation at an MEK event, meanwhile, was a tacit acknowledgement of Saudi Arabia's support of the group. Indeed, forming opportunistic alliances has been a hallmark of the MEK. In 2012, U.S. officials told NBC News that Israel's national intelligence agency, Mossad, was training and arming the MEK to assassinate Iranian nu-

clear scientists.

The group seeks to portray itself as a government-in-exile and the secular, democratic alternative to Iran's theocratic government. But the MEK's lack of influence inside Iran and skepticism about their allegations regarding Iran's nuclear program—for example, photographic evidence the MEK provided last year allegedly showing evidence of “Lavizan-3,” a secret uranium enrichment facility in the suburbs of Tehran, turned out to be a stock photo from an Iranian safe company – haven't prevented the group from gaining footholds in Washington through campaign contributions and lucrative speaking gigs for politicians who praise Rajavi and call for regime change in Iran at MEK rallies.

The MEK is known for paying generous sums to former officials who speak at their events. Lee Hamilton, a former chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee who headed the Woodrow Wilson Center for 12 years, told InterPress Service that he was paid “a substantial amount” to appear on an MEK panel in 2011.

Giuliani, Bolton, Lopez, and Gingrich have all sung the praises of Maryam Rajavi, called for the U.S. to work towards regime change in Tehran, and treated the MEK as a legitimate Iranian government in exile.

Speaking at an MEK rally outside Paris last year, Giuliani, who had taken speaking fees from the group when it was on the foreign terrorist organization (FTO) list, told the audience:

I will not support anyone for President of the United States who isn't clear on that slogan behind me. What does it say? It says “Regime Change.” ... I will not support a candidate who does not have the moral fiber and the courage to stand up to the Ayatollah and tell him “We are going to do everything we can to get you out and you are never going to become a nuclear power.”

Bolton, who also advocated for the group when it was on the FTO list, told an MEK audience outside Paris last summer:





There is only one answer here: To support legitimate opposition groups that favor overthrowing the military theocratic dictatorship in Tehran, and it should be the declared policy of the United States of America and all of its friends to do just that at the earliest opportunity.

Gingrich, who also spoke for the group before it was delisted, told the 2016 gathering in Paris:

There are no moderates in the dictatorship. The dictatorship cannot be trusted. The [nuclear] agreement made with it is insane.

He concluded by praising the commitment of Rajavi's followers, saying: I want you to know that the message I will take home to America is that there are thousands and thousands of Iranians who are prepared, who are ready, who are committed to and who believe that we can truly bring democracy to Iran. Lopez, who serves as a vice president at the Center for Security Policy, a far-right think tank headed by anti-Muslim conspiracy theorist Frank Gaffney, and as executive director of the long-time MEK advocacy group, the Iran Policy Committee, from 2005 to 2006, wrote that Prince Turki's surprising appearance marked a watershed moment for the MEK.

She wrote:

...[T]he implications of official Riyadh government support for the largest, most dedicated, and best-organized Iranian opposition movement will reverberate through the Middle East.

Although not openly stated by bin Faisal, the new NCRI-Riyadh alliance may be expected to involve funding, intelligence sharing, and possible collaboration in operations aimed at the shared goal of overthrowing the current Tehran regime.

If Lopez, Giuliani, Bolton, or Gingrich serve in the Trump administrations, the MEK will have the highest level access its ever enjoyed in the U.S. government, a remarkable journey for a fringe Islamic-Marxist group that, until 2012, was on the State Department's terrorism list for its role in assassinating Americans.

The Washington Post

Giuliani was paid advocate for shady Iranian dissident group

November 2016

Former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani is reported to be in contention to be Donald Trump's attorney general or secretary of state. Senators who will be considering his confirmation may want to examine the fact that Giuliani took money to advocate on behalf of an Iranian dissident group while it was listed by the State Department as a foreign terrorist organization, potentially breaking the law.

For years, Giuliani has been one of the most prominent American officials to advocate on behalf of the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), a Marxist Iranian opposition group that claims to be the legitimate government of Iran and resembles a cult. A Treasury Department investigation in 2012 examined whether speaking fees paid by several MEK front groups to a long list of U.S. politicians, including Giuliani, violated laws on Americans receiving money from designated terrorist organizations.

The State Department added the MEK to the list of foreign terrorist organizations in 1997 due to its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil in 1992. The group, which has about 3,000 members living in exile in Iraq, has not conducted a confirmed act of terrorism in more than a decade. In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of

MEK
Uncovered

809



Iraq, the United States mostly disarmed the MEK and provided its members with protection at their Iraqi base, Camp Ashraf. Throughout the first term of the Obama administration, Iranian American organizations with extensive links to the MEK paid prominent U.S. national security officials to speak on behalf of the group. They also contributed heavily to the campaign coffers of lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. The payments ran through the lobbying law firm DLA Piper, which passed the money through a speakers' bureau that cut checks to the officials.

In 2011 and 2012, Giuliani gave several speeches, including at events inside the congressional office buildings, calling on the State Department to take the MEK off of the list of foreign terrorist organizations. He also heavily criticized the U.S. government's effort to help relocate MEK members when the Iraqi government evicted them from Camp Ashraf.

In March 2012, Giuliani traveled to Paris to speak at an MEK conference alongside the group's secretive leader Maryam Rajavi. While there, he called the U.S. military base in Iraq where the United States wanted to relocate the MEK a "concentration camp." Those comments later appeared in an MEK ad in the New York Times.

That same month, the Treasury Department's investigation into the payments made to American politicians became public when former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell admitted that he had received a subpoena related to his work on behalf of the MEK. It's illegal for American citizens to do business with a group designated as a foreign terrorist organization.

During a pro-MEK protest and rally outside the State Department in 2011, Rendell told me he had received \$20,000 for his appearance there. How much money Giuliani received per appearance is unclear, although he spoke on behalf of the MEK several times in 2011 and 2012.

Representatives of several of the front groups, which have names like the Iranian American Citizens of Northern California, have maintained that they have not broken any laws.

Other potential Trump administration appointees took money to advocate for the MEK while it was listed as a foreign terrorist organization, including former ambassador John Bolton and former CIA director James Woolsey, but they were less involved than Giuliani. Other officials who have given pro-MEK paid speeches include Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), former FBI director Louis Freeh, former senator Robert Torricelli, former representative Patrick Kennedy, former national security adviser Gen. James Jones, former Joint Chiefs chairman Gen. Richard Myers, former White House chief of staff Andy Card, retired Gen. Wesley Clark, former representative Lee Hamilton, former CIA director Porter Goss and former senator Evan Bayh.

At the time, top State Department officials often complained about the U.S. politicians who were advocating for the MEK, calling their interference unhelpful and misguided. The American supporters of the MEK were increasing tensions between the U.S. government and the MEK while negotiations were ongoing.

"The Americans who ought to know better and claim to be on the side of good solutions are really damaging it. Either



they are too lazy or too arrogant to actually do their homework. They don't spend the time to learn facts, they just pop off. They accept the MEK line without question and then they posture," one State Department official told me in 2012.

In October 2012, after the MEK finally relented to State Department pressure and moved to Camp Liberty, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton decided to remove it from the foreign terrorist organization list. What happened to the Treasury Department's investigation after that is unclear.

The MEK story is complicated because the group does have legitimate grievances and has been the target of deadly attacks by Iranian-backed forces inside Iraq. There are also reports that the U.S. and Israeli intelligence services have used the group's members at various times to conduct covert operations inside Iran.

Giuliani and the other MEK supporters' argument that the group is the victim of human rights abuses and deserves protection from atrocities is valid. But by profiting from their advocacy while the group was a listed terrorist organization, they may have broken the law.

And if Giuliani really believes that the MEK could represent a viable alternative to the current Iranian government or a even a key pillar in U.S. policy on Iran, his potential tenure as a national security official in the Trump administration will mean a new and uncharted era in U.S.-Iran relations.



Giuliani Took Money From a Group That Killed Americans. Does Trump Care?

November 2016

You can tell a lot about potential Cabinet nominees by the terrorist group they shill for.

As President-elect Donald Trump settles on his nominees for secretary of state and other front-row positions, he has his pick of people who have lobbied for the bizarre and brutal Mujahidin e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian resistance group that helped launch the Islamic revolution and then fell out with the Tehran regime. The MEK has plenty of American blood on its hands, as well as that of thousands of Iranians killed while the group was a strike force serving Saddam Hussein in the 1980s and '90s.

Perhaps the best known MEK votary is none other than former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, reported to be on the shortlists for Trump's secretary of state and director of national intelligence, whose ties to the group have resurfaced as the press examines the numerous possible conflicts of interest created by his international business activities. The MEK has paid Giuliani handsomely for years—\$20,000 or more, and possibly a lot more—for brief appearances before the group and for lobbying to have it removed from the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO), which occurred in 2012.

MEK
Uncovered

813



Among other MEK devotees are former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton—another secretary of state in waiting—and champion Trump booster Newt Gingrich. Former Labor Secretary Elaine Chao (also the wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell), who suddenly appeared at Trump’s Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club on Monday for a meeting with the president-elect, has also been on the MEK payroll, as has former Bush 43 security aide Fran Townsend, whose name has been in play as a possible Trump secretary of homeland security or director of national intelligence.

Press accounts of MEK support by Giuliani and these others often treat their ties as a curiosity or, at most, some kind of peccadillo, because the group was taken off the State Department list in 2012. I was the coordinator for counterterrorism at that time, and my office was responsible for leading the effort to decide whether the group should be removed from FTO list. While I stand by that action, I also believe that any connection to the MEK is a lot more than a curiosity. Those who embrace the group show an alarming lack of concern about its past and heedlessness about core principles of American counterterrorism policy.

In Giuliani’s case in particular, the hypocrisy is rather stunning.

“America’s mayor” has presented himself as a centurion in the fight against “radical Islamic terrorism” and famously doubted Barack Obama’s patriotism, saying, “I do not believe that the president loves America.” Yet he appears to feel that gorging at the table of Islamo-Marxist terrorists who have murdered Americans is in no way unseemly.

The history of the MEK stretches back to the 1960s, when it was founded by a group of Iranian students who opposed the shah and espoused an ideology that mixed Shiism—particularly the cult of martyrdom—and Marxism. Along with the group’s anti-regime sentiment came a hefty dose of anti-imperialism and hatred of the United States and Israel. Some of its members trained in PLO camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

From the outset, the group advocated violence. Among the MEK’s many terrorist operations in the 1970s were bombings and shootings directed against American military personnel stationed in Iran—three U.S. colonels were killed during this period, as were three contractors. There was an attempted kidnapping of the U.S. ambassador to Iran, an assassination attempt against the general heading the U.S. military mission, as well as attacks against Iranian facilities belonging to General Motors, Shell Oil, Pepsi, Pan Am Airlines and others. When the revolution occurred, the MEK joined forces with the religious hard-liners looking to overthrow the regime. The group supported the takeover of the U.S. embassy in November 1979, and, according to some eyewitnesses, MEK members took part.

But as Iran’s revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini consolidated power, he became suspicious of the MEK’s leadership and its Marxist ideology and blocked the group from a role in the government. The MEK then took up arms against Khomeini and his followers. Before its top cadres fled to Paris in 1981, the organization carried out a series of bombings in Tehran, and it is believed to be responsible for one that killed





more than 70 members of the new regime's leadership, including Ayatollah Mohammed Beheshti, the second most powerful man in the country.

In 1986, about 7,000 MEK members relocated to Iraq, putting themselves in the service of Saddam Hussein during his war against Iran. Armed with Iraqi heavy weapons, the MEK claimed its fighters killed upward of 50,000 Iranian troops. After the Iran-Iraq War ended, MEK, Saddam's "Praetorian Guard," as Iran expert Ray Takeyh has called it, continued launching terrorist attacks against targets inside and outside Iran. After the 1990 Gulf War, the group participated in Saddam's bloody repression of the Shia and Kurdish uprising in Iraq. In April 1992, it staged attacks on Iranian embassies in 13 countries. Among these was a strike against the Iranian mission to the United Nations, making the MEK, along with al Qaeda and a scattering of others, one of the few international terrorist organizations to actually operate on U.S. soil.

In 1997, the MEK was among the first group of 30 terrorist organizations the State Department put on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, along with the worst of the worst from that period: Hezbollah, Hamas, the Abu Nidal Organization, Aum Shinrikyo and others. The group richly deserved this distinction. Although little known to most Americans, the MEK had considerably more blood on its hands than the large majority of the other groups included. The listing meant, among other things, that individuals who provided "material support" to the group could be prosecuted under U.S. law.

The MEK's inclusion on the FTO list also underscored a central principle of U.S. counterterrorism policy, namely, that the target of terrorist violence is irrelevant, and the killing of innocents to advance a political agenda is always wrong. So even though the United States may have few more determined and even deceitful foes than the government of the Islamic Republic, we still condemn terrorist violence against the regime. The U.S. has continued to embrace this policy through Republican

and Democratic administrations, and opposition to terrorism in all its forms has been essential for U.S. leadership on counter-terrorism issues.

In the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the administration of President George W. Bush cited Saddam's provision of safe haven to the MEK as one example of his support for international terrorism. Faced with the juggernaut of the American invasion of 2003, the group surrendered its tanks and other weapons to U.S. forces and gathered its personnel at the largest of its military installations, Camp Ashraf, 40 miles outside Baghdad. Inexplicably, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared the MEK forces, members of a listed Foreign Terrorist Organization, to be "protected persons" under the Geneva Convention. Thus began the incredible anomaly of the U.S. military protecting the MEK at Ashraf until 2009, when a new status of forces agreement turned responsibility over to the Iraqi authorities.

With its world turned upside down in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the MEK sought to recast itself as the legitimate opposition to the Islamic Republic and endear itself to U.S. advocates of regime change in Iran. Beginning around 2003, the group was led, as it is today, from Paris by Maryam Rajavi, the wife of group founder Massoud Rajavi, who mysteriously disappeared around the time of the invasion. The MEK, whose ability to carry out attacks appeared to be sharply curtailed by the American occupation, claimed—though with scant proof—that it had long since renounced violence—and claimed, as well, to have embraced democracy. Sometime around then, it also began enlisting U.S. politicians to support its effort to have the FTO designation removed.

Money washes away all sins in Washington, and the cash that the MEK offered would-be proponents came in a geyser. In addition to longtime regime-change advocates like Bolton, who recently boasted before a MEK crowd in Paris that he



had been engaged with them for a decade, the group signed up Republicans and Democrats en masse. Former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former FBI Director Louis Freeh, former DNC chair Howard Dean, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Hugh Shelton, former Obama National Security Adviser General Jim Jones, former Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell—the list went on and on.

The MEK appears to have built its stable of supporters by offering them lavish fees to speak at events in the U.S. and abroad that denounced Iran and promoted the group itself. They lobbied the secretary of state and the Bureau of Legislative Affairs for the most part, though they occasionally tried to get to me too, as coordinator for counterterrorism. Scores of notables were enlisted in Europe, too—a member of the British House of Lords showed up in my office one day under false pretenses to discuss the FTO listing only to be summarily ejected. No designated terrorist group had ever mounted a campaign like this before. Indeed, as a stampede of hogs to the trough, it was astonishing by any Washington standard.

Exactly where all the money came from remains unknown. Most of those who hitched their wagon to the MEK appeared to be getting \$15,000 to \$20,000 or more per appearance at these public events, and they were presumably happy to add their names to whatever open letters demanding better treatment for the group that were put in front of them. Many added their name to amicus briefs in support of an unprecedented legal action by the group seeking delisting—the MEK's lawyer was former New Jersey Democratic Senator Bob Torricelli. (I'm pretty confident about these figures. Shortly after leaving the State Department, I was offered a five-figure sum to appear at a MEK-sponsored event. I know other former senior officials who received similar offers and declined them.) Group supporters claimed the money came from the contributions of ordinary Iranians in exile, but the sums seemed far too great.

Rumors circulated about a vast hoard of cash that Saddam had bestowed on the group. Another view was Iran-hating Gulf Arabs were providing the lucre.

Wherever the money came from, plenty of it was being soaked up. And Congress became fixated on the MEK issue, too. Hearings into the case of the MEK were held, and hearings on other issues were hijacked by congressmen such as Republican Ted Poe of Texas and Democrat Brad Sherman of California, who championed the terrorist group. (Hill adoration for the MEK continues to be flabbergasting. Last April, Poe's House subcommittee invited Maryam Rajavi to testify on the issue of ISIS by videolink. According to at least one House staffer, no one else has enjoyed that privilege since the Democrats were in the majority (2009-11), and Cuban dissidents were interviewed from the U.S. Interests Section in Havana.)

The spectacle of so many current and former legislators, Cabinet members and the like falling over themselves to praise the MEK caused plenty of bemusement and also outrage within the administration. Many officials were repulsed by the campaign for delisting—what, they wondered, was promoting the MEK through public appearances and lobbying if not material support for a designated terrorist organization? In March 2012, the Treasury Department seemed to be leaning toward that conclusion, when it started issuing subpoenas to prominent MEK surrogates

In 2012, the issue of the MEK FTO designation became even more high-profile—in part because of the lawsuit but, more urgently, because of the possibility of a massacre at Camp Ashraf. American troops were no longer defending the camp, and the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, who had a close relationship with Tehran, wanted the hated MEK gone. Beginning in 2009, Iraqi military and Shia militias attacked the camp on several occasions. In April 2011, 34 inhabitants of Ashraf were killed and hundreds wounded in one such attack. For





Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the priority became averting more killing and getting the MEK members relocated. Such a movement, however, was inconceivable until the group was delisted. No country would give refuge to a bunch of terrorists. The issue consumed an enormous amount of the time and energy of the Department's 7th floor, my team in the Counterterrorism Bureau, the Office of the Legal Advisor, the Near East Bureau and the Justice Department. The staff of the Counterterrorism Bureau opposed delisting, a step that is itself a rare occurrence reserved almost exclusively for groups that had become defunct. Although the MEK professed to having forsworn violence, there was insufficient confidence in that pledge. The 3,400 or so remaining MEK members were of course unlikely to do much of anything while bottled up in Camp Ashraf, but who knew what they would do if let out? Moreover, by presenting itself as an opposition force that supported the overthrow of the regime in Tehran, the MEK seemed only a few steps from taking up arms again.

Even more unsettling was the sheer creepiness of the group. While Maryam Rajavi was presiding over enormous conferences with American political celebrities and seas of smiling, waving people in Paris, at Camp Ashraf, the MEK leadership treated its people appallingly. Visitors, including from the U.N., painted a picture of relentless intimidation, shaming and coercion of the inhabitants by camp leaders. The MEK, which is often described as a cult, had a long history of requiring that its members divorce and remain celibate. Now, its leaders were resolved that the group would remain together and none of the members would be relocated individually or in small groups—the Ashraf group was a bargaining chip that the leadership was cynically using for future leverage.

As the discussion within the U.S. government went on in 2012, the Iraqis became increasingly impatient, and the fear of renewed violence grew. The State Department finally designed a solution that would make delisting in essence a self-fulfill-

ing step. That is, the MEK leadership was informed that only by accepting relocation to a place called Camp Liberty near the Baghdad Airport and agreeing that its members would be farmed out to new homes around the world would the group be removed from the FTO list. In essence, the group was being dissolved as it was delisted. Even this the MEK objected to, and it haggled over the plan for weeks.

Faced with the possibility that the U.S. would leave the MEK on the terrorist list and walk away, the group finally capitulated. The decision to remove the MEK from the FTO list had taken so long that there was relief at State that the ordeal was over, but little satisfaction. When the department announced the delisting in September 2012, it made its ambivalence evident. With today's actions, the Department does not overlook or forget the MEK's past acts of terrorism, including its involvement in the killing of U.S. citizens in Iran in the 1970s and an attack on U.S. soil in 1992. The department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organization, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members.

The secretary's decision today took into account the MEK's public renunciation of violence, the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism by the MEK for more than a decade, and its cooperation in the peaceful closure of Camp Ashraf, its historic paramilitary base.

The United States has consistently maintained a humanitarian interest in seeking the safe, secure and humane resolution of the situation at Camp Ashraf, as well as in supporting the United Nations-led efforts to relocate eligible former Ashraf residents outside of Iraq.

The final Ashraf inhabitants were relocated from Camp Liberty to Albania—where many of the group's members wound up after being turned down by most other countries—just this past September. What the group does with its rank-and-file next is hard to know, and there has been little reliable reporting on their activities in Albania. For the moment, all eyes are on



the group's effort to ingratiate itself with U.S. policymakers and legislators, which it conducts now from its office on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Treasury ended its inquiry into the funding of MEK surrogates after the group was delisted—and with it any hope of gathering more information from MEK proponents on their financial relations with the group, or where all that money came from.

It is difficult to capture just how surreal the entire MEK denouement was. In the end, the protestations of Giuliani, Bolton and others made no difference to the process, though the former New York mayor has boasted of his success in the matter: “My ties to them are very open. We worked very hard to get them delisted—by Hillary Clinton, by the way.”

The love affair with the MEK continues to mystify. For some, like Bolton, there is clearly an unshakeable certainty that the MEK will play a role in changing the regime in Tehran. Bolton's reputation for dogmatism is well-earned in this case: Serious scholars of Iran all agree that the MEK is universally loathed in Iran, where no one forgets its service to Saddam or its slaughter of Iranian conscripts and others.

Iranian reformers, for their part, fear the MEK is girding to play such a role, and they were aghast at the delisting. “The MEK does not have a political future in Iran, but they will turn into a dangerous arm to serve U.S. interests,” one reformist political analyst told the Financial Times at the time. “Intellectuals have long been disappointed with the U.S. but now even ordinary Iranians realise that the U.S. does not support any democratic change in Iran.” That analyst may have been premature in his denunciation of the U.S. But if Bolton and his fellow ideologues do get a chance to pursue their regime-change designs by arming the MEK and others to carry out attacks, the U.S. can forget being a global bulwark against state-sponsored terror.

With Giuliani, as perhaps with Gingrich and others, the attrac-

tion to the MEK may be more grounded in plain old greed than foreign policy. According to a financial disclosure reported on by The New York Times, Giuliani has been speechifying at hyperspeed for years, collecting \$11.4 million for 124 appearances in just one year—and that was before signing up for the MEK gravy train around 2011. Perhaps he just didn't have time to consider the character of his paymaster.

Or perhaps, in Giuliani, avarice and ideology melt into one another. His last appearance before the MEK's front organization, The National Council of Resistance of Iran, involved a scream fest not unlike his performance at the Republican National Convention. "The ayatollah must go," he yelled. "Gone! Out! No more!"

Whatever the case, the irony seems not to have dawned on America's mayor that his performance was in front of a group that had helped put the ayatollahs in power and that, at least historically, shared their general view on the utility of violence. So Rudy Giuliani, hero of 9/11, is a buckraker with few principles. It's not so surprising to find someone like him near the head of the line for high office. The really depressing thing is—pace Gingrich, Bolton, Townsend, Chao et al.—how many others are behind him in the queue.



The MEK and Its American Fans

November 2016

Dan Benjamin reviews the history of the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) and its support from many American former officials and politicians:

Even more unsettling was the sheer creepiness of the group. While Maryam Rajavi was presiding over enormous conferences with American political celebrities and seas of smiling, waving people in Paris, at Camp Ashraf, the MEK leadership treated its people appallingly. Visitors, including from the U.N., painted a picture of relentless intimidation, shaming and coercion of the inhabitants by camp leaders [bold mine-DL]. The MEK, which is often described as a cult, had a long history of requiring that its members divorce and remain celibate. Now, it leaders were resolved that the group would remain together and none of the members would be relocated individually or in small groups—the Ashraf group was a bargaining chip that the leadership was cynically using for future leverage.

One of the more troubling things about American MEK supporters is their willingness to whitewash the group's past as well as its present-day behavior. They aren't content to work with an avowedly bad group against a common enemy, but feel compelled to pretend that the group is upstanding and noble. At an appearance in Paris last year, Giuliani called the cult leader Maryam Rajavi a "hero," which either suggests that his

MEK
Uncovered

824



understanding of heroism is extremely poor or that he will say anything to get paid.

It is hardly the first time that supporters of regime change in another country have aligned themselves with a disreputable group to pursue their goal, but the sheer dishonesty or credulity required to present a totalitarian cult as a group dedicated to freedom and democracy is nonetheless remarkable. This is perhaps the most insidious part of the MEK boosterism we have seen over the last few years: endorsing their makeover as a “secular, democratic” group and pretending that a group that has virtually no support inside Iran is the country’s “real” opposition. This is not only false, but it also does a real disservice to the Iranian opposition in Iran that wants reform rather than regime change. It also demonstrates contempt for and hostility to the people of Iran, since this same group is respon-

sible for killing so many Iranians when it was serving Saddam Hussein. Above all, it attempts to promote the lie that a policy of regime change is supported by Iranians in order to lend that dangerous and destructive goal the appearance of some legitimacy.



826

STASI: Dear Don, Rudy isn't fit to be our top diplomat, he's Dr. Strangelove on meth

November 2016

Dear Donald,

You and I have known each other for a very long time. You've done me a lot of solids in the past — truthfully more than I've done for you.

I know that during the campaign you were angry with me and you let it be known. But, hell, if you can put aside your differences with Mitt Romney, you can put aside your differences with me — at least for this one emergency appeal.

No, I'm not going to ask you for money. But I am going to ask you for something you will now — with your new gig — find even more important than all the money in your world: It's nothing less than the safety of the world.

Our lives and our children's lives are literally in your hands, and you can endanger all of us by appointing Rudy Giuliani as secretary of state.

He's a man who acted as a mouthpiece for Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), a Marxist Iranian opposition group that was yes, on the State Department terrorist list for killing Americans.

Then there was the money Rudy took from Qatar and Venezuela. How did he miss putting his hand in Putin's deep pocket?

MEK
Uncovered

827



MEK
Uncovered

828

It's one thing that Giuliani behaved, as I've pointed out before, like Dr. Strangelove on meth on the campaign trail. That's the nature of politics. Well, it was the nature of politics during the out-of-control 2016 presidential campaign at least.

Thing is, Rudy Strangelove knew something we didn't, which was that he had much more to gain than Homeland Security: He has almost all the power in the world to gain as secretary of state. No wonder he called you a genius for losing \$916 million buckaroos.

OK, that was funny. This isn't.

I'm begging you, therefore, Donald, to keep us safe by keeping your word about keeping us safe.

We can't be safe with this man at the wheel. He claims to be the world's greatest authority on terrorism. Why? Because he built a bunker in the only place that radical Muslims had bombed in New York City, which was then totally destroyed by radical Muslims in the greatest attack on U.S. soil?

How does this make any sense? Getting mugged doesn't make me a cop for God's sake.

His judgment is impaired. As mayor, Giuliani appointed his former driver, crooked Bernard Kerik, as police commissioner. If he vetted Kerik, perhaps he would have found out what it took the feds 15 seconds to uncover about him. Kerik then went to jail for tax fraud and lying to White House officials.

And considering belligerence isn't usually a qualification for secretary of state, please remember the case of Patrick Dorismond, the unarmed man killed by an undercover officer whose sealed juvenile arrest record Giuliani released. Worse, Dorismond had only been convicted of disorderly conduct. Consider too, the handcuffed Wall Streeters he perp-walked — who were never convicted, although their lives were ruined.

Rudy set out to tame the city once upon a time. Even if he weren't already tarnished, he still couldn't tame the world.

In the words of Hillary Clinton in 2000, "If (Rudy) is leading the rush to judgment in New York, how can we trust him to exercise good judgment in Washington?"

Indeed.

Please, Big D, you announced that no registered state or federal lobbyists would be allowed to serve in your administration, didn't you? Oh, but Giuliani wasn't technically a lobbyist — right? Wrong.

He wasn't personally registered as a lobbyist — but his former firm, Bracewell & Giuliani, was registered as a lobbying firm. He didn't leave the firm until this year!

Yes, the law is unclear on what is deemed freedom of speech and what is considered lobbying. But what do you call someone who received money from a group on the State Department terrorist list, who then gave a speech in D.C. calling upon the State Department to take that group off the terrorist list?

Whatever you call him, just please don't call him secretary of state. Our lives depend on it.

Best,

Your Sometimes Friend,

Linda



829

2017



Trump Cabinet pick paid by controversial Iranian exile group

February 2017

An official in U.S. President Donald Trump's Cabinet and at least one of his advisers gave paid speeches to organizations linked to an Iranian exile group widely accused of killing Americans before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, running donation scams and seeing its members set themselves on fire over the arrest of their leader.

Elaine Chao, confirmed this week as Trump's transportation secretary, received \$50,000 in 2015 for a five-minute speech to the political wing of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, previously called a "cult-like" terrorist group by the State Department. Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani also was paid an unknown sum to talk to the group, known as the MEK.

More than two dozen former U.S. officials, both Republican and Democratic, have spoken before the MEK, including former House Speaker and Trump adviser Newt Gingrich. Some have publicly acknowledged being paid, but others have not. While nothing would have prohibited the paid speeches, they raise questions about what influence the exiles may have in the new administration.

Already, a group of former U.S. officials, including Giuliani, wrote a letter to Trump last month encouraging him to "establish a dialogue" with the MEK's political arm. With Trump's ban

MEK
Uncovered

831



on Iranians entering the U.S., his administration’s call this week to put Iran “on notice” and the imposition of new sanctions on Friday, the exile group may find his administration more welcoming than any before.

A potential alliance with the MEK would link the U.S. to a group with a controversial history that has gone against American interests in the past by supporting Iran’s Islamic Revolution and the U.S. Embassy takeover in Tehran. After fleeing Iran, the MEK joined forces with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. It later exposed details of the clandestine nuclear program run by Iran, which views the MEK as its sworn enemy.

“The Mujahedeen have backed the winning horse. They are going to have some at least entree into the administration,” said Ervand Abrahamian, a professor at the City University of New York who wrote a book on the MEK. “I think it weakens the U.S. because the more they have access to the administration, the more people in Iran are going to be scared of anything the U.S. does.”

The MEK denies responsibility for the killing of Americans in the 1970s, blaming a splinter faction. It also denies financial misdeeds and cultism, and says it has been unjustly demon-

ized by its foes.

The group waged a long political struggle in Europe and the United States to be removed from lists of terrorist organizations. The Obama administration officially lifted that designation in 2012, with then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton saying she was satisfied that the MEK had publicly renounced violence and had committed no confirmed acts of terrorism for more than a decade.

In a letter to The Associated Press, the group's spokesman in Paris, Shahin Gobadi, dismissed the accusations against it now as "stale and threadbare."

"THE AYATOLLAH MUST GO"

The MEK long has cultivated a roster of former U.S. and European officials to attend its events opposing Iran's clerically-run government. It pays for the appearance of many.

Standing before a cheering crowd of MEK supporters in Paris in 2015, Giuliani didn't disappoint.

"The ayatollah must go! Gone! Out! No more!" Giuliani shouted in a speech as American flags waved behind him on giant screens.

"I will not support anyone for president of the United States who isn't clear on that slogan behind me. What does it say? It says regime change!"

Giuliani has acknowledged being paid for his appearances at MEK events. However, he hasn't filed a government disclosure form since his failed 2008 Republican presidential bid, so it's unclear how much the MEK has paid him in total. Giuliani did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment sent through his aides.

As Giuliani spoke in Paris, behind him were a host of other former officials on stage, including Chao, the wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. A former director of the Peace Corps and a labor secretary under President George W. Bush, Chao gave a much more subdued speech focusing on women's rights.





“While discrimination against women (has) been outlawed in other countries, Iran has been legalizing it,” Chao said. “While other countries are empowering women, Iran has been penalizing them.”

Chao had a seat of honor at the Paris event next to Maryam Rajavi, the “president-elect” of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, the political arm of the MEK. She received a \$50,000 honorarium from the MEK-associated Alliance for Public Awareness, according to a report she filed with the U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

Chao received another \$17,500 honorarium for a March 2016 speech she gave to the Iranian-American Cultural Association of Missouri, which MEK opponents also link to the exile group. The Department of Transportation said in a statement that Chao has a “strong record of speaking out in support of democracy and women’s rights in the Middle East,” but “has not spoken to MEK events.”

It added that her speeches were delivered alongside bipartisan members of Congress, governors, prime ministers, ambassadors, generals, former FBI Directors and “many other influential voices.”

Gingrich has also spoken to the MEK before, including at a gala in 2016, although it is not clear whether or how much he was paid. Gingrich could not be reached for comment. The White House also had no comment.

The MEK welcomes the incoming Trump government, as “some people within this administration” plan to change American policies toward Iran, said Mohammad Mohaddessin, the chairman of the foreign affairs committee of its political arm.

“The core of the policy that we are advocating is to be tough with the Iranian regime, to not ignore its crimes against the Iranian people,” Mohaddessin told the AP.

The U.S. Treasury briefly investigated the MEK’s practice of paying American politicians in 2012. A Treasury spokeswoman did not respond to requests for comment about the status of

that probe.

“THE KILLING OF TWO AMERICANS, THIS WAS WORK OF MOVEMENT MUJAHEDDEEN”

The MEK was formed by radicalized university students in 1965. It embraced both Marxism and the idea of an Islamic government after the violent overthrow of the American-backed shah. Their name, Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, means “the People’s Holy Warriors.”

The group at one point successfully infiltrated the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, according to a State Department report. And a series of bombings attributed to the MEK accompanied visits by presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter to Iran, including one to target an American cultural center.

In 1973, MEK assailants wearing motorcycle helmets shot dead U.S. Army Lt. Col. Lewis L. Hawkins, the deputy chief of the U.S. military mission to Tehran, as he walked home from work, according to the State Department.

In 1975, gunmen attacked a car carrying two American airmen, killing them. Hours later, American consular officials received a call claiming the attack for the MEK in revenge for Iran executing prisoners.

“This was work of Movement Mujahedeen of Iran,” the caller said, according to a U.S. diplomatic cable.

In the three years that followed, the MEK killed three American employees of defense contractor Rockwell International and a Texaco executive, according to the State Department and others.

“The Mujahedeen are xenophobic,” a once-secret 1981 CIA assessment on the group said. “Anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism provide cornerstones for the policies.”

The MEK, which now describes itself as being “committed to a secular, democratic, non-nuclear republic” in Iran, blames a Marxist splinter faction of the group for killing the Americans.

After joining in the Islamic Revolution and the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the MEK quickly fell out of favor with

MEK
Uncovered

835



Iran's first Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The MEK declared war on Iran in June 1981. Within days, a bomb exploded at the headquarters of the Khomeini-directed Islamic Republican Party in Tehran, killing at least 72 people. A series of assassinations and attacks followed as MEK leaders and associates fled to Paris. Later expelled from France, the MEK found haven in Iraq amid its grinding, bloody war with Iran. Heavily armed by dictator Saddam Hussein, MEK forces launched cross-border raids into Iran.

After Iran accepted terms of a United Nations cease-fire in 1988, the MEK sent 7,000 fighters over the border. The attack further alienated the group from average Iranians.

The MEK says it renounced violence in 2001. But the U.S. Army's official history of the Iraq invasion in 2003 says MEK forces "fought against coalition forces" for the first weeks of the war, something the MEK denies.

In the chaotic years after the invasion, the MEK itself became a target of violence. The worst came in September 2013, when at least 52 members were shot dead.

Thousands of MEK members were ultimately resettled in Albania.

"CULT-LIKE CHARACTERISTICS"

After siding with Saddam, the MEK's popularity in Iran plummeted. To boost its ranks, the group increasingly began targeting Iranians applying for visas abroad in Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, promising them work, aid in moving to Western countries and even marriage, according to RAND.

"Most of these 'recruits' were brought into Iraq illegally and then required to hand over their identity documents for 'safe-keeping,'" RAND said. "Thus, they were effectively trapped."

The MEK also forced its members to divorce their spouses and separated parents from their children, which the State Department described as "cult-like characteristics." RAND and Abrahamian, the university professor, said the MEK dictated how much its members slept, giving them busy-work tasks

and controlling what outside news they consume.

For years, MEK leader Massoud Rajavi, the husband of Maryam Rajavi, hasn't been seen publicly and is presumed to have died, Abrahamian said. MEK members call him the "Hidden Imam" who will return to Earth as a messiah, Abrahamian said.

When French police arrested Maryam Rajavi in 2003 as part of a terrorism investigation, MEK members responded by lighting themselves on fire in Paris and other European cities. The MEK denies it is a cult.

Over the years, the MEK has been targeted in a series of investigations around the world for running charity scams.

An FBI probe found MEK members hustled travelers arriving to Los Angeles International Airport, asking them to donate after showing them binders of photographs of disaster or torture victims. The money instead went to banks in Belgium, France, Jordan, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to "support MEK operations and activities, including terrorist activities," a 2007 indictment against seven members said.

In Britain, authorities dissolved a charity in 2001 allegedly associated with the MEK that had made an estimated 5 million pounds a year. Its investigation found some donors "were misled into believing they were personally sponsoring individual children when this was not in fact the case."

In the 2003 raids in France, police found \$1.3 million, mostly in \$100 bills, at MEK-affiliated properties.

Mohaddessin, the MEK foreign policy chairman, blames the investigations on a concerted misinformation campaign carried out by Iran. The Islamic Republic has imprisoned and executed the group's members for years.

"These allegations are absolutely false," Mohaddessin said. "There are many cases that were fabricated by the Iranian regime and their agents."

Iran also has alleged the MEK receives foreign support. After the assassination of four nuclear scientists, Iran accused Isra-



MEK
Uncovered

837



el of training and equipping MEK fighters who committed the killings. The MEK called the accusation “absolutely false” at the time, while Israel declined to comment.

In recent months, Saudi Arabia increasingly has shown support for the MEK as it faces off with Iran in wars in Syria and Yemen. The kingdom’s state-run television channels have featured MEK events and comments. Prince Turki al-Faisal, the nation’s former intelligence chief, even appeared in July at an MEK rally in Paris.

“I want to topple the regime too,” the prince said to cheers.

“SKILLED MANIPULATORS OF PUBLIC OPINION”

From protests at the United Nations to their Paris rallies, the MEK has proven over the years to be effective at getting attention.

RAND in 2009 called the group “skilled manipulators of public opinion.” A U.S. diplomatic cable from February of that year released by WikiLeaks described their “extravagantly hospitable, exaggeratedly friendly, culturally-attuned manner.” The cable also mentioned that the MEK had “a history of using intimidation and terrorism for its ends,” which Mohaddessin called an allegation from the Iranian regime.

The MEK’s success in getting former U.S. officials behind them could be seen in a letter dated Jan. 9 sent to Trump just days before his inauguration.

“We repeat the call for the U.S. government to establish a dialogue with Iran’s exile resistance,” read the letter, signed by Giuliani and others.

However, exile groups haven’t always been proven to be reliable American allies in the Middle East. Exiled Iraqi politician Ahmad Chalabi, for instance, heavily lobbied the administration of President George W. Bush to invade by pushing false allegations of weapons of mass destruction and links to al-Qaida.

Iran’s mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment.

But while the MEK continues to pay former U.S. officials for their time, the family of the American lieutenant colonel killed in 1975 has filed a \$35 million federal lawsuit in Colorado against the group and Iran.

The reason for the lawsuit, Lt. Col. Jack Turner's family says, is simple: "Unlike the U.S. hostages, our father never had the chance to come home."



Trump appointee paid \$50,000 by Iranian opposition MEK group

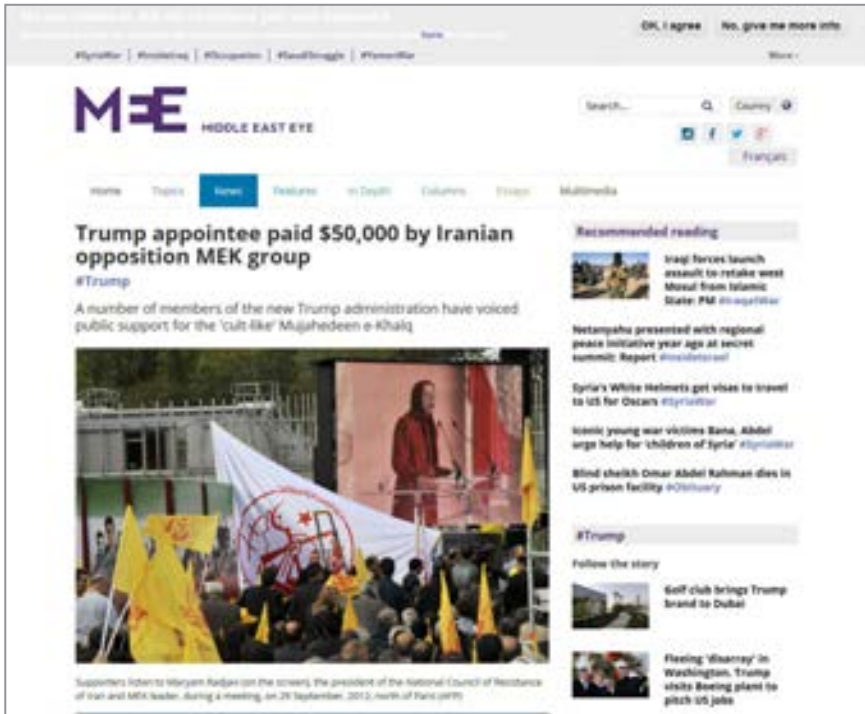
February 2017

A number of members of the new Trump administration have voiced public support for the 'cult-like' Mujahedeen e-Khalq. One of Donald Trump's picks for his new administration was paid \$50,000 by the "cult-like" Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK), a long-standing Iranian opposition group classified as a terrorist organisation by the US until 2012.

Elaine Chao, who Trump confirmed this week as his transportation secretary, was paid the money for a speech to the group in 2015. Former New York mayor Rudy Guiliani, currently Trump's cyber security adviser, was paid an unknown sum to talk to the group.

The MEK was originally formed in 1965 in opposition to the Shah of Iran, and later developed an ideology combining Islamism and Marxism. Although it initially supported the Islamic Revolution against the Shah in 1979, the group turned against the Islamic Republic and started an armed struggle in 1981. The US designated the group a terrorist organisation in 1997. The MEK now claims to have renounced violence. A number of American politicians have promoted the MEK as a viable alternative to the Islamic Republic and successfully pushed for the group to be removed from the terror list in 2012.

The MEK was, for many years, based in Iraq, where they sup-



ported Saddam Hussein in his war with Iran and also reportedly fought against US-led coalition forces after the 2003 invasion. The organisation, which after years of threats and attacks finally relocated to Albania, has been accused by the US State Department of having “cult-like” characteristics.

According to a report by the RAND corporation, a US global policy think tank, the MEK leadership reportedly dictates how much its members sleep, gives them busy work tasks, and controls what news they consume.

In her speech to the group, Chao spoke about the Islamic Republic’s record on women’s rights.

“While discrimination against women [has] been outlawed in other countries, Iran has been legalising it,” she said. “While other countries are empowering women, Iran has been penalising them.”

The Taiwan-born Chao served as deputy secretary of transportation in the 1980s, and was later US labour secretary under President George W Bush. She is the first Asian-American



woman to serve in a presidential cabinet and is the wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Many analysts have been critical of the support shown to the MEK by Republican politicians. Daniel Benjamin, former coordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department between 2009 and 2012, has described the MEK as “universally loathed in Iran, where no one forgets its service to Saddam or its slaughter of Iranian conscripts and others”.

The new Trump administration, which has shown intense hostility to Iran since coming to power in January, has given the group a new opportunity to position itself as a potential successor to the Iranian government.

“The Mujahedeen have backed the winning horse. They are going to have some at least entree into the administration,” said Ervand Abrahamian, a professor at the City University of New York, speaking to the Associated Press.

“I think it weakens the US because the more they have access to the administration, the more people in Iran are going to be scared of anything the US does.”

Deteriorating relations

Relations between Iran and the US have deteriorated sharply since Trump took office last month promising a tough line on what he sees as Iranian belligerence toward US interests.

“Iran would do well to look at the calendar and realise there’s a new president in the Oval Office. And Iran would do well not to test the resolve of this new president,” Vice President Mike Pence told ABC News in an interview taped Saturday.

The tough talk came after Trump’s Pentagon chief, James Mattis, declared last week that Iran was “the single biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world”.

The charged rhetoric has raised questions over whether the United States will abandon commitments it made under a landmark deal - negotiated with several world powers and approved by president Barack Obama in 2015 - that obliged Iran to curtail its nuclear programme in exchange for relief from US

and international sanctions.

“The Iranians got a deal from the international community that again, the president and I and our administration think was a terrible deal,” Pence said.

Although Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have said the United States would stand by the agreement, Pence was less forthcoming.

“Well, we’re evaluating that as we speak,” he said.

“I think the president will make that decision in the days ahead. And he’ll listen to all of his advisers, but make no mistake about it. The resolve of this president is such that Iran would do well to think twice about their continued hostile and belligerent actions.”

US officials said the new sanctions imposed on Friday were in response to Iran’s recent ballistic missile test and its support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who recently targeted a Saudi warship.

The White House has said “nothing is off the table” - even military action.





THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

Trump Is At War With Iran, Not ISIS

February 2017

Trump clearly has no intention of defeating terrorism. They say actions speak louder than words. Looking behind the Twitter storm which creates a smoke and mirrors effect to disguise the Trump administration's true intents, one fact is blindingly clear; for this government, Iranians are first in the firing line.

This, of itself, is not unexpected. On the campaign trail Trump threatened to tear up the nuclear deal with Iran. So it was already clear he's no fan of Iranians.

His first act as president has been to issue a direct and belligerent challenge to Iran – he included Iran in the Muslim ban and then declared that Iran is “on notice” after Iran test-fired a ballistic missile which it says is defensive. Iran is clearly in the crosshairs for Trump and his team.

And the evidence stacks up. As a barometer for any individual or even government's aggressive approach to Iran, support for the Mojahedin Khalq (MEK aka Rajavi cult) is as accurate an indicator as any. The group has advocated violent regime change against Iran for three decades. Its supporters are in doubt that this is a rallying cry for a U.S.-led war.

Even before taking office, revelations about potential Trump administration advisers and officials giving support to the terrorist MEK cult caused concern among foreign policy experts. After all, anti-Iran pundits can choose from literally thousands

MEK
Uncovered

844



of civil groups and personalities to act as advisors and partners in challenging Iran. The MEK's dirty past includes the anti-Imperialist inspired murder of six Americans in pre-revolution Iran which it later celebrated in songs and publications. (The family of U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Jack Turner - "We were the first victims of terror before there was ever a war on terror" - is currently seeking redress for his death.) The new president has apparently brushed aside such concerns and has chosen to surround himself with people who have advocated for the MEK.

By not denouncing the MEK Trump has done several things. One is to signal that he is at war not with Iran but with Iranians. The MEK is hated more profoundly than any of Iran's current political leaders by Iranians inside and outside the country. He also signals that his war is not with ISIS but with the country Iran. Donald Trump rose to victory in part on the promise to take on ISIS and defeat the group. Yet ISIS cannot be defeated except by a coalition of forces that includes Iran. The facts on the ground in Syria and Iraq demonstrate unequivocally that ISIS forces in Aleppo and Mosul have been defeated largely due to the involvement of Iran. Trump clearly has no intention of defeating terrorism.

But most importantly, this tolerance, even warmth, shown toward the MEK in American foreign policy circles is a message





that can be read from afar and by everyone else in the world: the American war box is virtually empty. Aside from a handful of puny sanctions, bringing the MEK into the equation means that not only does the America not have a stick to wave at Iran, it appears foolish enough, befuddled by ideological zeal perhaps, to tie its fate to the most unlucky and doom-laden group there ever was.

Laughably, parasitically, the MEK has consistently tied its fate to whichever it assumed was the winning side. However, the choice of MEK sponsors no longer looks so astute. Ayatollah Khomeini quickly saw through the MEK's smarmy overtures to share power and promptly exiled them from Iran. The next step was to ally with Saddam Hussein against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war – a feat of spectacular treachery for which no Iranian will ever forgive them. After Saddam's fall the MEK believed that the chaos in Iraq which gave rise to the insurrection of Al Qaida in Iraq would somehow carry them forward. The MEK even flirted with support for ISIS and the Syrian Free Army hoping they would find a home in the new Caliphate. Instead, the MEK were evicted from their base and sent into deeper exile in Albania, a country with no axe to grind against Iran. Long term sponsors have included Israel – which tasked MEK operatives with the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists – and the anti-Shia Saudi Arabia. Both countries are bogged down with interminable troubles of their own. And now the MEK are hoping to cosy up with the Trump administration. The Obama administration kept the MEK at arms' length and never entertained direct support for the group. When the government of Iraq held the US, along with the UN, responsible for removing the MEK from Iraq to a third country, the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was forced to agree to remove the MEK from the US terrorism list before any third country would legally be able to accept them on their territory.

Since 2001 Trump's predecessors have built up strong homeland defences and led counter-terrorism efforts particularly

against the threat of ISIS to the US and Europe. It is now likely that this legacy will be squandered by an administration with an overriding hatred of Iran. Instead of understanding the benefit of developing strategic partnerships with countries like Iran and Iraq in the global fight against terrorism, the Trump administration would rather rain down terror on the Iranian people. But the biggest delusion would be to believe that the MEK could be a reliable or effective partner in any sense. If Donald Trump has any insight into his own modus operandi - the erratic demands and refusal to take criticism – he will have a direct view of how the MEK operates. Aligning America's foreign policy with the whims of a mind control cult will not secure victory over Iran. Instead, it will diminish America's standing in the world, and it will certainly not make the world a better or safer place.



