



**MUJAHEDIN-E KHALQ**  
**UNCOVERED** **2**

The Terrorist Group in the Eyes of International Media

**MUJAHEDIN-E KHALQ  
UNCOVERED**

**2**

Habilian Association  
(Families of Iranian Victims of Terrorism)

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 **Preface**  

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This book is the second volume of MUJAHEDIN-E KHALQ UNCOVERED. The first volume was published in 2018 containing over 180 articles gathered from the Western media on the terrorist cult of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (aka MKO, MEK, and PMOI), between the mid-2000s and the beginning of 2017. With the inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the extremists opposing Iran in the White House were presented with an opportunity to bolster their support for this cult; and this has been a mutual one. On the one hand, Trump’s administration officials sided with this terrorist cult and a significant number of his close associates espoused the group. On the other hand, the MEK repeatedly incited the new administration to take severe measures and impose more sanctions against Iran, which all generally targeted the Iranian people.

Perhaps this magnitude of bilateral communications between mid-2017 and termination of Trump’s presidency led a considerable number of Western media outlets, particularly the United States, to focus on the MEK and its relations with Trump administration and highlight the group’s atrocious records of terrorism and deception.

Consequently, with Trump’s presidency coming to an end, an attempt was made to compile and refine all the articles in order to publish the second volume of the book.

These articles vividly demonstrate that the MEK is still a highly dubious and notorious group in the West and despite the efforts to present a different image of itself among Westerners, it has not attained much success.

The Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, which began its activities in 1965, adopted an armed-Marxist ideology from early stages to reach its goals. About two years after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this group once again resorted to violent, armed approaches and carried out numerous terrorist acts against Iranian citizens and officials. Afterwards, the group captured the attention of Iraqi former dictator Saddam and moved to Iraq to operate as his private army. In addition to participating in the war against Iran, the group helped with suppressing Iraq's ethnic and religious minorities. Having been surrounded in a military camp and forcibly disarmed by occupiers of Iraq, the group has been unable to hold guns formally since 2003, shortly after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. At the moment, the group is taking full advantage of the situation through concealing its history of violent terror acts and posing itself as a political opposition group.

Nevertheless, the strategies employed by the MEK toward Iran and the West are fundamentally different. The current functions of this terrorist group inside Iran include establishing terrorist cells called "Insurgent Centers" and "Fifth Round of the Liberation Army's Founders" to fire weapons, stirring up hatred, and promoting violence. Although the MEK deliberately avoided making the slightest reference to these issues in their non-Persian media so as not to draw attention and sway Western public opinion and officials, their Persian media is filled with provocative terrorist acts.

This is the true essence of terrorists all over the world. Inherently, terrorists do not believe in peaceful, political, and social activities, and their ideology relies on the use of force, violence and terror. This is the Mujahedin-e Khalq Uncovered.

Habilian Association

2017



## The Iranian MEK in Albania: Implications and Possible Future Sectarian Divisions

Ebi Spahiu

January 29, 2017

In 2013, the Obama Administration struck a deal with the government of Albania to offer asylum to about 250 members of Mohajedeen-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian “dissident group” exiled from Iran to Iraq during the early years of Khomeini’s regime. The group was once labeled a terrorist organization by the international community due to its track record of orchestrating bombing campaigns in Iran – often targeting American offices, businesses and citizens – as well as other military operations in an attempt to oust the newly established Iranian Islamic regime in the 1970s.

Since 2013, the Obama Administration and Albanian government have extended the agreement, consequently increasing the number of asylum seekers to somewhere in the range of 500-2,000 MEK members. During the summer of 2016, Tirana received the largest contingent of about 1,900 people-



an operation managed by the UNHCR.

Although most local media portray the operation and Albania’s willingness to offer assistance to the dissident group as a humanitarian mission, little discussion has been made regarding the potential implications that MEK’s presence may have for Albania in the long run, and for religious balances that have already been thrown off by Wahabbi and Salafi presence among moderate Muslim communities in recent years.

### **Sectarian Identities and Divides in the Context of Wahhabi Activism and Syria**

Sunni-based Islamist supporters and organizations have a history of operating in Albania and throughout the Western Balkans via funding that often streams from Gulf countries which have exported Wahabbi and Salafi Islamic values and traditions, ones that were previously foreign to Albania’s majority Muslim population which still follows the Hanafi-based teachings inherited by the Ottoman Empire.

According to a Pew Research Center analysis on Albania’s Muslim population, this religious composition is reflective of centuries of religious influences, including Sufi and Shi’a traditions, attested in practices and rituals to this day. It is mainly from this long history that six in ten Muslims do not distinguish their religious affiliation in a sectarian form, such as Shi’a or Sunni, rather simply identify as “just Muslim,” according to findings by Pew.

Despite these historical legacies that have strengthened relations between religious communities, the presence of Wahhabi and Salafi groups over the years has implanted a sectarian identity regarding which most Albanian Muslim practitioners were oblivious in the past. Since the outset of the conflict in Syria, about 150 Albanian citizens and over 500 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia have joined terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq, alongside then-Jabhat Al-Nusra and later IS.

Even though the number of foreign fighters has drastically decreased since 2015, threats persist from non-violent agitations and divisive narratives that continue to dominate some religious landscapes, including negative portrayal

of local Bektashi communities and sectarian rifts which are becoming more pronounced among popular religious leaders.

## **The MEK in Albania and Sectarian Divides**

Since its inception in the 1960s, the MEK has embraced Marxist ideologies and Shiite-centric Islamic values; this has distinguished the group from other Islamist terrorist organizations which have remained more focused on their sectarian identity.

Most people in Albania know little about the MEK, nor the list of other names the group has used to identify itself as a resistance group against Khomeini's theocratic rule, not to mention their activities following the Iranian revolution and their exile to Iraq, where Saddam Hussein offered his support in exchange for their capacities to threaten the Iranian regime.

Over the years, the MEK has renounced all violence and developed closer relationships with officials from the American government, which later removed the group from its official list of terrorist organizations. Despite their engagement with the West, however, the group's history of violence remains an important question often raised by Iran observers and policy-makers, who cast doubt on the group's pledge to have renounced all forms of violence while achieving political objectives.

In 2013 this was apparent when many countries that were approached by the US government to host MEK members refused to do so, out of concern for security implications. Romania is believed to have been the US' preferred host for the MEK, but the Romanian authorities immediately refused. Albania was therefore not the first choice for MEK relocation, but accepted due to its close relations with the US.

The type of security implications their presence may bring is yet to be assessed by Albanian policy-makers, with some speculating that the MEK will establish a base in the country's capital, similar to that of Camp Liberty and Ashraf in Iraq, where they can access weapons and restart their political activities to bring down Iran's regime.

Even though most MEK asylum-seekers seem to lead a quiet life in their new homes, recent events and discussion regarding the potential death of the exiled MEK leader, Massoud Rajavi, suggest that the MEK seeks to regain its political standing in opposition to Iran, and sees its members' relocation to Albania as an opportunity to reengage as a resistance movement against Khomeini's regime, but this time away from the direct threat that Iranian proxy groups posed for them in Iraq.

### **The Paris Event, Albania and Possible Foreign Interests in the New Arrangement**

Since their arrival in Albania, the group appears to have ramped up support in the midst of Albania's political elite, which was highly celebrated during a congress organized by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, held in Paris this past July.

Pandeli Majko, a current Socialist MP and former Prime Minister of Albania during the war in Kosovo, accompanied by over 20 political representatives from Albania, gave an impassioned speech at the Free Iran gathering in Paris where he pledged his support for the refugees currently staying in Albania, as well as the group's struggle to succeed in changing the regime in Iran. This has certainly angered Iranian officials who insist that the MEK seeks to exploit Albania's geographical position in order to form a new camp there.

While Iran's traditional rivalry with Israel might seem to indicate further activity in Albania involving the MEK, available information does not suggest any significant Israeli activity. However, a potential greater concern involves another traditional Iranian adversary – Saudi Arabia – which has been reported as giving help to the MEK. During the event in Paris, several important international figures attended and (as was reported in some anti-Western media) a Saudi government representative made a speech that pledged commitment to help out the movement in bringing down Iran's regime.

#### **Possible Repercussions for Albania: Sectarian Divides and Local Controversy More Likely than Larger Threats**

These developments may have serious repercussions for Albania and Alba-



nian policy-makers who may not foresee the long-term consequences of being involved in the issue, and in expanding their role on foreign policy issues beyond the small Balkan nation's traditional reach.

Since the MEK has renounced all violence, the group does not represent an immediate threat to national security in Albania. However, it does remain an existential threat to the Iranian regime, which over the years has supported significant raids via Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed proxy groups in Iraq to destroy the organization and kill key MEK leaders. It should be remembered that the MEK was brought to Albania under agreement with the Obama Administration directly from Iraq, not from any third country.

Considering these factors, more involvement should be expected from Albanian authorities, even though there are no clear signs that Iran's presence is increasing. It would be significantly harder for Iran to hit MEK in Albania than in its neighboring country of Iraq, though it is still possible.

Of more concern is that the MEK presence poses a risk of inflaming sectarian divides in smaller communities, a phenomenon still in its latent state among Albanian Muslims.

Several online sermons from Sunni-based religious leaders warn their followers of a Shiite presence under NGO programs that aim at recruiting young men and women to follow Quranic teachings and study programs in Iran, but there is never a mention of MEK's presence in Albania and the role they may play.

While a serious sectarian war is farfetched at this point, there is a sectarian narrative to the issue which could be a matter of concern for the future, depending on how strong existing Islamist factions become. These include not just ISIS supporters, but also Turkish and Muslim Brotherhood supporters.

One test will be how well the government manages the MEK, their needs and political objectives. Many Albanians are worried about whether the MEK poses any immediate risk, but nobody is actually talking about Iran's historic and cross-borders feud with the MEK, and how threatened Iran still feels by the group.

Whether Albania is prepared enough to inherit a long-standing struggle between a major regional Middle Eastern power and a cult-like former terrorist organization is yet to be seen, but given Albania's continued struggles with endemic corruption and organized crime, and the slow emergence of religious radicalization as a regional security threat, sectarian rifts may add to the list of challenges facing Albania's political standing. One point of controversy that has already occurred domestically is that the agreement itself is very vague; there has thus been plenty of criticism domestically over a perceived lack of transparency on the terms agreed between Albania and the US.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump Cabinet pick paid by controversial Iranian exile group

Jon Gambrell

February 5, 2017

AP

**D**UBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — 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 that killed Americans before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, ran donation scams and saw 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 Re-

## Trump Cabinet pick paid by controversial Iranian exile group

By JON GAMBRELL February 5, 2017



publican 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 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 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, the same year the State Department delisted the group as

a foreign terrorist organization. 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.

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.

“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 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. Both Iran and the CIA attributed the attack to the MEK, which never claimed responsibility for it.

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.

Fourteen U.S. soldiers were killed and at least another 60 wounded escorting MEK members on supply missions, according to a RAND Corp. report prepared for the office of the U.S. defense secretary. The MEK itself became a target of violence, and in September 2013 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 ‘safekeeping,’” 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.” The MEK dictates how much its members sleep, giving them busy-work tasks and controlling what outside news they consume, according to RAND and Abrahamian, the university professor.

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 spon-

soring 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 Israel 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."

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## AP: Trump appointee spoke at event for “cult-like” Iran exile group

February 5, 2017

**D**UBAI, United Arab Emirates -- An official in U.S. President Donald Trump’s Cabinet and at least one of his advisers gave paid speeches for organizations linked to an Iranian exile group that killed Americans before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, ran donation scams and saw its members set themselves on fire over the arrest of their leader.



Elaine Chao, confirmed this week as Mr. 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 Re-

publican 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 on Iranians entering the U.S. (currently blocked by federal courts), 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 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.

Chao, the wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, spoke before an MEK conference in 2015 in Paris. She also had a seat next to Maryam Rajavi, the “president-elect” of the National Council of Resistance



of Iran, the political arm of the MEK.

Chao 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 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.”

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 AP request for comment sent through his aides.

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 did not 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,” he said.

The White House had no comment.

The MEK formed in 1965. They embraced both Marxism and the idea of

an Islamic government after the violent overthrow of the American-backed shah who ruled Iran at the time. Their name, Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, means “the People’s Holy Warriors.”

They carried out a string of targeted assassinations hitting Iranian officials, as well as Americans. However, the MEK today blames a Marxist splinter faction of the group for killing the Americans.

The MEK fled Iran and later found refuge from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Heavily armed by Saddam, MEK forces launched cross-border raids into Iran during its war with Iraq, further alienating the group from average Iranians. The MEK says it renounced violence in 2001. A couple years later, President Obama removed the group from the State Department list of terrorist organizations.

The State Department has described the MEK as having “cult-like characteristics.” When French police arrested Rajavi in 2003 as part of a terrorism investigation, MEK members responded by lighting themselves. At least two people died.

Over the years, the MEK has said their organization receives money from Iranians to fund their operations. However, the group has been targeted by a series of investigations around the world for running charity scams.

Mohaddessin blames the investigations on a concerted misinformation campaign carried out by Iran.

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 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.

Whether Trump’s administration forms closer ties to the MEK is yet to be seen. However, exile groups haven’t always been proven to be reliable American allies in the Middle East. Exiled politician Ahmad Chalabi heavily lobbied the administration of President George W. Bush to invade Iraq 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 Iran in 1975 has filed a \$35 million federal lawsuit in Colorado against the group and Iran.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Rudy Giuliani and Elaine Chao paid by ‘cult-like’ Iranian group to give speeches

Mark Moore

February 5, 2017

“The Mujahedeen have backed the winning horse. They are going to have some at least entree into the administration,” the Associated Press quoted Ervand Abrahamian, a professor at the City University of New York.

Giuliani did not respond to the Associated Press for comment.



**NEW YORK POST**

The Department of Transportation said Chao has spoke out about democracy and women’s right in the Middle East but “has not spoken to MEK events.”

“While Secretary Chao does have a strong record of speaking out in support of democracy and women’s rights in the Middle East, she has not spoken to MEK. Her speeches regarding empowerment for women were delivered alongside bipartisan members of Congress, Governors, International Prime

Ministers, Ambassadors, Generals, Former FBI Directors and many other influential voices who are passionate democracy and human rights,” a spokesperson said in a statement.



MEK, formed in 1965 by radicalized university students, has been implicated in the death of several Americans, including US Army Lt. Col. Lewis L. Hawkins, who was killed in 1973 by MEK assailants wearing motorcycle helmets as home to work in Tehran.

The group also supported Iran’s Islamic Revolution and the US Embassy takeover in Tehran. MEK left Iran after falling afoul of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and joined

forces with former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, the AP reported. President Trump adviser Rudy Giuliani and Cabinet member Elaine Chao gave paid speeches to a “cult-like” Iranian group that killed Americans before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, according to a report on Sunday.

Giuliani, the former mayor, was paid an unknown amount to speak to the political arm of Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, which the State Department previously called a terrorist group, the Associated Press reported.

Elaine Chao, who was confirmed last week as Trump’s transportation secretary and is the husband of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, was paid \$50,000 for a five minute speech to the group.

The news service said although there was nothing to prevent the paid speeches, the relationship raises questions about what kind of influence the group may have in the White House.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump appointee paid \$50,000 by Iranian opposition MEK group

Middle East Eye

February 6, 2017

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 supported 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.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## What is John McCain thinking?

Michael Rubin

April 17, 2017

Senator John McCain has made moral courage and clarity a pillar of his political career. He has been outspoken in his advocacy for transformative diplomacy, the promotion of freedom and democracy, and robust defense against those who might target or threaten Americans. He is, by any standard, a great and principled American.



How disappointing it is then to see this press release from the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, an Iranian opposition group also known as the Mujahedin al-Khalq (MEK or MKO):

[On] Friday, April 14, 2017, Senator John McCain, Chair of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, met with Maryam Rajavi in Tirana. They discussed the latest developments in Iran, the Iranian regime's criminal meddling in the region, as well as the future prospects. Maryam Rajavi expressed her

appreciations to Senator McCain for his unsparing efforts in support of the MEK from Ashraf and their relocation out of Iraq... On the recent developments in the region, Maryam Rajavi noted, 'The Iranian regime is responsible for committing war crimes in Syria and it must be evicted from that country. Aside from its valuable humanitarian aspect, I believe this is the right policy from a merely political standpoint.'

So far, so good. But the press release continues:

The Chair of the US Senate Armed Services Committee told MEK members, 'You have stood up and fought and sacrificed for freedom, for the right to live free, for the right to determine your own future, for the rights that are God given.' 'I thank you for being an example, an example to the whole world, that those people who are willing to fight and sacrifice for freedom will achieve it, and you are an example to everyone in the world that is struggling for (freedom),' Senator McCain remarked. Senator McCain lauded Maryam Rajavi's leadership. He declared, 'Someday, Iran will be free. Someday, we will all gather in that square.'

Let's put aside the question about whether the press release quoting McCain is accurate: McCain is savvy enough to understand imagery and that the MEK uses his presence to signify endorsement.

But, if the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee chooses to signal his support for the group, what's the big deal? After all doesn't the Mujahedin al-Khalq oppose the Islamic Republic of Iran? Enemy of my enemy etc? Unfortunately, not really.

Consider the Mujahedin al-Khalq's history: It began as a reaction to the growth of Western liberal thought in Iran, embraced anti-American terrorism in the 1970s, and became a significant backer to the Islamic Revolution in Iran before revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini ordered them purged. The Mujahedin responded with terrorism directed not just at the Islamic Republic's top officials, but at the population at large. At its peak in July 1982, the group assassinated, on average, three regime officials per day. The straw that broke the camel's back in Iranian public perception was that they sided with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War. In effect, they became to

ordinary Iranians what John Walker Lindh, the American Taliban, became to the American public.

I spent about seven months in post-revolutionary Iran while working on my doctoral dissertation. As an American traveling around in the mid-1990s, I was somewhat of a novelty and Iranians would seek to talk to me on buses, in hotel lobbies, in taxis, and in restaurants. Few had anything good to say about the Islamic Republic but none had any kind word for the Mujahedin al-Khalq.

After Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the leadership of the organization changed its tune. Whereas once they had embraced Marxism, Islamism, and then during their Iraqi exile, Baathism, they suddenly reinvented themselves rhetorically as democrats. The problem is that they still operate, if not as terrorists, as a totalitarian cult. Masoud and Maryam Rajavi can even tell members who to marry and divorce. Whereas McCain and other U.S. officials were right to condemn the massacre of the Mujahedin al-Khalq by Iranian forces and their Iraqi proxy militias, this does not mean that the group needs to be tolerated or embraced in any way, shape, or form.

The animosity Iranians feel toward the Mujahedin al-Khalq is such that any Western flirtation with Rajavi and the Mujahedin al-Khalq plays into the Islamic Republic's propaganda, allows Tehran to rally Iranians around the flag, and hampers rather than catalyzes regime change.

It is perfectly acceptable to oppose the Islamic Republic—indeed, it is morally curious how so many policymakers can ignore its racism, terrorism, and genocidal incitement. But no one supports the notion of replacing the existing regime with something that is hardly better. With this meeting, McCain has embraced the enemy of our enemy in the Tehran regime, but he has also embraced the enemy of the Iranian people, for whom for so long he has been a valiant champion. Iran can do better than the MEK as it seeks to replace the reprehensible dictatorship now in charge. And so can we.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Debate in the European Parliament 'What is to be done about the Iranian Mojahedin Khalq (MEK)?'

Massoud Khodabandeh

June 2, 2017

A meeting in the European Parliament on 30 May discussed the problems associated with the Mojahedin Khalq Organisation (MEK) both inside the Parliament and across Europe and the wider world.

**IHUFFPOSTI**

The meeting, which was attended by MEPs, researchers and analysts along with representatives of agencies outside the parliament such as security personnel, was organised by Ana Gomes, SND (Portugal) and seconded by Marietje Schaake, ALDE (Netherlands) and Michael Gahler, Christian Democrats (Germany).

All three have a clear record as outspoken critics of Iran's human rights record and are concerned about the impact of MEK activity on this issue.

Two expert speakers were invited to address the



meeting: Nicola Pedde, Director Institute for Global Studies, Italy and Massoud Khodabandeh, Director Middle East Strategy Consultants, UK.

Since all the participants have seen first-hand that the MEK spends enormous amounts of money for publicity and lobbying, the first issue to be discussed was ‘who funds the MEK and what is their agenda?’ It soon became apparent that the MEPs are fully aware that the MEK has never existed as an independent group and has benefitted over three decades from funding streams from specific circles which are trying to engineer regime change in the Middle East.

The question then became whether these sponsors understand that the cost benefit of supporting the MEK is not giving positive returns but in fact has a negative result for them in their regime change agendas.

Further discussion by representatives revealed that the MEK has been shunned by almost every Parliament across Europe.

In spite of this, MEK members can still gain access to the European Parliament because it is an open institution. The problem this presents is the bullying tactics used by the MEK to intimidate MEPs and their staff. Several delegates at the meeting gave first-hand evidence of this. One MEP said that within ten minutes of taking one particular stance he was bombarded by mass emails some of which contained swearing and threats. Delegates agreed that this is incompatible with the fundamental principles of any Parliament in which representatives must be able to speak and act free from any pressure or intimidation.

Nicola Pedde described to delegates his work in the Italian Parliament where

MPs are persuaded to sign petitions by bogus human rights campaigners. Pedde said that when he asked, many of the signatories were unaware that the MEK was behind the petition and didn't realise that various sentences or paragraphs were added afterwards to give support for Maryam Rajavi and her agenda. Pedde said some MPs were even strongly against the MEK and were very angry about being deceived in this way. They had thought they were condemning human rights abuses in Iran, but their names were then misused to depict them as supporters of terrorists in Albania.

The discussion moved on to the problem of accepting the MEK as advocates of human rights for Iran. Ana Gomes said that when Iranian Nobel Human Rights Prize winner Shirin Ebadi visited the European Parliament, she was unequivocal in saying that the MEK do not have the right to be described as human rights activists. Quite the opposite, they are abusers themselves, she said. Massoud Khodabandeh reminded delegates that in a recent interview with AP, Reza Pahlavi – who wants to restore the monarchy to Iran – dismissed the MEK as a cult. In addition, every Iranian opposition group from the Greens to the Nationalists has rejected the MEK as human rights advocates and as a political entity.

More concerning for delegates is that the government of Iran is quick to use the MEK's advocacy for human rights as a means to dismiss the issue, pointing out that the terrorist group murdered thousands of Iranian citizens and still commits human rights abuse against its own members. Massoud Khodabandeh gave an example from the UK House of Lords in which Haleh Afshar – a prominent Iranian feminist and academic who now sits in the House as Baroness Afshar – hosted a parliamentary debate about human rights in Iran. The challenging discussion, with valuable contributions from several informed members, was completely undermined by one of the MEK's supporters who asserted that only Maryam Rajavi and her group could bring freedom and human rights to Iran. The government of Iran cannot be expected to even respond to such a debate said Khodabandeh.

Nicola Pedde made an interesting comment when he said that the MEK cannot be considered as a viable force because, as a result of its cultish behaviour, the MEK do not have a second generation. They have effectively killed themselves, he told delegates, because marriage and family are banned for all members.



The third issue to be discussed was the MEK presence in Albania. Delegates heard how the MEK had been forced to leave Iraq and how the Americans arranged for the UN to be able to transfer them to Albania. The government of Iraq was relieved to be rid of three thousand MEK who had been part of Saddam Hussein's repressive forces, but the problem has now simply been moved to Albania. The Americans promised help to de-radicalise the MEK members. But, as Massoud Khodabandeh pointed out, this did not happen and the group was allowed to re-group as a terrorist cult and treat its members as modern slaves.

Delegates discussed Albania's candidature to join the European Union in light of this situation and agreed that this is not just incompatible but that having trained terrorists on the doorstep of Europe is already a security threat to Europe. Delegates stressed that European security services need to take this threat seriously from now.

Reports also described the human rights abuses inflicted on MEK members by their own leaders. They are living in conditions of modern slavery because the UNHCR is acting illegally by paying refugee allowances to the organisation instead of to the individual members. This means members are forced into dependency on the group and cannot leave. Members are also prevented from contacting their families or even other former members so they do not



have any recourse to external help or support.

As the two speakers gave their expert analysis throughout the meeting, they also offered suggestions for solutions. Khodabandeh urged delegates to put pressure on the Albanian authorities and the UNHCR to resolve the hostage condition of MEK members in Albania.

Pedde said MEPs should be briefed about the danger of supporting human rights through using groups like the MEK.

At the end the meeting was also opened to the audience for discussion. Former MEK members, Ali Akbar Rastgou, Batoul Soltani, Reza Sadeghi and Ghorban Ali Hossein Nejad were able to join the discussion at this time.

In conclusion delegates discussed various solutions which are open to them. It was important, they said, to find ways to tackle these problems because parliament cannot be held hostage to bullies. A package of activities was agreed in order to curtail the MEK's deceptive and intimidating activities in Parliament. Other solutions to the wider problems were also agreed and will be put in place throughout the rest of the year.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



Paul R. Pillar

June 7, 2017

**I**t appears the most immediate American response to the attacks will be sanctions on, not sympathy for, the victim.

For Americans fed a diet of rhetoric about Iran that constantly links it to the sending, not the receiving, end of terrorism—in which “the leading state sponsor of terrorism” is the adjectival phrase routinely affixed to Iran, and in which official rhetoric such as President Trump’s speech in Riyadh mashes Iran together with Sunni Islamist terrorism of the ISIS variety into one undifferentiated blob of evil—the deadly attacks today in Tehran generate much cognitive dissonance. But however disorienting this news may have been, it is true. An obviously well-planned operation struck at the heart of Iran, at its parliament and the monument to the Islamic Republic’s founder. At least a dozen people were killed and dozens more injured. The credibility of the claim



of responsibility by ISIS is enhanced by the group’s posting of video footage from the attack.

For anyone looking beyond rhetoric and at reality, the attack is no surprise. Iran has been one of the staunchest and most active foes of ISIS. Probably the main reason an attack like this had not happened any earlier is the difficulty that ISIS has had in finding recruits among Iranians. Iran has, partly with its own personnel but mainly through material support of clients and allies, been a leader in combating ISIS, especially in Iraq and to a lesser extent in Syria. Many Iraqis give Iran, with good reason, the main credit for saving Baghdad from ISIS when the group was making its dramatic territorial gains in northern and western Iraq in 2014. If the United States could overcome its current hang-up about doing any business with Iran, it would find a worthwhile partner in many aspects of counterterrorism, especially as far as the fight against ISIS is concerned.

There has long been a willingness, and a necessary awareness of shared interest, on the Iranian side. In September 2001, immediately after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, both Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and then-President Mohamed Khatami strongly condemned the attacks. Expressions of sympathy in Iran for the American victims included candlelight vigils and observing a minute of silence by tens of thousands of people at a sporting event. Two weeks after the attack, Khatami stated, “Iran fully understands the feelings of the Americans about the attacks in New York and Washington.” Khatami correctly noted that American administrations had been at best indifferent about terrorist attacks in Iran since the revolution of 1979, but that Iranians felt differently and were expressing their sympathies accordingly.

We wait to hear from the Trump administration the kind of expression of sympathy and solidarity that commonly is offered to foreign nations that have become victims of major terrorist attacks. We should not hold our breath while waiting. The Iranians certainly aren’t. They have experienced a long history of American postures toward Iran, in the context of a common terrorist threat, that have ranged from indifference at best to door-slamming at worst. In the first few months after 9/11, Iranian officials worked cooperatively and effectively with U.S. officials to midwife a new regime in Afghani-

stan to replace the Taliban. The Iranians thought this could be the beginning of further cooperation against a common threat. But then the United States slammed the door shut, as George W. Bush declared an axis of evil in which Iran was lumped together with North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

The principal perpetrator of terrorism in Iran over the past four decades has been the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), the Marxist/Islamist cult/terrorist group that prior to the revolution had claimed Americans among its victims. Thanks largely to the MEK's activity, Iran necessarily has had much experience in countering terrorism. Khamenei lost the use of his right arm when he was injured by an MEK bomb in an assassination attempt in 1981. The U.S. handling of the MEK in recent years has seen the U.S. Government succumbing to a well-financed lobbying campaign on behalf of the group, with that campaign winning much support for the group in the U.S. Congress and the group eventually being removed from the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations. If the crippled Khamenei exhibits some reflexive anti-U.S. sentiments, do you suppose this history has something to do with it?

Right now, on the very day of the terrorist attacks in Tehran, the United States Senate is scheduled to take its first vote on a bill that would impose still more sanctions on Iran. It appears the most immediate American response to the attacks will be sanctions on, not sympathy for, the victim.

In the months ahead, Iran may take actions outside its borders in response to the attacks. The United States, ever since 9/11, has claimed a right for itself to be ruthlessly aggressive in the name of responding to terrorism, lashing out with force while sometimes being little restrained by collateral damage or international law (not to mention its own constitutional requirements). Iran may see a need to be more aggressive in places such as Iraq or Syria in the interest of fighting back against ISIS. Will the United States grant Iran the same kind of slack it grants itself? Or, as has been customary in opposing anything Iran does and taking no account of exactly what interests are being advanced or threatened, will the Iranian responses be denounced as more "nefarious," "malign," and "destabilizing" behavior?

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Sordid History Of State Sponsored Terrorism Against Iran

Eric Draitser

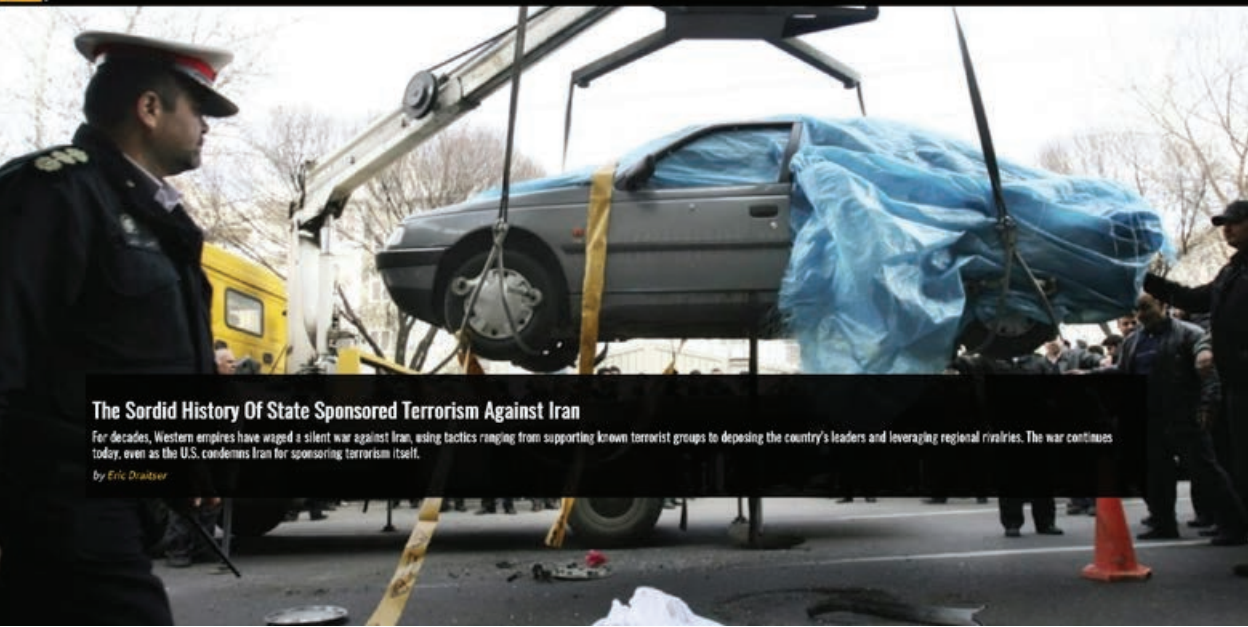
June 13, 2017

For decades, Western empires have waged a silent war against Iran, using tactics ranging from supporting known terrorist groups to deposing the country's leaders and leveraging regional rivalries. The war continues today, even as the U.S. condemns Iran for sponsoring terrorism itself.



NEW YORK (Opinion)— With blood still fresh on the streets of Tehran after last week's deadly terror attack, the U.S. was quick to condemn the attacks. But in a sadly predictable move, President Donald Trump's White House also blamed the victim, condemning Iran as a sponsor of terrorism.

While this may seem like merely the latest instance of insensitivity on Trump's part, it is, in fact, emblematic of the strategy of supporting terrorism against Iran that Washington has employed for decades.



## The Sordid History Of State Sponsored Terrorism Against Iran

For decades, Western empires have waged a silent war against Iran, using tactics ranging from supporting known terrorist groups to deposing the country's leaders and leveraging regional rivalries. The war continues today, even as the U.S. condemns Iran for sponsoring terrorism itself.

by Eric Draitser

The official White House statement, while expressing grief over the attacks, was noteworthy for implying that Iran itself was responsible for the tragedy. “We underscore that states that sponsor terrorism risk falling victim to the evil they promote,” reads the second sentence of the statement.

Aside from the sheer tastelessness and callous disregard for the victims of the attack, the irony of the official statement was obviously lost on Trump. Perhaps if Trump would’ve chosen to pull his head out of the posteriors of Saudi oil executives, he might realize that it is the U.S., not Iran, that has a long history of sponsoring terrorism to which it later falls victim.

Moreover, if Trump had a sense of history beyond having watched all ten seasons of *Ice Road Truckers*, he would know that Iran has, for decades, been the victim of a terror campaign backed both directly and indirectly by the United States in the hopes of bringing regime change to the Islamic Republic, returning the country to its place as energy footstool of the West. Perhaps, Mr. President, you could consider reading on. You might learn something.

## The recent history of terrorism against Iran

The subject of terrorism directed against the Islamic Republic of Iran would likely need a dissertation-length analysis well beyond the scope of this article.

However, even a cursory examination of the use of terror against Iran reveals a number of worrying trends, with all roads leading West.

Put another way, terrorism against Iran is as American as apple pie; as British as shepherd's pie; as Israeli as stolen Palestinian pie.

For instance, take the oft-touted “freedom fighters” of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK; also known as MKO), a terrorist group hailed as heroes by the U.S. neoconservative establishment, despite having been officially recognized by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization from 1997 through 2012. Indeed, so warm and cozy were these terrorists with policy-makers, including key government officials, that through an intensive lobbying campaign, including advocacy from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the MEK was officially removed from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Never mind the fact that MEK was implicated by the Obama Administration itself as having colluded with Israel in assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists, a blatant violation of international law. But of course, this was nothing for MEK, whose history is one of assassination and terror against Iran.

As Anthony Cordesman and Adam C. Seitz noted in their book “Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Birth of a Regional Nuclear Arms Race?”:

“Near the end of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, Baghdad armed the MEK with heavy military equipment [provided by the US] and deployed thousands of MEK fighters in suicidal, mass wave attacks against Iranian forces...In April 1992, the MEK conducted near-simultaneous attacks on Iranian embassies and installations in 13 countries...In April 1999, the MEK targeted key Iranian military officers and assassinated the deputy chief of the Iranian Armed Forces General Staff...The pace of anti-Iranian operations increased during “Operation Great Bahman” in February 2000, when the group launched a dozen attacks against Iran.”

It should also be remembered that the U.S. opened its military base in Iraq to MEK, which used Camp Ashraf (also known as Camp Liberty) as a safe hav-

en and staging area until it was closed (and MEK members killed) by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

Perhaps a hundred other examples of MEK terrorism against Iran, sponsored and backed by the U.S., could be provided. Suffice to say that the removal of MEK from the U.S. government's official terror organization list was the result of a well-funded and well-orchestrated lobbying campaign with many key allies on Capitol Hill and the Beltway, including some of the most influential neoconservative figures, such as Max Boot, Daniel Pipes, David Horowitz and Rudy Giuliani.

Another way of looking at this relationship would be to say that the U.S. has been the principal sponsor of one of the most violent and prolific anti-Iranian terrorist groups. And they are certainly not alone.

Washington has long been seen by many as a backer of, and potential handler for, the organized crime and terror organization known as Jundallah. This notorious terror organization, which has operated on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border in the region of Sistan-Baluchestan, has been led for decades by the Rigi family, a well-known anti-government crime family, and has been linked a number of high-profile terror attacks in recent years, including a deadly October 2009 bombing that killed over 40 people, including 15 Iranian Revolutionary Guard members.

Counterterrorism experts have long been aware of Jundallah's historic ties to both U.S. and Israeli intelligence. As Foreign Policy reported in 2012, Israeli Mossad and U.S. CIA operatives essentially competed with one another for control of the Jundallah network for years. The report noted that:

“The [U.S. government] memos also detail CIA field reports saying that Israel's recruiting activities occurred under the nose of U.S. intelligence officers, most notably in London, the capital of one of Israel's ostensible allies, where Mossad officers posing as CIA operatives met with Jundallah officials.”

Consider for a moment the reality of what the report illustrated: U.S. intelligence officials were livid that their Israeli counterparts would meet with



Jundallah while posing as CIA agents. Not only does this signal a turf war between the two ostensible allies, it indicates a much deeper and more intimate relationship between Western intelligence agencies and the anti-Iranian terror group. Considering Jundallah became the battleground between the CIA and Mossad, it's not a stretch to say that the organization is, to some degree, influenced or even directly controlled by the U.S.

Like Jundallah, Jaish al-Adl is a terror group operating in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, as well as Pakistan's Balochistan Province. The group has carried out numerous attacks against Iranian government institutions, including one infamous incident in March 2014 in which five Iranian border guards were kidnapped, with one being executed later.

According to the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium:

“[Jaish al-Adl is] an extremist Salafi group that has since its foundation claimed responsibility for a series of operations against Iran's domestic security forces and Revolutionary Guards operating in Sistan and Balochistan province, including the detonation of mines [link added] against Revolutionary Guards vehicles and convoys, kidnapping of Iranian border guards and attacks against military bases... Jaish al-Adl is also opposed to the Iranian Government's active support of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, which they regard as an attack on Sunni Muslims... Jaish ul-Adl executes cross-border operations between the border of Iran and Pakistan and is based in the Baluchistan province in Pakistan.”

Jaish al-Adl is certainly not riding alone on the terror train, as their cousins Ansar al-Furqan – a fusion of the Balochi Harakat Ansar and Pashto Hizb al-Furqan, both of which have been operating along Iran's eastern border with Pakistan – have entered the anti-Iran fray in recent years.

According to the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium:

“[Ansar al-Furqan] characterize themselves as Mujahideen against [sic] the Shia government in Iran and are linked to Katibat al Asad Al 'Ilamiya; Al-Farooq activists; al Nursra Front (JN), Nosrat Deen Allah, Jaysh Muhammad, Jaysh al 'Adal; and though it was denied for some time, appears to have at

least personal relationships with Jundallah...The stated mission of Ansar al Furqan is ” to topple the Iranian regime...”

Here one sees the intersection of the war against Iran and the ongoing war in Syria. Sunni extremist organizations such as Jaish al-Adl and Ansar al-Furqan see their war against Iran as an extension of the war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, itself part of the broader jihad against Shia Islam.

## **Weaponizing Iraq’s Kurds against Iran?**

Thanks to WikiLeaks, it is well-documented fact that Israel, as well as the U.S., have long attempted to use Kurdish groups such as PJAK (an Iraqi Kurdish terror group) to wage continued war against Iran for the purposes of destabilizing its government. At the same time, however, both Washington and Tel Aviv have been involved on the ground with the Kurdish Special Forces by attempting to use them against Iran.

As Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh noted in 2004:

“The Israelis have had long-standing ties to the Talibani and Barzani clans [in] Kurdistan and there are many Kurdish Jews that emigrated to Israel and there are still a lot of connection. But at some time before the end of the year [2004], and I’m not clear exactly when, certainly I would say a good six, eight months ago, Israel began to work with some trained Kurdish commandoes, ostensibly the idea was the Israelis — some of the Israeli elite commander units, counter-terror or terror units, depending on your point of view, began training — getting the Kurds up to speed.”

Iran’s leaders have been keenly aware of the presence of Israeli special forces and intelligence on the ground in Kurdistan, knowing that ultimately it is Tehran in the crosshairs. And indeed, that has been the recent history of relations between Israel and the Barzani/Talabani-led Iraqi Kurds. As pro-Israeli blogger Daniel Bart noted:

“During most of that time there were usually some 20 military specialists stationed in a secret location in southern Kurdistan. Rehavam Zeevi and Moshe Dayan were among Israeli generals who served in Kurdistan...The Israelis

trained the large Kurdish army of Mustafa Barzani and even led Kurdish troops in battle...The “secret” cooperation between Kurdistan and Israel is mainly in two fields. The first is in intelligence cooperation and this is hardly remarkable as half the world including many Muslim states have such relationships with Israel. The second is influence in Washington.”

Here again one sees the rich diversity of tactics employed by the U.S. and Israel against Iran. And while no one should be surprised that Washington and Tel Aviv would use regional antipathy and rivalries to gain leverage over and ultimately destabilize Iran, the use of terrorist groups as a weapon might come as a surprise to the uninitiated. But indeed, terrorism has been perhaps the most potent weapon in this war.

### **A new chapter in an old story**

For Iran, the last seventy years have demonstrated that so-called “Western democracies” are actually anti-democratic and function as state sponsors of terrorism – precisely the terms hurled at Iran on a near-daily basis in the corporate media. From the CIA and MI6’s “original sin” of deposing Iran’s democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in a coup d’etat in 1953, to imposing the U.S. puppet Shah with his secret police, torture chambers and forced disappearance of dissidents, the U.S. and its allies have been waging a terror war against the people of Iran for decades.

And what exactly is the great sin of the Iranian people? For one, they had the misfortune of residing in a country that sits atop trillions of dollars in energy reserves, making it a prime target for empires throughout the last century. Additionally, with its large, well-educated population, Iran is a lucrative market for Western corporations, so long as the pesky democratically elected government can be removed as an obstacle. And Iran, strategically located along both the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea, bordering the Middle East and South Asia, forms a critical node in the projection of power for all Western empires, including the U.S.

For these reasons, the Islamic Republic is rightly seen by Tel Aviv and Riyadh as a regional rival, a growing power that challenges Israeli-Saudi hegemony in the region. So it should come as no surprise that Iran has been repeatedly

victimized by Western-sponsored terrorism.

And so, when the Orange Buffoon currently occupying the White House, or any of the neocons who have held the reins of US foreign policy for years, blasts Iran as a sponsor of terror at precisely the moment the country is reeling from a national tragedy, it is rather revealing. Because, indeed, it is the US and its closest allies that have the long and sordid track record of sponsoring terrorism, not Iran.

So when Trump or any of the neocons who have held the reins of U.S. foreign policy for years blasts Iran as a sponsor of terror at precisely the moment the country is reeling from a national tragedy, it is rather revealing. It is the U.S. and other Western powers that have allowed the ISIS (Daesh) to proliferate, backed al-Qaeda, and sponsored myriad terror groups in waging war against Iran. It is Washington, Tel Aviv and Riyadh that have cast Iran as the villain and painted terror groups as legitimate resistance against the “mullocracy.”

Here again, when it comes to terrorism and U.S. foreign policy, we see the pot calling the kettle black. However, given Iran’s unwillingness to be cowed by terror, no one should be surprised if the kettle finally boils over.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump's Provocative Rhetoric Against Iran

Mohsen Solhdoost

June 29, 2017

President Donald J. Trump, in a White House statement released on June 7, expressed sympathy with the victims of the terrorist attack on Iran's parliament. Yet, his message suggested that Iranians deserved the attack.

Such a response to a tragic incident combined with the Californian congressman, Dana Rohrabacher, proposing to support ISIS and other Sunni groups to launch further attacks on the Shiite state, once again, recalls the misguided US stated goal of ushering in an American style of democracy in specific Middle Eastern countries including Iran.

First, it should be noted that dialing up a diplomatic tone is not peculiar to President Trump. His predecessors, in fact, did a lot more. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used the term 'rogue state' in his foreign policy rhetoric to refer to Iran, Iraq,



North Korea and Libya and enforced toughest of economic sanctions particularly on Iran.

Former President George W. Bush in his 2002 State of the Union Address declared a 'War on Terror' and mentioned that states like Iran, Iraq, and North Korea constitute an 'Axis of Evil' as they sponsor terrorism worldwide. Mr. Bush emphasized that the axis of evil should be denied any opportunity to destabilize the world as such. The same year, then-Undersecretary of State, John Bolton, in his 'Beyond the Axis of Evil' speech, added Cuba, Libya, and Syria to the list.

U.S. foreign policy actions towards these countries have exposed the American misperception of democratization processes and state-building strategies in the Middle East since Cold War. Using controversial means for promoting democracy, on the one hand, attests to U.S. anti-terror posturing, and on the other hand, betrays the contrary. Fundamentalist groups and terrorist organizations such as Taliban and Al-Qaeda emerged following U.S. support of extremist groups who were fighting the pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Likewise, providing unrestricted military support to Syrian opposition groups to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the hope of establishing a democracy has resulted in the expansion of various armed, and quite radical, groups since 2011.

In the case of Iran, perhaps the most infamous U.S. foreign policy move, which significantly undermined Iranians' quest for democracy, was the 1953 coup that led to subversive actors toppling the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Since 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, U.S., in accordance with its democratization strategies, has officially continued to support insurgencies, ethnic minority groups, terrorist organizations, and belligerents to sabotage the Iranian state power. The U.S. has always picked up groups that subscribed to either fundamentalist ideologies, separatist ideas, or extreme political notions so that they could be easily mobilized against Iranian ruling power. In pursuing such a foreign policy towards Iran, U.S. has also involved Iran's regional adversaries.

A prime example is the terrorist organization Mujahedin-E-Khalq (MEK). By running bombing campaigns and terror attacks in Iran, MEK has not only victimized Iranian civilians but also targeted Americans since the 1970s. Considering MEK as a viable alternative to the current Iranian government, the U.S. has been providing financial support, training, and weapons to this group to generate leverage against Iran.

Several U.S. officials, including members of the U.S. Congress, former directors of the CIA and the FBI pushed for delisting this designated terrorist group back in 2012. After Mrs. Clinton removed this group from the list of terrorist organizations, U.S. officials, along with representatives from their regional allies such as Saudi Arabia, publicly expressed their explicit support and endorsement of MEK.

In a letter to the President-elect Trump, former U.S. officials made strong recommendations to continue to support MEK in order to establish a secular democratic republic in Iran. In addition to MEK, the U.S., collaborating with Saudi Arabia and Israel, had an ongoing program to destabilize the Iranian theocracy via Jundallah, an extremist Sunni group which was made up of members of the Baluchi tribe in the southeast of Iran.

Only in 2010, the U.S. Department of State designated Jundallah as a terrorist organization after this group had killed scores of Iranian civilians as well as government officials in terror attacks since its inception in 2003. Similarly, several Kurdish separatist groups such as PAK and PEJAK, which have staged multiple terrorist attacks in Iran, have received support from U.S. under the rubric of democratization.

As the former congressman, Dennis Kucinich, noted in 2006, it is hard to imagine how terrorist groups such as PEJAK and MEK might have cut a swath of terror across Iran without at least the tacit approval, if not explicit support, by the U.S. It should be highlighted that the U.S. complicity or direct involvement in fomenting opposition and supporting military operations in Iran among violent proxy groups such as MEK is, in fact, incongruent with the objectives of the 'War on Terror' if not against the core values upheld by liberal democracies.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Here's Why Washington Hawks Love This Cultish Iranian Exile Group

Mehdi Hasan

July 7, 2017

The MEK, an ex-terrorist group pushing regime change in Iran, aligns with D.C.'s most hawkish denizens — and also cuts fats checks for them.

What were a Saudi prince, a former Republican House Speaker and a former Democratic vice-presidential candidate doing together in a suburb of Paris last weekend?

Would you be surprised to discover that Prince Turki Bin Faisal, Newt Gingrich and Joe Lieberman were speaking on behalf of a group of Iranian exiles that was officially designated a “Foreign Terrorist Organization” by the United States government between 1997 and 2012?

Iran hawks long ago fell head over heels for the Mojahedin-e Khalq, known as the MEK, and loudly and





# HERE'S WHY WASHINGTON HAWKS LOVE THIS CULTISH IRANIAN EXILE GROUP

The MEK, an ex-terrorist group pushing regime change in Iran, aligns with D.C.'s most hawkish denizens — and also cuts fats checks for them.

Mehdi Hasan

July 7 2017, 4:30 p.m.

successfully lobbied for it to be removed from the State Department list of banned terror groups in 2012. Formed in Iran in the 1960s, the MEK, whose name translates to “Holy Warriors of the People,” was once an avowedly anti-American, semi-Marxist, semi-Islamist group, pledged to toppling the U.S.-backed Shah by force and willing to launch attacks on U.S. targets. The MEK even stands accused of helping with the seizure of hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran; the group condemned the hostages’ release as a “surrender” to the United States. But after the Iran’s clerical rulers turned on the group in the early 1980s, its leaders fled the country and unleashed a series of bombings across Iran.

These days, the organization — run by husband and wife Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, though the former’s whereabouts are unknown and he is rumored to be dead — claims to have renounced violence and sells itself to its new American friends as a 100 percent secular and democratic Iranian opposition group. The biggest problem with the MEK, however, is not that it is a former terrorist organization. Plenty of violent groups that were once seen as “terrorists” later abandoned their armed struggles and entered the corridors of power — think of the Irish Republican Army or Mandela’s African National Congress.

Nor is it that the MEK lacks support inside of the Islamic Republic, where it has been disowned by the opposition Green Movement and is loathed by

ordinary Iranians for having fought on Saddam Hussein's side during the Iran-Iraq war.

Rather, the biggest problem with U.S. politicians backing the MEK is that the group has all the trappings of a totalitarian cult. Don't take my word for it: A 1994 State Department report documented how Massoud Rajavi "fostered a cult of personality around himself" which had "alienated most Iranian expatriates, who assert they do not want to replace one objectionable regime for another."

You think only people inside of dictatorships are brainwashed? A 2009 report by the RAND Corporation noted how MEK rank-and-file had to swear "an oath of devotion to the Rajavis on the Koran" and highlighted the MEK's "authoritarian, cultic practices" including 'mandatory divorce and celibacy' for the group's members (the Rajavis excepted, of course). "Love for the Rajavis was to replace love for spouses and family," explained the RAND report.

You think gender segregation inside of Iran is bad? At Iraq's Camp Ashraf, which housed MEK fighters up until 2013, lines were "painted down the middle of hallways separating them into men's and women's sides," according to RAND, and even the gas station there had "separate hours for men and women."

You might understand why a Saudi prince, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, or uber-hawk and former Bush administration official John Bolton — who all attended the Paris rally — might be willing to get behind such a weird collection of fanatics and ideologues. But what would make a liberal Democrat from Vermont such as Howard Dean — who has suggested Maryam Rajavi be recognized as the president of Iran in exile — want to get into bed with them? Or Georgia congressman and civil rights hero John Lewis, who spoke out in favor of the MEK in 2010?

Could it be because of the old, if amoral, adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"? Perhaps. Could it be the result of ignorance, of senior U.S. figures failing to do due diligence? Maybe.

Or could it be a consequence of cold, hard cash? “Many of these former high-ranking U.S. officials — who represent the full political spectrum — have been paid tens of thousands of dollars to speak in support of the MEK,” revealed a wide-ranging investigation by the Christian Science Monitor in 2011.

In Washington, D.C., money talks. Whether you’re a Democrat like Dean or a Republican like Bolton, a former head of the CIA like Porter Goss or an ex-head of the FBI like Louis Freeh, what seems to matter most is that the MEK can cut fat checks.

Take Gingrich, who once lambasted Barack Obama for “bowing to the Saudi king” but has himself been caught on camera bowing to Maryam Rajavi. The former House speaker bizarrely compared Rajavi to George Washington in his speech in Paris over the weekend.

Or Giuliani, “America’s Mayor” and self-styled anti-terror hawk, who nevertheless has had no qualms accepting thousands of dollars since 2010 to shill for a group that murdered six Americans in Iran in the mid-1970s; joined with Saddam Hussein to repress Iraq’s Kurds in the early 1990s; allegedly worked with Al Qaeda to make bombs in the mid-1990s; and fought against U.S. troops in Iraq in 2003.

Have these people no shame? To quote Suzanne Maloney, an Iran analyst at Brookings and a former adviser to the State Department: “How cheaply Gingrich/Giuliani/Bolton/Lieberman value their own integrity to sell out to MEK cult.”

Meanwhile, regime change in Tehran is very much back on the agenda in Donald Trump’s Washington. Candidate Trump, who blasted George W. Bush’s Middle East wars of aggression, has been replaced by President Trump, who appointed Iran hawks such as James Mattis and Mike Pompeo to run the Pentagon and the CIA, respectively; counts MEK shills such as Giuliani and Gingrich among his closest outside advisers; and appointed Elaine Chao, who took \$50,000 from the Rajavis for a five-minute speech in 2015, to his cabinet.

Let's be clear: The Trump administration, the Saudis and the Israelis — who have “financed, trained and armed” the MEK in the past, according an NBC News investigation — are all bent on toppling Iran's clerical rule; they long for a bad sequel to the Iraq war. And Maryam Rajavi's MEK is auditioning for the role of Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress: The group's 3,000-odd fighters, according to former Democratic senator-turned-MEK-lawyer Robert Torricelli last Saturday, are keen to be the “point of the spear.”

That way madness lies. Have U.S. political, intelligence, and military elites learned nothing from their Mesopotamian misadventure and the disastrous contribution of Iraqi exiles such as Chalabi? Well, the brainwashed fanatics of the MEK make the INC look like the ANC.

It is difficult, therefore, to disagree with the verdict of Elizabeth Rubin of the New York Times, who visited the MEK at Camp Ashraf back in 2003 and later “spoke to men and women who had escaped from the group's clutches” and “had to be reprogrammed.” The MEK, warned Rubin in 2011, “is not only irrelevant to the cause of Iran's democratic activists, but a totalitarian cult that will come back to haunt us.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## This Group Hopes to Push America toward Regime Change in Iran

Ted Galen Carpenter

July 17, 2017

**T**he Trump administration needs to avoid the Mujahedeen Khalq like the plague.

American policymakers and pundits have an unfortunate history of embracing odious foreign political movements that purport to be democratic. During the Cold War, embarrassing episodes included Washington's support for the Nicaraguan Contras and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. The post-Cold War era provides ample evidence that influential Americans have not learned appropriate lessons from those earlier blunders. The Clinton administration made common cause with the Kosovo Liberation Army, which proceeded to commit numerous war crimes during—and following—its successful war of secession against Serbia. Both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations allied with Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress (INC). The INC's false in-

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telligence regarding Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction, which the New York Times and other prominent media outlets reflexively circulated, was one of the major factors that prompted the United States to launch its ill-starred military intervention in Iraq.

There is mounting danger that the Trump administration is flirting with committing a similar blunder—this time in Iran. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was asked explicitly by Rep. Ted Poe whether the United States supported a policy of regime change in Iran when he testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in June 2017. Poe argued that “there are Iranians in exile all over the world. Some are here. And then there’s (sic) Iranians in Iran who don’t support the totalitarian state.” Tillerson replied that the administration’s policy toward Iran was still “under development,” but that Washington would work with “elements inside Iran” to bring about the transition to a new government. In other words, regime change is now official U.S. policy regarding Iran.

That strategy entails numerous problems. An especially troubling one is that the most intense opposition force (inside and especially outside Iran) is the Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK). Although Tillerson did not explicitly mention

the MEK, any U.S. promotion of dissidents would almost certainly have to include that faction. More moderate reformists have repeatedly rejected an American embrace, justifiably concerned that such an association would destroy their domestic credibility. Indeed, a significant segment of Iranian moderates endorsed President Hassan Rouhani and were a major factor in his decisive reelection victory over a hard-line opponent in the 2017 election.

The MEK's history should cause any sensible U.S. administration to stay very, very far away from that organization. The MEK is a weird political cult built around a husband and wife team of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. It has been guilty of numerous terrorist acts and was on the U.S. government's formal list of terrorist organizations until February 2012. The group did not even originate as an enemy of Iran's clerical regime. It began long before that regime came to power, and its original orientation seemed strongly Marxist. The MEK was founded in 1965 by leftist Iranian students opposed to the Shah of Iran, who was one of Washington's major strategic allies. And the United States was very much in the MEK's crosshairs during its early years. During the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, the MEK directed terrorist attacks that killed several Americans working in Iran.

The MEK's worrisome track record has not deterred prominent Americans from endorsing the organization. In the months preceding the State Department's decision to delist the MEK, dozens of well-known advocates—primarily but not exclusively conservatives—lobbied on behalf of the group. Vocal supporters included former CIA directors R. James Woolsey Jr. and Porter Goss, former FBI director Louis J. Freeh, as well as Tom Ridge and Michael Mukasey, both cabinet secretaries in George W. Bush's administration. Several members of Congress, including Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, were also prominent advocates. Rohrabacher stated confidently that the MEK seeks “a secular, peaceful, and democratic government.” Other proponents included former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Sen. John McCain. Gingrich has been especially enthusiastic about the MEK over the years, describing it as the vanguard of “a massive worldwide movement for liberty in Iran.” More recently, Gingrich showed up along with former Democratic senator and former vice president nominee Joe Lieberman at a conference in Paris to laud the MEK.

Such enthusiasm has increased since its delisting as a terrorist organization. The House Foreign Affairs Committee even invited Maryam Rajavi to testify at a hearing on strategies for defeating ISIS. The decision to give Rajavi a platform for her broader agenda was not that surprising. Many of the committee's members (especially GOP members) are staunch advocates of a regime-change strategy toward Iran. The MEK serves the same function for such hawks as Chalabi and the INC did in the prelude to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Americans have reason to be wary when prominent advocates of an extremely hard-line policy toward Iran also want “vigorous support for Iran’s opposition, aimed at regime change in Tehran,” as former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton recommends. Given his vocal cheerleading for the MEK in recent years, there is little doubt that he is not referring to the moderate, anti-clerical “Green coalition” inside that country, but to the MEK.

Therein lies the principal danger of Tillerson’s embrace of a regime-change strategy toward Iran. Granted, he referred to U.S. support for peaceful regime change, but the MEK’s American backers show no signs of making that distinction. The MEK has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars cultivating their support, and such gullible (or venal) Americans continue to tout the organization as a genuine democratic movement with strong support inside Iran. The extent of the financial entanglements is deeply troubling. Many prominent American supporters have accepted fees of \$15,000 to \$30,000 to give speeches to the group. They also have accepted posh, all-expenses-paid trips to attend MEK events in Paris and other locales. Former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell confirmed in March 2012 that the MEK had paid him a total of \$150,000 to \$160,000, and it appeared that other “A-list” backers had been rewarded in a similar fashion. Needless to say, accepting such largesse from a highly controversial foreign political organization—and one that was still listed as a terrorist organization at the time—should raise justifiable questions regarding the judgment, if not the ethics, of the recipients.

U.S. opinion leaders are playing a dangerous and morally untethered game by flirting with the likes of the MEK. Daniel Larison, a columnist for the American Conservative, recently highlighted the problem with their approach. “I



have marveled at the willingness of numerous former government officials, retired military officers, and elected representatives to embrace the MEK,” he wrote. “There’s no question that they are motivated by their loathing of the Iranian government, but their hostility to the regime has led them to endorse a group that most Iranians loathe.” The last point is not mere speculation. The MEK aided Saddam Hussein’s war against Iran in the 1980s, and even Iranians who detest the clerical regime regard the MEK as a collection of odious traitors.

President Trump should learn from the follies of his predecessors who backed the agendas of foreign groups that purported to be democratic but turned out to be nothing of the sort. There are ample warning signs about the real nature of the MEK. The administration needs to avoid that organization like the plague.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## We Hate Mojahedin-e Khalq: Social Media Respond to a Conference of the Iranian Opposition

Raz Zimmt

July 25, 2017

Raz Zimmt investigates Iranian social media responses to the annual conference of Mojahedin-e Khalq, an Iranian opposition group whose support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War remains a searing national trauma.



In early July, Iran's National Resistance Council, the political wing of the opposition group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), held its annual conference at the Villepinte Exhibition Center in a suburb of Paris. The conference sparked angry reactions and public criticism on Iran's social networking sites (SNS). This anger was exacerbated by Saudi and US representation at the conference, which was seen as evidence of Saudi and American efforts to instigate political change in Iran through compromising support of a terrorist organization widely considered traitorous by Iranians.

MEK's ideology combines Shi'ite Islam with Marxism. During the early 1970s, the organization emerged in opposition to the Iranian monarchy. The United States and the European Union previously designated MEK as a terrorist organization due to its involvement in terrorist attacks in Iran, with several attacks against Western (including American and Israeli) targets. Shortly after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, MEK and the new regime fell into severe conflict, with the regime implementing strongly suppressive measures against MEK. As a result, the organization transferred most of its activities to Iraq, where it aligned itself with the Saddam Hussein regime. In the 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq War, MEK even participated in several Iraqi army operations against Iran. As a result, MEK was left with very little support in Iran proper, with many Iranians considering MEK activists traitors. In recent years, there has been no evidence of the organization's involvement in terrorism. Instead, it focuses mainly on political activity in Europe and the United States aimed at enlisting support for regime change in Iran. Nonetheless, critics believe this political activity is merely a façade.

This year's annual MEK conference was chaired by the organization's leader, Maryam Rajavi, and attended by hundreds of participants from around the world, including Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal, who formerly served as head of Saudi intelligence, as well as largely hawkish former US officials, including the former ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, former US Senator Joseph Lieberman (Ind.-Conn.), and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani. In their speeches at the conference, these senior officials harshly criticized the Islamic republic, accused it of supporting terrorism, and called for regime change in Tehran.

The conference aroused strong reactions in Iran. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who ended an official visit to Paris on the eve of the conference, criticized France for permitting the opposition group to operate within its borders, saying that regional and European countries are well aware of MEK's terrorist activities.[1] Ali Akbar Velayati, the Iranian Supreme Leader's advisor on international affairs, emphasized that hosting terrorists would not contribute to regional or international peace.[2] On SNS, thousands of Iranian users mobilized a virtual campaign against the organization using the English and Persian hashtags "Iran hates MEK" and "No to MEK." [3] The posts included insults and slurs against members of the orga-

nization accused of causing the death of thousands of Iranian citizens. Users contended that MEK is a terrorist organization entirely unrepresentative of the Iranian people, and devoid of popular support. They stressed that opposition to MEK unites Iranians, regardless of ideology or political outlook. As one user tweeted, “There is no difference between conservatives, reformists or independents! We all agree on hatred for Munafakin [a derogatory term for the MEK, meaning hypocrites or false Muslims].”[4]

Predictably, the main criticism of the organization was based on its alignment with the Iraqi regime during the Iran-Iraq war. Iranian users called MEK members “betrayers of the homeland” and “traitors,” accusing them of collaborating with the Ba‘ath regime’s chemical attack on the citizens of Iran during the summer of 1987. “When Iranian women and children trembled in fear of Iraqi missiles, the MEK drank faludeh [a cold Iranian beverage],” wrote one commenter.[5] Many users emphasized that the Iranian people would neither forget nor forgive the organization for its historic misalignment.

Along with expressions of hatred towards the opposition group, users also attacked its supporters in the West and Saudi Arabia. Many users compared MEK to ISIS, arguing that there was no difference between supporting the Iranian opposition group and supporting the Islamic terror organization. Western support for MEK, spearheaded by American politicians close to the current administration, was considered further proof of the West’s hypocrisy. Critics contended that while Western countries claim to defend democracy and human rights against terrorism, they perpetuate a terrorist organization responsible for thousands of innocent civilians’ deaths, and for serious human rights violations in internment camps it operated in Iraq. “Trump administration wants to back an Islamist terrorist cult (MEK) to bring democracy to Iran. What a sick joke,”[6] tweeted one user. Meanwhile, Saudi support for this opposition group reignited Iranian hostility towards Saudi Arabia, which has been the target of Iranian users’ hatred and racism for the past several years of worsening relations between the countries. “Saudi Arabia supports Maryam Rajavi as leader of Iran, but within Saudi Arabia women have no right to drive!” read one tweet.[7]

The angry reactions aroused by MEK’s conference in Paris attest to the inten-

sity of the hostility towards the organization among Iranian citizens, including critics of the regime. Most of the Iranian public view the organization's conduct since the Islamic revolution as a series of treacheries that climaxed with the organization's support of the Saddam regime during the Iran-Iraq war, which remains a traumatic memory for Iranians. Therefore, Iranians consider any support for MEK to be an illegitimate offence against national pride. The Iranian public's aversion to foreign interventions and allies of Iran's enemies sporadically captivates SNS discourse,[8] as exhibited by the conference's backlash.

[1] "Iranian FM decries France green light to MKO activities," Press TV, July 1, 2017.

[2] "Velayati Blasts France for Hosting MKO Terrorists," Fars News Agency, July 3, 2017.

[3] #IranHatesMEK and-#No2MEK

[4] @sadat0\_7 , Twitter, 3 July 2017. Last accessed 16 July 2018.

[5] @tousheh , Twitter, 1 July 2017. Last accessed 16 July 2018.

[6] @Atheist\_Iran, Twitter, 1 July 2017. Last accessed 16 July 2018.

[7] @sepehrad2, Twitter, 3 July 2017. Last accessed 16 July 2018.

[8] In this context, see Iranians' responses to a letter in which Iranian activists in exile urged US President Trump to adopt an aggressive policy towards Iran .Raz Zimmt, "Critics or Traitors? Responses to Iranian Exiles' Letter to Trump," Beehive, 5(1), January 2017,

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Buyer's Remorse: Why Is Howard Dean Selling Out Single-Payer?

Jason Rhode

October 16, 2017

Paste

The doctor is now in private practice

Howard Dean was never one of us. Dean, a former governor, first became famous as a progressive hero in 2004, before serving as the Democratic National Committee Chair from 2005 to 2009. What has he done since then? Why, turned lobbyist. The last several years have been kind to Dean's bottom line, but not his followers. The former Governor and DNC honcho opposes single-payer and called the Iranian Revolution Guard a terrorist organization. What can we make of such a decreased paragon?

We could discuss the failure of Dean the Progressive endlessly. I think two examples will suffice.

Let's take a pair of Dean's positions: one in foreign policy, one domestic. Then we can examine why

# Buyer's Remorse: Why Is Howard Dean Selling Out Single-Payer?

The doctor is now in private practice

By [Jason Rhode](#) | October 16, 2017 | 2:30pm

*Joe Raedle / Getty*

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Dean has ended up on the short end of the progressive stick.

## DEAN AND IRAN

On October 13, Dean tweeted:



The replies to this thread are a joy to read.

Dean is cool with taking money from MEK which was considered a terrorist group, and he once said LibDems were the only sane UK party LMAO

— extremely scary kai (@lonelykai15) October 13, 2017

Many of the Twitter snapbacks mentioned that Dean had been in the pay of MEK. That's short for Mojahedin-e Khalq, or the People's Mujahedin of Iran, an organization which calls for the violent overthrow of the Islamic Republic. The organization is also known as PMOI or MKO.

*Salon*, in an article titled “Dem is paid shill for Iranian regime change group,” noted that Dean had been critical of Obama's negotiations with Iran back in 2015: ” Dean, appearing on Morning Joe, urged the administration to back out of the negotiations still underway in Lausanne, Switzerland.”

How does the hand-me-down oracle of the Internet, Wikipedia, refer to Dean's backers? Surely, they will share the former governor's enthusiasm for MEK?

Or perhaps not.

It is designated as a terrorist organization by Iran and Iraq, and was considered a terrorist organization by the United Kingdom and the European Union until 2008 and 2009 respectively, and by Canada and the United States until 2012. Various scholarly works, media outlets, and the governments of the United States and France have described it as a cult. The organization has built a cult of personality around its leaders Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. ... In 2002 the MEK revealed the existence of Iran's nuclear program. They have since made various claims about the programme, not all of which have been accurate.

Human Rights Watch documented prison camps run by the MEK. This was in 2005:

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.



Within the District, MEK is famous for its aggressive lobbying efforts. They spent with wild abandon to get their names stricken from the terrorist list. Nobody's sure how much. Who received those funds? Among others, Howard Dean. Dean is a Democrat, and the MEK are equal-opportunity spenders.

The claim that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is a wholly terrorist organization, that they are a unique threat, is so laughable that only Dean and the National Review could believe it. The IRGC are pretty much the same as any military-industrial state complex: they play political games and try to expand their own power. Iran funds various militant groups and militias, but they're far from the dominant state funder of terrorism. That would be us, and our good friends, Saudi Arabia.

The Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland has recorded terrorist incidents since 1970 onwards. A significant majority of deaths—over 94% of them—are the work of the Islamic State's Sunni jihadists and al-Qaeda.

Of course, factual documentation of Iran is hardly the point. Since the Seventies, the American national security apparatus has wanted to fight Iran. Labeling the IRGC a terrorist group is one step closer to war with Tehran, since the IRGC is almost as powerful as the clergy. Once you have labeled the government as a hive of terror, it is easy to paint the entire population as murderers-in-waiting, and if you have done that, there is little to prevent the rain of missiles. Now, did Dean buy into the Iranian menace because he was paid to, or because he actually believes Tehran is gunning for Vermont? Does it matter?

## DEAN AND SINGLE-PAYER

The question of belief leads into the weirdest skit in the hip-hop concept album that is Howard Dean. In November, the former Governor will give a talk about how great Big Medicine is, at a private get-together for medical industry professionals. The Geisinger Healthcare Symposium is next month. Hillary will be there, giving the keynote, "From Crisis to Cure." According to Geisinger's site:

The invitation-only event will be held Nov. 8, 9 and 10 on the Danville, Pennsylvania, campus of Geisinger Medical Center and will bring together a panel of the nation's leading healthcare experts on policy, patient experience, wellness and technology.

## **WHAT WILL DEAN BE SPEAKING ABOUT?**

Positive Impact of the Private Sector in Healthcare: Howard Dean, M.D., former Vermont governor and former chairman of the Democratic National Committee who ran for the party's presidential nomination in 2004

Private sector? Positive impact? But this is Dean, who made his national name arguing for single-payer! You scoffers can scoff all you want. I can only speak for myself. I, for one, regret that I will not be there to see Dr. Dean's magnificent defense of the large-hearted medical industry. For example, on September 20, 2015, the Times reported that

In August, Impax sold Daraprim to Turing for \$55 million, a deal announced the same day Turing said it had raised \$90 million from Mr. Shkreli and other investors in its first round of financing. Daraprim cost only about \$1 a tablet several years ago, but the drug's price rose sharply after CorePharma acquired it.

The private sector has made leaps and strides in degeneracy, and we do not give it enough credit for its glorious vision of a world where only Martin Shkreli can listen to Wu-Tang. It's truly beautiful and calming that the U.S. Health Care industry spends five hundred billion dollars a year on administration alone, and thank sweet Christ our man Dean is there to praise the industry that bankrupts millions of Americans. What a brave minister of the healing gospel.

As Lee Fang wrote for The Intercept back in 2016, Dean has been in the pay of the health care lobby for some time.

Dean, though he rarely discloses the title during his media appearances, now serves as senior advisor to the law firm Dentons, where he works with the firm's Public Policy and Regulation practice, a euphemism for Dentons' lobbying team. ... The Dentons Public Policy and Regulation practice lobbies on

behalf of a variety of corporate health care interests, including the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, a powerful trade group for drugmakers like Pfizer and Merck.

In 2009, as Fang notes, Dean praised single-payer. That changed as soon as he moved full-time into lobbying. Fang again:

After Dean began working in the lobbying industry, he gave a talk about how to navigate the post-Citizens United campaign finance world. “I’ve advised a lot of clients in the industries that I usually end up working with, which are mostly health care industries, not to give any money to either side, or if you do, give it to both sides because politicians really don’t know much about the issues,” Dean said. “But they remember the ads, and they remember who was on whose side and who wasn’t, and it makes a big difference.”

What can account for Dean’s move to the profitable center? Why, his nature.

## **HE DOESN’T EVEN GO HERE**

Dean is the last gasp of the Clinton Presidency, the moment right before Twitter swallowed up politics. Dean is the kind of progressive the Democrats used to follow; he symbolizes the final instant in American politics where grownups under forty took left-centrism with a straight face.

Dean is McCain, but less lucky. McCain scored his party’s nomination. Dean didn’t get that far. However, he definitely had McCain’s gifts for spinning a gullible press. The media painted him as a radical, but that was only in comparison to the times. In 2003 and 2004, Bush and the GOP were riding so high, they invaded Iraq on a rumor. Dean had the sand to say that Iraq was a mistake, and that set him apart from every other boneless Donkey in Washington.

That’s all it took to be a hero in 2004. No wonder the Governor of Vermont became famous. After failing in Wisconsin and his famous scream (which wasn’t much of a scream at all), he sank below the waves. Kerry was eventually nominated, met his destiny, and disintegrated into multiple windsurfing homunculi, never to be heard from again.

Dean, not President but very much alive, rose along an alternative path. In 2005, he became the DNC chair and instituted a fifty-state strategy which was incredibly useful and, frankly, blindingly obvious—make a national party a national party. Then, after Obama was lifted to the Executive. Dean and his followers promptly forgot everything that had got them there. The Republicans stayed a national party. Trump’s the result.

In his job as the chair, Dean traded on his image as the rebel leader of 2004. But any close reading of Dean’s record puts the lie to that assessment. Even during his supposedly courageous campaign, Dean argued for the War in Afghanistan; he advocated for the balanced-budget as if he’d just given birth to it onstage. He used the words “tax credit” with a straight face. His proposals were timid. In those days, with most of the Democratic party curled up around the radiator of the Iraq War, that counted as brave. Let me repeat that 2003 was deep in the Bush years, when Olbermann was considered a sage and Lance Armstrong could be a hero. During Dean’s run, the world cloned the horse and Arnold became governor of California, neither which should have been allowed by physics or good taste. Howard Dean was the great hope of progressives, but that counts more against Dean than progressives. Dean is selling out because he didn’t have much to sell to begin with.

Unless you’re one of those few political mutants who can see through tangled ship-rigging of time, you make use of what you have when you have it. In the Nineties hangover of Bush America, Dean was far enough out of the power structure to shock us all; he was honey to the bones, lithium to cranium. He was the only visible water in a vast desert. The rains have come since then. Why has Dean declined so? Because he was never high to begin with. He’s always been far from right, but this hardly makes him left.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## How The MEK Paid Their Way From Terrorists To ‘Freedom Fighters’

Philip M. Giraldi

October 30, 2017



With enough money, you can even open a nice plush lobbying office on Pennsylvania Avenue in the District of Columbia, not too far from the White House and Capitol Hill. If you want to change a group of terrorists who have killed Americans overseas into something that appears to be much more benign, all you have to do is pay off the right people in Washington. With enough money, you can even open a nice plush lobbying office on Pennsylvania Avenue in the District of Columbia, not too far from the White House and Capitol Hill.

One-time Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been rightly blamed for the ill-conceived and badly bungled “regime change” in Libya in 2011 that eventually led to her mishandling of the resulting blowback in Benghazi, but one of her greatest failings just might have involved the piece of paper she

signed when she removed the Mujaheddin e Khalq (MEK) group from the State Department list of “designated terrorist organizations” in September 2012.

How is it possible that the bad judgment demonstrated in the Libyan fiasco that created a failed state, a humanitarian disaster, a migrant crisis, armed terrorists and ultimately produced the murder of the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans compare with a signature on a piece of paper? It is because that signature put in place one of the elements that will most likely in the near future lead to a far more disastrous war for the United States than was Libya. MEK, now labeled the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), has become a principal voice of the war party that is now seeking to attack Iran, a role similar to that played by Ahmad Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress in his disseminating of lies in the lead up to the catastrophic invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The tale of the rehabilitation and rise of MEK/NCRI is a subset of the ongoing corruption of America’s political culture, best illustrated by the fact that even national security is now up for sale, enabling a terrorist group to transform itself into a “resistance movement” and eventually be labeled “freedom fighters.”

How did this happen as MEK was on the State Department roster of foreign terrorist organizations since the list was established in 1997? Its inclusion derived from its having killed six Americans in the 1970s, its participation in the U.S. Embassy hostage-taking and from its record of extreme violence both inside and outside Iran since that time. When I was a CIA trainee our course included a simulation of the horrific attack on U.S. Air Force Officers in Tehran in 1973 that killed two colonels.

MEK is widely regarded as a terrorist cult headed by a bizarre husband and wife team Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. Its members are required to be celibate and are subjected to extensive brainwashing, physical torture, severe beatings even unto death, and prolonged solitary confinement if they question the leadership. One scholar who has studied them describes their beliefs as a “weird combination of Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism.”

With the sharp turn of the Trump Administration against Iran, NCRI is now finding an audience , telling the American public that Iran is “cheating” on the nuclear deal. It also tells us that “Iran’s nuclear weapons program has far from halted” and has claimed to identify four major sites that “with a high degree of certainty” have been involved in various aspects of the allegedly ongoing nuclear weapons project. This has led Jillian Mele of Fox News to declare, falsely, that “It appears [Iran’s nuclear] weapons program is fully operational.”

The CIA has in the past recruited MEK/NCRI agents to enter into Iran and report on nuclear facilities, but Israel’s Mossad is the group’s principal employer. Agents, recruited and trained by Israel, have killed a number of Iranian nuclear scientists and officials. The group appears to have ample financial resources, places full page ads in major US newspapers, and is also known to pay hefty fees to major political figures who are willing to speak publicly on its behalf. The group claims to want regime change in Iran to restore democracy to the country, an odd assertion as it itself has no internal democracy and is loathed by nearly all Iranians.

Because MEK/NCRI is a resource being used by Tel Aviv in its clandestine war against Iran, it is perhaps inevitable that many friends of Israel in the United States actively campaigned to have the group removed from the terrorism list so that it could, ironically, have a free hand to continue to terrorize Iran. Indeed, neocons at their various think tanks and publications as well as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee all recommended delisting the group and continue to support it. Prominent American Jews to include Elie Wiesel and Alan Dershowitz have been advocates for the group in spite of its record of terrorism.

Multi-million dollar contracts with Washington lobbying firms experienced at “working” congress backed up by handsome speaking fees have induced many prominent Americans to join the chorus supporting NCRI. Prior to 2012, speaking fees for the group started at \$15,000 and went up from there. Former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell reported more than \$150,000 in honoraria. Rudy Giuliani has been paid generously for years at \$20,000 per appearance for brief, twenty-minute speeches. Bear in mind that MEK was a listed terrorist group at the time and accepting money from it to promote its

interests should have constituted material support of terrorism.

The group's well-connected friends have included prominent neocons like John Bolton and ex-CIA Directors James Woolsey, Michael Hayden and Porter Goss as well as former Generals Anthony Zinni, Peter Pace, Wesley Clark, and Hugh Shelton. Traditional conservatives close to the Trump Administration like Newt Gingrich, Fran Townsend and Elaine Chao are also fans of NCRI. Townsend in particular, as a national security specialist, has appeared on television to denounce Iran, calling its actions "acts of war" without indicating that she has received money from an opposition group.

The emergence of NCRI at this time is just another fool's game with the usual Washington crowd queuing up for a bad cause because they are both lining their pockets and thinking they are helping Israel by punishing Iran. In any event it is a poor bargain for the rest of us, but that hardly seems to matter anymore.

*Philip M. Girdali is a former CIA counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer who served nineteen years overseas in Turkey, Italy, Germany, and Spain. He was the CIA Chief of Base for the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 and was one of the first Americans to enter Afghanistan in December 2001. Phil is Executive Director of the Council for the National Interest, a Washington-based advocacy group that seeks to encourage and promote a U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East that is consistent with American values and interests.*

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Double standards in Albania's fight against terrorism

Olsi Jazexhi

November 15, 2017

On Nov. 7, Albania's High Criminal Court changed the sentences of two Muslim Albanians from prison to house arrest. The detainees, Xhezair Fishti and Medat Hasani, who are Salafists, were arrested in November 2016 by Albanian counterterrorism units on suspicion of planning an attack on the Israeli national football team, which was scheduled to play Albania on Nov. 12, 2016.

### DAILY SABAH

These Salafists were two of some 150 Muslims who the Albanian police detained that month. Albanian authorities, who generally regard Muslims with suspicion, conducted mass arrests and closed the borders with Kosovo and Macedonia. They did this so that Muslim Albanian fans could not attend the football match between Albania and Israel and shout anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian slogans.

However, out of the 150 people who were detained, four were singled out as terrorist suspects and accused of plotting to attack the Israeli team. This counterterrorism operation was coordinated along with the Kosovar police, which, for its part, arrested another 19 Muslims with the same excuse. Now a year later, Albania's High Criminal Court has not been able to find any incriminating evidence for the arrests and therefore was forced to free them from jail and instead hold them under house arrest.

It seems that the detention by the Albanian authorities of four Muslim Albanians in 2016 was made based on false Israeli media claims, since now, a year later, no charge has been proven against the detainees.

Since 2014, the government of Albania has been very aggressive in arresting Sunni Muslims and surveilling their mosques and civil society organizations as part of its policies for "fighting terrorism". Pressured by the American administration and U.S. Embassy in Tirana, the Albanian government has changed many of its laws, arrested and jailed dozens of Muslims and imams who "sympathize" with Daesh, confiscated properties belonging to terrorist suspects and with the help of the U.S. administration has put pressure on Muslims in Albania to cooperate and spy on other Muslims and imams who are seen as "potential terrorist supporters". In its fight against terrorism, the Albanian government has been helped a lot by Turkey, which has extradited Daesh suspects to Albania when the government asked for their extradition.

However, while the Albanian government has been more than zealous in appeasing the Americans during their fight against terrorism and cracking down on Daesh sympathizers, it has not shown the same zeal for fighting other terrorist organizations that presently operate or have members hiding in the country.

Two foreign governments have accused Albania of hosting members of two terrorist organizations in the country. The first is Turkey, which has asked Albania to detain Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ) members and close their organizations in the country. The second is Iran, which has asked Albania to not host and at least to curb the activities of the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian terrorist organization that advocates the violent overthrow of the current government of Iran.

FETÖ and the MEK are terrorist groups as much as Daesh is. These terrorist organizations seek to overthrow the governments of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran by means of violence and terrorism. Albanian Criminal Code Articles 231 and 265 condemn the participation, incitement, recruitment, organizing, leading and training in terrorism and calls for the overthrow of regimes in other countries. Daesh, FETÖ and the MEK do or have done these things during the past years against many governments in the Muslim world. However, while the governments of Turkey and Iran have demanded that Albania help them in their fight against terrorism, Albanian authorities have continuously failed to stick to their laws and fight terrorism impartially and without bias.

Even though the Turkish Embassy in Tirana and many Turkish authorities have continuously asked the Albanian government to crack down on FETÖ and detain terrorists who abetted the coup of July 15, 2016, Albanian authorities have neglected their duties. The latest example of this double standard was on Oct. 7, 2017, when Albanian border police detained Muhammed Aydoğmuş, a FETÖ suspect whom Turkey had placed on Interpol's wanted list. Aydoğmuş, who was detained while trying to exit Albania with falsified documents after being found to be a FETÖ member, was released and not detained as both Albanian and Turkish law demands.

Apart from his crimes in Turkey, Aydoğmuş had committed two crimes according to Albanian Penal Code Articles 189 and 297, which carry a jail sentence from three to seven years for people who falsify documents and try to illegally cross the border. However, Aydoğmuş got special treatment from Albanian authorities. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and a number of Western officials asked Albania to release the FETÖ suspect with the excuse that his arrest was political. The Albanian government and its courts have so far refused requests by the Turkish Embassy in Tirana for his extradition and he is not even being held in detention for his crimes in Albania, as any other person might be. The double standards that Albania displays in its fight against terrorism can be seen even in the case of MEK that Albania hosted on the request of the U.S. after 2013. This organization, which was relocated in its entirety from Iraq to Albania in 2016, now has several camps in Tirana. They run different operations against Iran from these

camps and the leader, Maryam Rajavi, and the commanders continuously call for the violent overthrow of the government of Iran. Prominent U.S. senators and officials, including John McCain and John Bolton, have visited Albania over the past months and together with Rajavi and a number of Albanian politicians such as Pandeli Majko and Fatmir Mediu have called for war against Iran.

What Rajavi and MEK does in Albania is exactly what many Salafists were doing in 2013 and 2014. The Salafists were calling for the violent overthrow of Syrian dictator Bashar Assad and replacing his regime with their caliphate. Imam Genci Balla, one of the Salafist imams who was calling for the fight against Syria in 2013 has been jailed by the Court of Serious Crimes and condemned to 17 years in prison. He was arrested in 2014 and charged under Articles 231 and 265 of the Albanian Criminal Code. He and many of his friends were charged with inciting terrorism and for calls to take part in military action in a foreign country.

Many Salafist Muslims who followed Balla ask in their Facebook postings why their imam is in jail but the Iranian MEK, which makes the same calls as Balla did in the past, are never charged, but instead honored by American and Albanian politicians. Other people ask why Albania does not extradite FETÖ suspects to Turkey in the same way that Turkey extradited Daesh suspects to Albania in 2013.

The release of Aydoğmuş, who was caught breaking the law, and the detention on false charges of Fishti and Hasani by Albanian authorities shows that Albania has different standards in its fight against terrorism. If one happens to be an Albanian Salafist Muslim, the chances are that they can very easily be jailed on false charges and mere suspicion of being a terrorist, but if one is a FETÖ or the MEK member and are caught breaking the law or even making open calls for a terrorist war against Turkey or Iran, the Albanian precedent shows that they will not face justice for terrorist-related activities. It seems that for as long as U.S. foreign policy is hostile to the country in which one wants to wage their terrorism, Albania will obey and not punish them if they engage in terrorist activities.

■ Access the article from [here](#).

2018



## Birth Of An Insurgency: The US-Israeli “Secret Deal” To Manipulate Protests In Iran

Whitney Webb

January 3, 2018

With the Trump and Netanyahu administrations now working in lockstep, U.S.-Israeli hostility towards Iran has now ripened into a plan to repeat what befell Syria over six years ago – the hijacking of minor protests and their transformation into the cover for a foreign-funded insurgency intent on toppling Iran’s elected government.



TEHRAN, IRAN (Analysis) – Using the recent protests as cover, the governments of the United States and Israel are advancing a much larger plan for covert regime change against the Iranian government, one born out of the “secret deal” negotiated and signed between the two countries right before the widely covered but relatively small protests in Iran began in late December.

That deal, negotiated between National Security Ad-



viser and neocon darling H.R. McMaster and his Israeli counterpart Meir Ben-Shabbat, secured the full cooperation of the Trump and Netanyahu administrations in targeting Iran’s “threatening activities” through a series of “memorandums of understanding.” As the Times of Israel reported, such cooperation is ultimately expected to translate into “steps on the ground” — a vague way of implying that aggressive actions will soon target Iran, including potential military action.

Yet, since the agreement was announced in the press, the evidence seems to point to the development of a more covert operation that is set to begin with the assassination of a top Iranian general.

### **Reviving a once-thwarted assassination plan**

On Monday, Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported that an “American-Israeli agreement” had been forged that determined that Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, leader of the Quds Force active in fighting the Wahhabist insurgency in Syria, is a “threat to the two countries’ interests in the region.” This understanding subsequently resulted in the U.S. government giving Israel the “green light” to assassinate Soleimani, a plan Israel had unsuccessfully attempted to carry out three years earlier. The Obama administration had thwarted that operation, when Israel was allegedly “on the verge” of killing Soleimani near Damascus, by warning the Iranian government of the plan.

However, the U.S.’ failure to enact regime change in Syria – a close ally of Iran – and the Trump administration’s close relationship with Israel have apparently led the U.S. government to openly voice its support for Israel to assassinate a top general of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, a move that would likely embroil Iran and Israel – and perhaps the rest of the Middle East – in war.

Indeed, Soleimani’s force in Syria has been instrumental in aiding the Syrian

government in eliminating the largely foreign-funded Wahhabist insurgency that was intended to remove Syrian president Bashar al-Assad from power, a key strategic goal of both the U.S. and Israel in the region.

Furthermore — with the disintegration of Daesh (ISIS) in Syria and, along with it, the disintegration of the U.S.-led coalition’s excuse for its illegal presence in Syria — Soleimani delivered a forceful message to the U.S. forces stationed in Northwest Syria. In that message, delivered to the U.S. via the Russian military, Soleimani warned the U.S. military command in Syria that it best remove all U.S. forces currently present in Syria “or the doors of hell will open up,” adding that “I advise you leave by your own will or you will be forced to.”

Russia later echoed Soleimani, albeit less forcefully, by advising that U.S. forces vacate Syria, as the terrorist threat has been largely eliminated and the U.S.’ continued presence in the country would be in violation of the Syrian government’s sovereignty.

However, the U.S. has made it clear that it has no plans to leave Syria anytime soon. Last Friday, U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis insisted that the “war is not over” in Syria or Iraq, as much work remains to be done to prevent a potential resurgence of Daesh. Mattis’ words came just days after reports surfaced alleging that U.S. forces in Northwestern Syria are retraining Daesh fighters from areas “liberated” by U.S. proxy forces.

The endgame of this U.S. operation is likely the exportation of insurgents from Northwestern Syria through Iraqi Kurdistan, where U.S. forces are still present, and into eastern Iran where the fomentation of an armed insurgency will be used to destabilize and hijack the protests currently taking place in Iran. Most of the recent growth in reported unrest has been concentrated in eastern Iran.

In order for such a program to achieve its goal, the U.S. must be able to continue illegally occupying northwestern Syria. With Soleimani out of the picture and the Quds Force in Syria thus weakened, that occupation would be significantly easier to prolong.



While a U.S.-Israeli plan to create a terrorist pipeline from Syria to Iran has yet to be definitively established, regime-change plans specifically targeting Iran have included such strategies for toppling the Iranian government. For instance, the Brookings Institution — a prominent, hawkish U.S. think tank — published a manual in 2009 titled “Which Path to Persia? Options for a New American Strategy toward Iran.” The manual, divided into four parts, includes an entire section devoted to enacting regime change. This section includes three chapters, the first two of which focus on “supporting a popular uprising” and “inspiring an insurgency” by “supporting Iranian minority and opposition groups.”

When the protests against the neoliberal economic policies of the Rouhani-led government began just days ago, the U.S. and Israeli political establishments — and their supporters — quickly took advantage of the situation. Though the protests have been small in size, intentional misreporting from the corporate media and on social media has sought to combine these protests with regime-change aspirations while also exaggerating their size.

Both neocons and their liberal counterparts have posted publicly their support for the protests, claiming to support the Iranian people despite their past support for the sanctions that damaged Iran’s economy – the very factor that allegedly inspired the protests in the first place.

Though the plan to support a popular uprising depended on the organic emergence of some unrest, however minimal, within Iran, the plan to inspire an insurgency requires more careful preparation. Given the establishment of a new CIA “mission center” focused on “turning up the heat” in Iran last June — which has sought to make Iran “a higher priority target for American spies” — along with the U.S. operation in Syria, the groundwork for such an insurgency has now been laid.

Of particular concern is the fact that the CIA officer in charge of the center is Michael D’Andrea, a Wahhabist who has overseen the agency’s drone bombing program and was a key player in the CIA’s torture program. According to Moon of Alabama, he is believed to be the mastermind behind U.S. cooperation with extreme Wahhabi groups in Libya, Iraq and Syria.

In addition, Israel has openly worked with terrorist groups active in Iran in the past, namely the Jundallah terrorist group that Israeli Mossad hired to kill nuclear experts in Iran and for other tasks in its covert war against the Islamic Republic.

## Arming the uprising

As the protests in Iran have unfolded, the increase in violent incidents suggests that U.S.-Israeli support for both a popular uprising and their support for a budding insurgency have merged and are taking place simultaneously. For instance, there has been a precipitous rise in the number of “armed protesters” since the ostensibly “peaceful” protests began, including a group of armed individuals that attempted to overtake government buildings and military bases.

Others have killed police and participated in the wanton destruction of property. Others still have shot innocent bystanders, who were then threatened into saying that the police had been the shooters. Eyewitness reports have claimed that many of the more violent protesters are “non-native” (i.e., foreign).

“ *#Iran This is how they did it in #Daraa, #Syria, attacking police. See my video on it.*  
<https://t.co/nwDWwRTGU4> <https://t.co/drL9kSyEzC>

— Kurt Nimmo (@kurt\_nimmo) January 2, 2018

“ *#IranianProtest #IranProtests #IranianProtests #IranProtests2017 #Iranprotesters  
Iran #AryanSpring<https://t.co/dUOXpZ3hqg>*

— Nardeep Pujji (@AWAKEALERT) January 2, 2018

However, the most telling evidence has been the emergence of terrorist activity in eastern Iran. As the protests were beginning, a Sunni jihadist group known as Ansar al-Furqan exploded an Iranian oil pipeline in the Khuzestan province.

The group — which, according to the Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, has ties to al-Nusra Front in Syria — claimed that it carried out the attack in order to “inflict losses on the economy of the criminal Iranian regime.”

Both the U.S. and Israel have close ties to al-Nusra Front in Syria. The U.S., for its part, funneled weapons to al-Nusra by continuing weapons shipments to Syrian opposition groups in Idlib even as they declared allegiance to al-Nusra en masse, and even took al-Nusra Front off the terror watch list after it changed its name. An al-Nusra Front commander also infamously claimed in 2016 that “the Americans are on our side.” Meanwhile, Israel’s long-standing commitment to aiding and funding the terrorist group, while also treating their wounded, has been an open secret for years.

In addition, the terrorist group Mujahideen-e-Khalq, popularly known as MEK in the West, has been active in the current protests as well. Despite its record of killing innocent civilians, Western media has cited MEK spokespeople and members in its reporting on the protests as “proof” that the Iranian people are calling for regime change, while ignoring the massive pro-government rallies that have coincided with the protests. Little mention has been made of the fact the MEK fighters have been trained by the U.S. military in the past and share connections with Israeli Mossad.

The hostility of the U.S. and Israel towards Iran is well known. Yet, with the Trump and Netanyahu administrations now working in lockstep, that hostility has now ripened into a plan to repeat what befell Syria over six years ago – the hijacking of minor protests and their transformation into the cover for a foreign-funded insurgency intent on toppling the elected government of Iran.

Whether or not such an effort will be successful is yet to be seen. However, it’s unlikely that either Israel or the United States will be willing to accept another failure like their venture in Syria, lest they be forced to give up on their regional ambitions entirely.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## ‘Liberal’ Mainstream Media Suddenly Praising Trump—Because He Wants War with Iran

Matt Agorist

January 4, 2018

All mainstream media is beholden to the establishment and all those in the establishment are beholden to the military-industrial complex. As a result, the president’s newfound support from the NY Times, CNN, and the Washington Post should come as no surprise.



Analysis — The same mainstream media who’s been lambasting President Donald Trump since he was sworn in last year has now taken to supporting him. Why, exactly, are these agencies who’ve made up countless fake news stories about the president now supporting him, you ask? Well, the short of the answer is war.

All mainstream media is beholden to the establishment and all those in the establishment are beholden to the military-industrial complex. As a result, the president’s newfound support from the NY Times,

CNN, and the Washington Post should come as no surprise.

Leading the way in their support of Trump's stance on Iran was WaPo in a piece on New Year's day, which echoed the sentiments of Trump. Instead of calling him a moron or making fun of his latest series of irrational Tweets, WaPo agreed with Trump's process.

Claiming that the current Iranian regime will paint the protesters as foreign agents—which they have already done—WaPo even provided Trump a recommendation of not remaining silent “but to ensure that U.S. statements of support are broadly multilateral and are backed with more practical steps.” Caring not about saving face and sticking to their guns of hatred toward Donald Trump, the NY Times then published a piece on Tuesday praising the president's saber-rattling toward the Iranian regime. In an aptly titled op-ed, “Trump Is Right, This Time, About Iran,” Roger Cohen, the international affairs and diplomacy writer for the Times, praised Trump and confessed that he actually retweeted the president's threat to Iran.

Cohen wrote, “I have a New Year's confession: I retweeted President Trump with approval, not something I had expected to do, especially on the subject of Iran. But Trump has been right to get behind the brave Iranian protesters calling for political and economic change.”

The tweet in question:

*“ Many reports of peaceful protests by Iranian citizens fed up with regime's corruption & its squandering of the nation's wealth to fund terrorism abroad. Iranian govt should respect their people's rights, including right to express themselves. The world is watching! #IranProtests*

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) December 30, 2017

While Trump's tweet certainly sounds reasonable it is important to point out that the protests in Iran are hardly peaceful and definitely not comprised of 100 percent Iranian citizens.

As Reuters reports, an Iranian judicial official said on Wednesday a European citizen was arrested in protests in the Borujerd area of western Iran, but did not specify the nationality of the detainee.

“(This) European citizen ... had been trained by European intelligence services and was leading the rioters,” Hamidreza Abolhassani, head of Borujerd’s Justice Department, was quoted by Tasnim news agency as saying.

Unfortunately, these non-citizens, who stand accused of fomenting violence in the protests have America’s full support, thanks to Trump—who promises to show that support “at the appropriate time.”

“Such respect for the people of Iran as they try to take back their corrupt government. You will see great support from the United States at the appropriate time!” Trump wrote in the latest of a series of tweets on Iran’s turmoil.

While it would be irresponsible to assume all the protesters are foreign actors, it is also irresponsible to assume that it is entirely organic. Consider the following tweet below as evidence toward this assertion.

“I wanted to get money from ATM , Protesters shot at me with a gun, then asked me to say that police shot me, they were non-native,” said the Iranian who’d allegedly been shot by non-natives while trying to get money out of an ATM.

“ *#BREAKING : Iranian shot by a Non Native – told to say ‘Police shot him’*  
*RT @Zolfegar12 “I wanted to get money from ATM , Protesters shot at me with a gun, then asked me to say that police shot me, they were non-native.”#Iranprotests*  
*#IranProtesters Iranpic.twitter.com/rSgLTJbRKg*

— Nardeep Pujji (@AWAKEALERT) *January 2, 2018*

For those who may be unaware, the plan to overthrow Iran has long been in the works. In fact, in April 2012, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Seymour Hersh reported that the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command had trained (Mojahedin-e Khalq) MEK operatives at a secret site in Nevada from 2005

to 2009. MEK is the Iranian political-militant organization that advocates for the violent overthrow of the current Iranian regime. They are hardly quiet about it.

According to Hersh, MEK members were trained in intercepting communications, cryptography, weaponry and small unit tactics at the Nevada site until President Barack Obama took office in 2009. Hersh also reported additional names of former U.S. officials paid to speak in support of MEK, including former CIA directors James Woolsey and Porter Goss; New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani; former Vermont Governor Howard Dean; former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Louis Freeh and former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton.

Coincidentally, MEK was classified as a terrorist organization by the United States and its allies—during this training period—until they suddenly removed them from the list in 2012.

While the current Iranian regime is certainly no bastion of freedom, the idea that US intervention or a violent revolution would be beneficial for the people of Iran is outright insane. To see what US intervention—through military support and the support of ‘protesters’—does to countries, one need only look at Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya to see the horrific death tolls and war-ravaged dystopias left in America’s wake.

To those paying attention over the years, Trump’s desire to intervene in Iran, and his subsequent support in the media should come as no surprise as it has been the plan since Bill Clinton was in office and was documented in the neoconservative PNAC report. This was even admitted by General Wesley Clark, former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, that the U.S. planned on going to war with Iran, according to a 2001 memo from the U.S. Secretary of Defense.

“This is a memo that describes how we’re going to take out seven countries in five years,” Clark said. “Starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finishing off with Iran.”


All presidents since Clinton have crossed countries off this list. Now it’s

Trump's turn.

Just in case you think it is a coincidence that the media is supporting Trump in this move, as TFTP reported last year after Trump violated the constitution by launching dozens of missiles at the sovereign nation of Syria without approval from Congress, the media went into a frenzy. They were bending over backward to show their newfound love of the man who was only just beginning to prove his loyalty to the military-industrial complex.

Sadly, so many people are compromising their principles just to keep their support for Trump who has proven to be just like every other candidate by running on a platform of peace and America first only to stoke war and bolster the police state.

Matt Agorist is an honorably discharged veteran of the USMC and former intelligence operator directly tasked by the NSA. This prior experience gives him unique insight into the world of government corruption and the American police state. Agorist has been an independent journalist for over a decade and has been featured on mainstream networks around the world. Agorist is also the Editor at Large at the Free Thought Project. Follow @MattAgorist on Twitter, Steemit, and now on Facebook.

 Access the article from [here](#).





## Is MEK/Jundullah The ISIS Of Tomorrow?

Rahul D. Manchanda

January 5, 2018

One would think that the United States would have learned by now, that it is never a good idea to arm terrorist groups in different parts of the world, due to the inevitable “blowback” which eventually ensues after these violent groups determine that the USA is no longer in support of them, or when the USA wants to deny that they have any relationship with them.

modern  
diplomacy

We have seen this paradigm unfold countless times before, over the past few decades, with groups like Al Qaeda, Al Nusra, La Fenice, Avanguardia Nazionale, Ordine Nuovo, the Contras, Cuban Exiles, Colombian Paramilitary Organizations, Los Pepes, Kosovo Liberation Army, Jundullah, Mujahedin-e Khalq (“MEK”), and countless others designed to engage in United States sponsored terrorist activities against sovereign governments and nations that the US doesn’t like for whatever reason.

# Is MEK/Jundullah The ISIS Of Tomorrow?



Published 4 years ago on January 5, 2018  
By **Rahul D. Manchanda, Esq.**



In the wake of the abject failure of the US using ISIS to destabilize, disrupt and disorient various governments throughout the Middle East, such as Syria, Iraq, Lybia, Yemen and others, followed quickly by various ISIS-attributed terrorist attacks against the US and Europe by ISIS, President Donald Trump was swept into office in large part because the American and European people discovered this via the veritable “sieve” known as social media and the internet.

But rather than change US foreign policy to ban or cease using violent thugs to carry out US policy overseas, instead it appears that the US Government through the CIA have now adopted a smaller more surgically precise approach by supporting, through its proxy nations Israel and Saudi Arabia, smaller groups such as MEK and Jundullah, who operate primarily in tiny regions of the world, such as in and around Iran, without much of a global presence.

But like cancer, these groups have a tendency to grow uncontrollably, and then later turn on the US and Europe, when and if the latter starts to pull funding or divorce themselves from the court of public opinion through plausible denial.

This is exactly how ISIS grew into a formidable fighting force, and eventually turned on its creators, much like the Frankenstein monster in the Mary Shelley novels.

All of this must be an abject nightmare for the US FBI, DHS, ICE and DEA pull their proverbial hair out, because they must often clean up/explain the horrific domestic messes of terrorist blowback occurring on US soil when these groups inevitably turn on their paymasters, just like they are the chief law enforcement/preventative bodies that deal with the drug war, also in large part caused by the CIA's open and clandestine support of massive drug producing/trafficking regimes in Afghanistan, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico.

The news lately has revealed that the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia are openly funding, supporting, arming, training and providing logistical support to Jundullah and MEK in order to take down the current sovereign government of Iran.

Even though the USA, Saudi Arabia and Israel may not like the current government there, what right do they have to engage in this type of state sponsored terrorist behavior?

There is a reason why various governments throughout the world have stood the test of time, and exist in their present states.

Perhaps their people wanted it, or perhaps there was need for that specific type of ideology or mode of governance, but unless and until those governments actively target or harm Americans, the US has absolutely no business getting involved with those groups, and indeed, has invariably and inevitably lived to regret it countless times, in nearly 100% of all cases.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Coverage of Iran Protests Illustrated With Protests Not in Iran—Organized by Fringe Cultists

Adam Johnson

January 11, 2018

**FAIR**

When it comes to covering protests in other countries, it seems any vague picture of brown people protesting can stand in for those actually on the streets expressing their grievances. Since the outbreak of protests across Iran three weeks ago, several major outlets have used pictures of demonstrations in the United States, France, or United Kingdom—organized by a fringe, cult-like group, Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK)—in place of images of the entirely unaffiliated protesters, 6,000 miles away, who are the topic of discussion.

These are all images of rallies by the MEK (sometimes known as the People’s Mujahedin, or its benign-sounding front-group name, National Council of Resistance) being presented as protesters in Iran. Several other outlets used their images, but noted they were simply “solidarity” marches in the US or

JANUARY 11, 2018

## Coverage of Iran Protests Illustrated With Protests Not in Iran—Organized by Fringe Cultists

ADAM JOHNSON



Europe. While this is technically accurate, it's still wildly misleading, given that it's safe to assume most people won't know that the organizers of these rallies are part of a US- and Israeli-aligned fringe group, and not allies of the workers and young people taking to the streets in Iran.

Casually throwing around MEK images to represent unrest in Iran is the worst combination of insulting and sloppy. It would be like a Chinese outlet, in 2012, using images of a Westboro Baptist Church protest in a story about Occupy Wall Street, because both opposed the US government. The exact ideology of those protesting in Iran isn't 100 percent clear—they seem to represent a mix of groups and grievances—but MEK has virtually zero support in Iran itself, having been disowned by the Green Movement (the last major protest movement in Iran) in 2009, and is widely loathed for working with Israeli intelligence and fighting alongside the Iraqi army in Iran's decade-long war against Saddam in the 1980s that killed a half-million Iranians. The MEK has carried out several bomb attacks in Iran, and was even officially listed by the US State Department as a foreign terrorist organization for 16

years, until it was removed by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2012, after a years-long lobbying effort by pro-regime change forces within the US.

The only major media faction that even pretends the MEK has any legitimacy within Iran is the Murdoch group, which routinely runs MEK's blatant disinformation (Fox News, 1/1/18) and pro-regime change op-eds (Wall Street Journal, 1/8/18). Even consistent regime change partisans, such as Bloomberg's Eli Lake (1/2/18), warn against promoting MEK:

People's Mujahedin leader Maryam Rajavi, or supporters of the Pahlavi dynasty that fell in 1979, should not be treated as leaders or spokesmen for this organic uprising. They seek to impose an agenda on a movement they did not create. Don't let them do it.

No intellectually honest person takes MEK seriously as a viable alternative to the current government in Iran. The idea that it is an actual "Iranian opposition" is a Western media fiction. But the group's rallies outside Iranian embassies provide great visual fodder for indifferent or dishonest editors in need of high-quality "Iran protest" images—without the mess of actually paying Iranian photographers, or dissecting the on-the-ground political reality in Iran.

Adam Johnson is a contributing analyst for FAIR.org.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Iran Protests, Regime Change, and the MEK

Anne and Massoud Khodabandeh

January 17, 2018

Lobe  
Log

When protests broke out in Iran at the end of 2017, most countries maintained a hands-off approach. After all, these countries maintain diplomatic and trade relations with the Iranian government. Even some influential U.S. observers recommended caution. Former Secretary of State John Kerry, for instance, tweeted: “With humility about how little we know about what’s happening inside Iran, this much is clear: it’s an Iranian moment and not anyone else’s. But the rights of people to protest peacefully and voice their aspirations are universal and governments everywhere should respect that.”

But other American observers, eager to exploit the protests for their own purposes of promoting regime change in Iran, quickly rushed in where the more cautious feared to tread. The first push came from the media. Lacking any organizations or op-

position leaders to interview inside Iran, some American media substituted Iranian exiles as representatives of the people. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's Monarchists got some coverage.

But it was Maryam Rajavi, leader of the notorious Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), who received the most coverage, appearing by video link on Fox News and Voice of America.

The MEK is a fringe, cult-like group that was once on the U.S. terrorism list. Rajavi's appearances, in which she talks as though she represented the Iranian people, provided Iran's leaders with a gift. Among other angry Farsi commentary, she provoked a hashtag storm on Twitter, with Iranians of every political stripe telling Rajavi in English and Farsi to #shutuprajavi. It is hard to overstate how much Iranians both inside and outside the country hate the MEK.

Indeed, the Iranian media immediately translated Maryam Rajavi and the MEK's social media output and video speeches into Farsi to inform all Iran's citizens how the US was hoping to impose the MEK on the country through regime change. Some Iranians might want regime change but what comes after is just as important. No Iranian wants the MEK to substitute for the mullahs.

Later, what had begun as working-class protests against economic hardship and government corruption were quickly politicized by agitators who instigated violence. Iran's Spiritual Leader Ayatollah Khamenei attributed these incidents of violence to "foreign interference," naming America, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and their proxy, the MEK. Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), announced that the MEK trained a number of people involved in the violence. Iran's intelligence service in the western Iranian province of Lorestan also said it had disbanded and arrested four members of a terrorist cell linked to the MEK in Boroujerd. Iran also claimed to have uncovered a network of agitators organized from Afghanistan and Iraqi Kurdistan that planned to launch violent actions later in 2018. The spontaneous and widespread working-class protests had apparently triggered the network into action ahead of schedule.





If the plan had been to provoke Iran's security services into a harsh crackdown on the protesters, which the Western media could then present as human rights violations, it largely didn't work. Instead, the establishment brought out its supporters in big counter-demonstrations. Above all, when the protests turned violent, ordinary people went home. They wanted no part in manufactured regime change. Iran's hardliners know that the most effective way to denounce the protests without resorting to bans or violence is to blame the MEK. This allows them to spin their suppressive activities to the populace as counter-terrorism.

Iranians are not surprised by the involvement of the MEK in violence. They know the group and its history. A visitor to any war museum in Iran will find a section dedicated to the MEK's military collaboration with Saddam Hussein. New Iranian films and TV docudramas educate a new generation about the MEK terrorism, which caused thousands of civilian deaths.

Nevertheless, the MEK's backers have worked for years to whitewash the group's past crimes for a Western audience. For anti-Iran elements in the United States, the MEK has been a useful tool by leaking faked information during the nuclear negotiations and posing as human rights advocates. This carefully constructed narrative of victimhood and supposedly democratic values has allowed the MEK to operate in political circles where they could push the regime change agenda.

Meanwhile, in Albania, the MEK was busy secretly reconstructing the terrorist training camp it had lost in Iraq. When former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton negotiated an agreement to transfer 3,000 MEK fighters from Iraq to Albania, funding was earmarked to establish an Institute for De-Radicalisation so that the MEK could be successfully rehabilitated back into society. That didn't happen. In this past year, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) and former UN ambassador John Bolton both visited Albania to promote the MEK and its regime-change agenda.

These and other MEK activities have driven a wedge between Europe and the Trump administration. Even before the protests, European parliamentarians had demanded a ban on the MEK, particularly after an incident of MEK violence on parliamentary premises. Relations between France and Iran now make it possible for Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to directly demand that France curtail the MEK's activities there.

In an attempt to maneuver her way out of this isolation and irrelevance, Maryam Rajavi recently published an article in the Wall Street Journal as though none of this had happened. It is just one more attempt by the MEK to portray itself as an influential representative of the Iranian people. But if the MEK had even one iota of influence inside Iran, the protests would have become much more violent. Instead, all the MEK seems to have accomplished is to provide Iran's hardliners with a convenient rationale for suppressing an authentic civic movement for change.

Massoud Khodabandeh is the director of Middle East Strategy Consultants and has worked long-term with the authorities in Iraq to bring about a peaceful solution to the impasse at Camp Liberty and help rescue other victims of the Mojahedin-e Khalq cult. Among other publications, he co-authored the book "The Life of Camp Ashraf: Victims of Many Masters" with his wife Anne Singleton. They also published an academic paper on the MEK's use of the Internet. Anne Khodabandeh is a UK expert in anti-terrorist activities and a long-standing activist in the field of deradicalization of extremists. She has written several articles and books on this subject, along with her husband, who is of Iranian origin.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The MEK: From Revolutionary Group to Imperialist Asset

James Carey

January 24, 2018

The MEK's violent past makes it clear why its only remaining friends are those who seek regime change in Iran at any cost.

TEHRAN, IRAN (Analysis) — With the recent protests across Iran, some people are, for the first time, being exposed to a fringe group of Iranian exiles known as the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK, and their political front group, The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI).



While audiences of Western media may be seeing the group, they aren't actually being provided the proper context of who the MEK and NCRI are. Instead, MEK protests are being shown across Western media as "anti-regime" protests representative of the general mood of Iranians. The problem with these protests — which have been highlighted by outlets like Fox, Salon, and Vox — is that they aren't



close ally of the U.S. foreign policy establishment as a tool for applying pressure to Iran? To better understand how the MEK, which is almost universally rejected by the Iranian people, found itself in bed with nations like Israel and the U.S., it is worth examining MEK's full history.

## MEK's origins in pre-revolution Iran

The MEK was founded in 1965 by six members who splintered from the Freedom Movement of Iran, a moderate party based in the politics of former Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. The MEK founders were followers of a Shia leftist thinker, Ali Shariati. The group split from the Freedom Movement due to that party's moderate approach in challenging the government of the Shah.

When the MEK was founded it was accepted as a part of the larger anti-Shah revolutionary coalition (which easily integrated Marxist and liberal movements as long as they opposed the government) and, much like other factions of the revolution, the MEK also opposed Western interests in Iran. In the years leading up to the revolution, the MEK was so committed to waging war on U.S. interests that it attempted a kidnapping of U.S. Ambassador Douglas MacArthur II and an assassination of U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Harold Price. The MEK also carried out a host of bombings in Iran, many of which targeted U.S. citizens and assets (although the MEK now blames all these attacks on a splinter group, Peykar).

The MEK continued to work alongside Iran's Islamic revolutionaries through

the fall of the Shah, even claiming to have played a role in exposing the anti-Ayatollah Nojeh coup in 1980. The group attempted to field presidential candidates in 1980, although they were declared ineligible for office by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini due to the organization's beliefs that ran counter to the Islamic revolution. These events soon led to tension between the MEK and the government of the Islamic Republic, resulting in mutual hostility between the MEK and Hezbollah of Iran, a non-government militia that wasn't directed by the revolutionary government, nevertheless, these conflicts and the mutual hostility which followed, eventually led to MEK terror attacks on government targets in Iran.

At that time, the revolutionary government in Iran had high levels of popular support, which made the MEK's activities unacceptable to wide swaths of the population. Predictably, this led to the outlawing of MEK and the exile of its leadership, who ended up in France.

### **MEK in exile: from revolutionary to reactionary**

After its terror campaign against the revolutionary government failed, the MEK was forced to flee to France, where it remained for several years. The MEK was then forced to leave France in 1986, as part of an agreement between Tehran and Paris to return French hostages in exchange for banning the MEK.

At this point, there were few safe havens for the MEK available except for the one country that was engaged in a direct war against the government of Iran: Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Despite accurately calling Saddam an aggressor while the group was still in Iran, the MEK now joined the Iraqi government in opposing Iran and formed the National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA) in Baghdad.

The NLA was even more aggressive than the Iraqi army in its incursions into Iranian territory, going so far to assault and destroy Iranian villages during a ceasefire period brokered by the United Nations (UN). It was at this point that the MEK and its partner organizations officially became extensions of Iraqi policy and by extension, the CIA, which backed Saddam against Iran. These changes also led to the MEK improving rela-

tions with Israel in exchange for funding as well as intelligence on Tehran which was gathered by the Mossad, Israel's intelligence arm.

At this juncture, the MEK's ideology began to stray even further from that of the majority of Iranians (or anyone), and the group essentially evolved into a cult. The group began following the word of its leader Massoud Rajavi, enforcing rules such as making older women divorce their husbands and requiring celibacy for young women. The MEK also separated from its commitment to Marxism, instead adopting beliefs including opening relations with the West, capitalism, and religious freedom.

The MEK continued to coordinate terror attacks on Iran from Iraq after the Iran-Iraq war up until 2003, when it allied with Iraqi forces in the short campaign to resist the U.S. invasion. The MEK surrendered alongside Iraqi troops, however, unlike Iraqi army units, MEK fighters were given a 'special status' designation as civilians by U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld due to their opposition to Tehran — a controversial move even among right-wing think tanks like the Rand Corporation. This status allowed MEK fighters special protections in American custody, such as their captors' abiding by the Geneva Conventions at a time when the U.S. torture program was gaining notoriety.

The MEK's time in Iraq cemented the organization's unpopularity in Iran. While the Iranian people protest against the government over legitimate grievances, such as economic reform, much like other anti-imperialist powers such as North Korea, Iran remembers the past — and Iranian citizens (no matter how they feel about the current government) overwhelmingly reject involvement by the U.S. in Iran's internal affairs.

## **No friends but imperialists**

The MEK's sordid past makes it clear why its only remaining friends are Western nations and their allies who seek regime change in Tehran. The group was happy to play the role and abet the cause in exchange for protection and resources.

The MEK soon became a tool of every anti-Iranian entity seeking to topple the government in Tehran, including Israel, which regularly coordinates with the MEK and uses the organization as a sort of intelligence launderer to release information to the public without crediting them for it. The most notable instance of this relationship was the dissemination of information by the MEK claiming to prove Iran was developing nuclear weapons technology. While these allegations proved untrue, what made them even more nefarious was that the information was allegedly given to the MEK by the Mossad.

The MEK is also suspected to be behind the assassinations of Iranian civilian nuclear scientists, which they were trained to carry out by the Mossad, during a period in which the group was sheltered in the U.S. military's Camp Ashraf in Iraq and allegedly allowed to continue carrying out covert terrorist activities in Iran.

The MEK has continued to aid other Israeli projects as well. In Syria, the MEK released 'intelligence' on the fight for Aleppo and other conflict zones within the country. The group, which was formerly condemned by U.S. politicians on both sides of the aisle, suddenly became a darling of the neoconservative establishment, meeting with everyone from Newt Gingrich to Rudy Giuliani, and welcoming a Senate delegation that traveled to meet the group's members living in Albania.

### **MEK in latest protests**

While the MEK remains unpopular in Iran, the group still holds value to the U.S. It provides both an image of "Iranians against the regime" as well as a conduit to publish false intelligence demonizing Iran. The initial protests in Iran were started by citizens with legitimate grievances about the rising cost of essential consumer goods and the slow pace of economic reform, yet even those who oppose the government are likely to come from the large portion of Iranian citizens who harbor anti-American sentiment.

While the much of the media may be focusing on peaceful gatherings of the MEK in countries like France, the Iranian government claims several

cells of the organization have been found preparing to incite violence in the country. It is important not to be misled by false profiles of MEK demonstrations as regular Iranians vying for change, but to keep in mind that the group is a terror organization and is almost universally despised in the country it claims to wish to “liberate.”

📖 Access the article from [here](#).





## UK MPs attended rally for Iranian group whose leader is still banned by London

Joe Lo

January 30, 2018

Several UK MPs attended a rally in Paris organised by a controversial group which was listed a terrorist organisation by the UK government until 2008, according to parliamentary data just released.

The National Council for Resistance of Iran (NCRI) is widely considered to be an alias for the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) - otherwise known as the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI).



MEK/PMOI is described as a cult by some experts and former members while its leader, Maryam Rajavi, is still banned from entering the UK. The NCRI says that MEK falls under its umbrella.

Since it was founded in the 1960s, the group has gone from Islamic-Marxism to ally of Saddam Hussein to its current incarnation, attempting to position itself



## UK MPs attended rally for Iranian group whose leader is still banned by London

The group was delisted as terrorist organisation in 2008 - but some analysts say it still operates as a cult



as the Iranian government-in-waiting.

Conservative MPs David Amess, Bob Blackman, Theresa Villiers, Matthew Offord and Labour MP Toby Perkins were among the UK delegation at the NCRI's Free Iran rally in Paris on 1 July, where the NCRI is based in exile from Iran.

Speaking to MEE, Iranian analyst Mahan Abedin said: "If UK parliamentarians are supporting them with a view to pushing for

change inside Iran or supporting the protesters then this may not be the right way to go about it because this group has no traction. It's universally reviled.

"One reason it's so reviled is because memories are very long. They were blatantly fighting on the Iraqi side in the Iran-Iraq war."

The NCRI paid Perkins' \$1,112 in expenses to cover his travel, accommodation and meals, while attending the rally, according to the Parliamentary register of MPs' financial interests. MPs Blackman and Amess were paid to attend by the Welle Association for Human Rights and Democracy, a Zurich-based organisation which campaigns for human rights in Iran, and the others appear to have paid for themselves.

The Paris rally featured speeches from politicians from around the world, including Villiers and Amess, who spoke of the need for human rights and

democracy in Iran and their support for Rajavi.

According to video from the rally, Amess said: “The Iranian resistance is expanding its activities inside the country. Internationally, it has emerged as the only democratic alternative to the theocratic regime. So ladies and gentlemen, today we do not want to talk about condemnation of the mullahs’ crimes.

“We want to talk about regime change which is at long last within our grasp. We want to talk about a future Iran with Maryam Rajavi’s 10-point plan.” This 10-point plan is Rajavi’s a blueprint for a secular, liberal democracy in Iran.

Video from the event shows Rajavi entering the venue, followed by a dozen children dressed all in white, as the crowd and assembled politicians rise to their feet and applaud her.

“The ruling regime is in disarray and paralysed as never before,” Rajavi told the crowd, “Iranian society is simmering with discontent and the international community is finally getting closer to the reality that appeasing the theocracy is misguided.” Members of MEK also watched via satellite from the group’s camp in Albania.

How MEK evolved

The MEK began in the 1960s as an Islamic-Marxist group of militants who took up armed struggle, first against the Shah and his US supporters, and then against the post-revolution Iranian state. The US State Department holds the MEK responsible for killing six Americans - three military officers and three security contractors - in the 1970s.

During the Iran-Iraq war from 1980-1988, the MEK sided with Saddam Hussein and its militants launched an attack on Iran and helped provide intelligence on military targets within Iran.

The group is also alleged to have helped violently suppress Kurdish and Shia uprisings in Iraq, which it denies. In return for its support, the Iraqi ruler allowed the MEK to run a military camp near the Iranian border called Camp Ashraf.

According to a 2005 Human Rights Watch report, after the Iran-Iraq war failed to overthrow the Iranian regime, many MEK fighters grew disillusioned.

The MEK's leaders, Massoud Rajavi and his wife Maryam Rajavi, then began to enforce punishments for dissent which have led to accusations from former members that the MEK has become a cult.

In its report, Human Rights Watch said that all MEK members were forced to divorce, although Massoud and Maryam Rajavi remained married, and that any dissenters were imprisoned and tortured inside Camp Ashraf.

Masoud Banisadr was the MEK/NCRI's public relations chief until 1996, when he left the group. Speaking in 2009, he said that the organisation he joined during the 1970s "soon changed into a terrorist organisation and then a destructive cult".

According to former members, two dissenters were killed while being interrogated, HRW reported.

In 1992, the MEK raided several Iranian government embassies in the West. In 1997, the US listed the MEK as a terrorist organisation and in 2001, the UK followed suit under pressure from the Iranian government, according to then-home secretary Jack Straw.

When Iraq was invaded in 2003, the MEK was disarmed as part of a ceasefire deal with the US forces. Its camps in Iraq were gradually and violently shut by the new Iraqi government, with the remaining residents from Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty moving to a new camp in Albania in 2016.

Group tries to rebrand

Since the US invasion, MEK has distanced itself from its alliance with Saddam Hussein and rebranded itself as an Iranian government-in-waiting which supports freedom, democracy and secularism.

This has led the UK, US and EU to take it off their lists of terrorist organisations, although the UK's last Labour government only did so after a court

decision.

On the other side of the Iranian political scene, and just one month after the rally, Conservative MP Richard Bacon attended Hassan Rouhani's inauguration and met with Iranian parliamentarians. The \$1,208 cost of his trip was paid for by the Iranian government.

When asked to comment on his attendance at the rally in Paris, Perkins said that the information about "the arrangements for the trip are incorrect" but would not elaborate on this further. The parliamentary record states that he received funds from the NCRI and that the purpose of visit was "attending a conference on human rights".

At the time of publication, none of the other MPs who went to Paris had replied to MEE requests for comment.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Ex-terrorist group funds Paris trip for British Labour MP Toby Perkins

rt.com

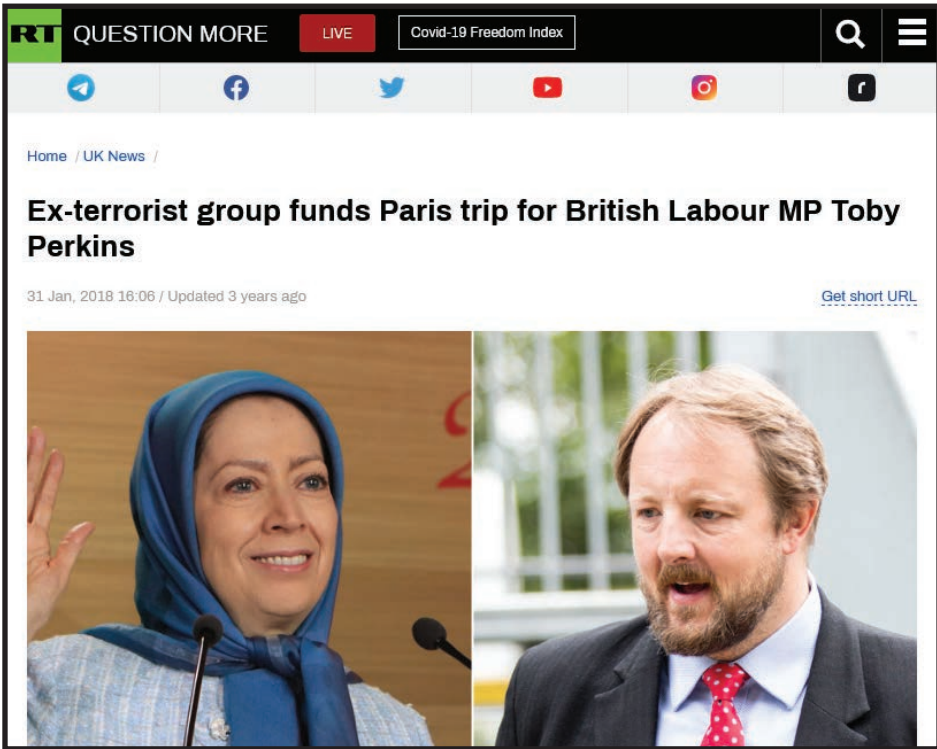
January 31, 2018

**A** group, formerly listed as a terrorist organization by the UK and US, funded a trip to Paris for a Labour MP. Toby Perkins was at an event run by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, described by ex-members as a cult.

Perkins, the representative for Chesterfield, while not being the only British MP at the rally, was the only politician to receive money from the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). According to financial disclosure documents, Perkins received £800 (\$1,135) from the group.

Conservative MPs David Amess, Bob Blackman, Theresa Villiers and Matthew Offord also attended the July conference, which took place in Paris. The Welle Association for Human Rights and Democracy paid for Amess and Blackman's trip, while other MPs appear to have covered their own costs.





The NCRI is widely considered to be synonymous with the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), who consider themselves an Iranian government in exile and advocate the violent overthrow of the current administration in Iran. More than 16,000 people have been killed in violent acts carried out by MEK since 1970s, including dozens of targeted assassinations against Iranian politicians.

MEK which was listed as a terrorist organization by the US, until then-secretary of state Hillary Clinton formally removed it from the list in late 2012. The group's leader, Maryam Rajavi, is banned from entering the UK, although she regularly holds events and meets with politicians in various European capitals. Both the UK and EU have listed the group on terrorism lists, with the former removing MEK in 2008 and the latter in 2009.

Speaking to the Middle East Eye, Iranian analyst Mahan Abedin said: "If UK parliamentarians are supporting them with a view to pushing for change inside Iran or supporting the protesters then this may not be the right way to go about it because this group has no traction. It's universally reviled.

“One reason it’s so reviled is because memories are very long. They were blatantly fighting on the Iraqi side in the Iran-Iraq war.”

The Paris event included speeches from politicians from around the globe. Tory MPs Villiers and Amess both gave speeches in which they stated their support for Rajavi and spoke of the need for human rights and democracy in Iran, according to Middle East Eye.

“The Iranian resistance is expanding its activities inside the country,” Amess said at the Free Iran rally.

“Internationally, it has emerged as the only democratic alternative to the theocratic regime. So, ladies and gentlemen, today we do not want to talk about condemnation of the mullahs’ crimes.

“We want to talk about regime change which is at long last within our grasp. We want to talk about a future Iran with Maryam Rajavi’s 10-point plan,” referring to Rajavi’s blueprint for a secular, liberal democracy in Iran.

Despite the NCRI’s abysmal global reputation, they are backed by significant figures in the US - including Trump-supporter and former mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani and ex-FBI head Howard Dean, among others.

According to the BBC, many of their Western supporters get paid for spreading the organization’s message. From those who have declared their earnings, the going rate for a pro-NCRI/MEK speech appears to be \$20,000.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## With Tillerson Gone, MEK Leader Rajavi Calls for “Uprising” in Iran

Exit News

March 14, 2018

Yesterday US President Donald Trump unceremoniously fired Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State, nominating CIA Director Mike Pompeo in his stead. According to several US media, Pompeo is a strong critic of the nuclear deal with Iran and would support President Trump’s plan to reject it in May.

**exit**  
news

This would open the prospect of the US backing regime change in Iran, something favored for a long time by several key members of the Republican Party. An important element in this regime change would be the 3,000 Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian opposition group, in exile in Albania which Iran refers to as “terrorists.”

During 2017, the MEK in Albania received visits from former FBI Director Louis J. Freeh, US Senator John McCain (R-AZ), and US Senators Thom

Tillis (R-NC), Roy Blunt (R-MO), and John Cornyn (R-TX). In his speech to the MEK, underneath the slogan “Free Iran,” Sen. McCain stated: “Some day Iran will be free. Some day we will all gather in that square.”

Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the MEK, which has been described as a “cult,” has frequently called for “comprehensive sanctions” against the Iranian regime:



Maryam Rajavi underscored the need for imposing comprehensive sanctions on the Iranian regime’s banking and oil sector, expelling the IRGC and its affiliated militias from Syria, Iraq, and other regional countries, taking urgent steps to punish the regime for widespread political executions, especially the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners, setting up a commission of inquiry to investigate this major crime against humanity with the aim of bringing to justice the perpetrators, and recognizing the aspirations of the Iranian people and Resistance to overthrow the ruling religious tyranny and to establish freedom and democracy, and a republic based on the separation of religion and state, gender equality, and a non-nuclear Iran.

therefore, it should come as no surprise that on the same day Tillerson — who always defended the nuclear deal with Iran — was fired, Rajavi posted a video on Facebook, stating:

Now is the time to expand and spread the bastions of rebellion for freedom. I call on my compatriots across the country to rise up and join this uprising.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## John (“Bomb Iran”) Bolton, the New Warmonger in the White House

Robin Wright

March 23, 2018

THE  
NEW YORKER

Hawks are closing in on the White House. John Bolton, arguably the most abrasive American diplomat of the twenty-first century, will soon assume the top foreign-policy job at the National Security Council. As is his wont, President Trump announced yet another shakeup of his inner circle in a tweet late on Thursday. He dismissed General H. R. McMaster, who couldn’t survive a testy relationship with the impatient President despite his battle-hardened career and three stars on his epaulets. Trump tapped Bolton to take over. A former U.N. Ambassador currently best known as a Fox News pundit, Bolton has advocated far harder positions than Trump, including bombing campaigns, wars, and regime change. The late-day news flash sent chills across Washington, even among some Republicans.

With Mike Pompeo, the C.I.A. director, due to take

NEWS DEBATE  
JOHN ("BOMB IRAN") BOLTON, THE NEW WARMONGER IN THE WHITE HOUSE

By Robin Wright  
March 23, 2018



John Bolton, in 2016, speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference. Photograph by Andrew Hester / Bloomberg / Getty

over from the ousted Rex Tillerson at the State Department, the team deciding American actions across the globe will now be weighted by hard-liners and war advocates. Defense Secretary James Mattis, a retired marine general, is the most pragmatic policymaker left. What an irony. (And how long will Mattis stay? He was photographed having dinner with Tillerson on Tuesday.)

Bolton, a Yale-educated lawyer whose trademark is a white walrus mustache, championed the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which produced chaos followed by waves of extremist violence

in the region. He also advocated international intervention to oust Syria's Bashar al-Assad. He has repeatedly urged military action in Iran and North Korea, which he has called "two sides of the same coin."

In an op-ed for the Wall Street Journal, written two months ago, Bolton condemned the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran as a "massive strategic blunder"—then went further. American policy, he wrote, "should be ending Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution before its fortieth anniversary," next February. "Recognizing a new Iranian regime in 2019 would reverse the shame of once seeing our diplomats held hostage for four hundred and forty-four days. The former hostages can cut the ribbon to open the new U.S. Embassy in Tehran."

Shortly before the Iran deal—brokered by the world's six major powers—Bolton wrote a piece in the Times entitled "To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran." In it, he predicted, "Iran will not negotiate away its nuclear program. Nor will sanctions block its building a broad and deep weapons infrastructure. The inconvenient truth is that only military action like Israel's 1981 at-

tack on Saddam Hussein's Osirak reactor in Iraq or its 2007 destruction of a Syrian reactor, designed and built by North Korea, can accomplish what is required. Time is terribly short, but a strike can still succeed." Three months later, Iran accepted the nuclear deal, the most significant nonproliferation treaty in more than a quarter century. The deal was endorsed unanimously in a U.N. resolution. Trump has vowed that he will withdraw from the deal without fixes by mid-May, a move that Bolton clearly supports.

Bolton has also long backed a cultlike Iranian opposition group, the Mujahideen-e Khalq, or M.E.K., which has been held responsible for the murder of multiple American military personnel, the attempted kidnapping of a U.S. Ambassador, and other violent attacks in Iran before the 1979 revolution. The M.E.K. was based in Iraq during the regime of Saddam Hussein, who provided arms, financial assistance, and political support. In 1997, it was among the first groups cited on the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations. It wasn't removed until 2012. Bolton spoke at an M.E.K. rally last year—for the eighth time—in Paris. Other speakers at M.E.K. rallies have reportedly been paid tens of thousands of dollars for their appearances.

Bolton's policy recommendations on North Korea are also militant, and they break with the man who just hired him. Earlier this month, Trump pledged to meet Kim Jong Un by May. "Talking to North Korea is worse than a mere waste of time," Bolton wrote in *The Hill*, in August. "Negotiations legitimize the dictatorship, affording it more time to enhance its nuclear and ballistic-missile capabilities. Today, only one diplomatic option remains, and it does not involve talking to Pyongyang. Instead, President Trump should urge President Xi Jinping that reunifying the Korean Peninsula is in China's national interest."

The answer to China's fear of an uncontrolled collapse, Bolton wrote, "is a jointly managed effort to dismantle North Korea's government, effectively allowing the swift takeover of the North by the South." Not even the South Korean President, Moon Jae-in, supports that idea; he has been trying to broker a rapprochement with the North.

The deepest disagreement between Bolton and Trump may be over Russia—especially its President, Vladimir Putin. In an op-ed last July, Bolton wrote

that undermining the U.S. Constitution “is far more than just a quotidian covert operation. It is in fact a *casus belli*, a true act of war, and one Washington will never tolerate.” He charged that Trump had been duped by Putin in their meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 summit last summer.

Bolton has worked for three Republican Presidents—Reagan and both Bushes. He gained his reputation as a feisty hawk after George W. Bush appointed him to be Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security. By 2005, he was so controversial that his nomination to be U.N. Ambassador failed to win Senate approval, and Bush appointed him as a “recess appointment” when Congress was not in session.

The United Nations was an odd fit. In 1994, Bolton said, “There is no United Nations. There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power left in the world, and that’s the United States, when it suits our interests and when we can get others to go along.” He later said about the world body, “The Secretariat Building in New York has thirty-eight stories. If you lost ten stories today, it wouldn’t make a bit of difference.”

When I covered the George W. Bush Administration, I often heard grumbling about Bolton being irascible and argumentative. He had deep disagreements with both Secretaries of State, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. He ultimately had a falling out with President Bush, who lamented his support for Bolton. “Let me just say from the outset that I don’t consider Bolton credible,” he said, according to an account in the *Times*, in 2008. The same year, Bolton countered in the *Wall Street Journal*, “Nothing can erase the ineffable sadness of an American presidency, like this one, in total intellectual collapse.”

After Bolton’s appointment, on Thursday, I spoke to John B. Bellinger III, the former legal adviser to the N.S.C. and the State Department, who worked with Bolton for two years. “John may be the only senior person in the White House with significant diplomatic experience, both bilateral and multilateral,” Bellinger said. “He has negotiated with most of the governments in the world, which is helpful, given that Trump has not. John tends to annoy and frustrate and try to steamroll other countries. But at least he’s not ignorant of diplomatic relationships.”

Bolton negotiated strong U.N. resolutions on North Korea, Bellinger told me. “He also famously repudiated the U.S. signature to the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court. He’s not a fan of international law or international institutions, which he may think can challenge U.S. sovereignty.” Bellinger was more sanguine about how stubborn Bolton will be at the National Security Council. “We’ll have to hope that some of the aggressive actions John suggested when he was not in government—and more of a provocateur—may look a lot different to him when he’s responsible for the actions or advising the President on final decisions and he has other Cabinet secretaries telling him what the consequences will be.”

Although Bolton has experience in the White House Situation Room, navigating the interagency process may be challenging when he is surrounded by the many people with strong views in this Administration, Bellinger said. “John does not suffer fools gladly. He may have a challenging time as national-security adviser with a President who is not interested in facts or history.”

The Bolton nomination provoked strong reactions in Washington. On the Hill, the Democratic Senator Edward Markey, of Massachusetts, tweeted, “With the appointments of Mike Pompeo and John Bolton, @realDonaldTrump is successfully lining up his war cabinet. Bolton played a key role in politicizing the intel that misled us into the Iraq War. We cannot let this extreme war hawk blunder us into another terrible conflict.”

Jon Soltz, an Iraq War veteran and chairperson of VoteVets, the largest progressive veterans group, called Bolton’s appointment “downright frightening.” In a statement, he said, “A man who was key in sending me and thousands and thousands of my fellow troops to Iraq is now the National Security Adviser to Donald Trump. Let there be no mistake—there is no war for regime change, anywhere, that John Bolton wasn’t for. He sees troops not as human beings, with families, but as expendable resources, in his real-life game of Risk. We are undoubtedly closer to a war in Korea, now, and a war with Iran.” Soltz added, “To the Trump voters out there we say: You were suckered. You were lied to, and now our troops are going to have to pay the price, for that.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Opinion: John Bolton wants regime change in Iran, and so does the cult that paid him

Jason Rezaian

March 24, 2018

The  
Washington  
Post

President Trump's appointment of John Bolton as his new national security adviser has created a stir among foreign policy experts. He is known for expressing extreme skepticism about international institutions (including the United Nations, where he served as U.S. ambassador in the George W. Bush administration). He has advocated a preemptive strike against North Korea. And he has also repeatedly proposed "regime change" (meaning "war") in Tehran.

Since the latter issue is one of the trickiest facing the Trump administration, it's worth taking a closer look.

Bolton's hawkish views on Iran mirror those of Israel, Saudi Arabia and one of his key ideological partners, the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK).





Today the MEK bears little resemblance to the highly organized, influential and militant opposition force that it was in Iran while seeking to topple the shah during the 1979 revolution. Initially it worked in cooperation with the clerical government. In fact, children of several top officials in the Islamic Republic

joined the MEK.

When it became clear that the MEK could no longer coexist with the ruling Islamic Republic Party, some MEK members withdrew from the group, while others were imprisoned. They either recanted and returned to society or were executed.

Those who were left fled to Iraq, where Saddam Hussein, who invaded Iran in 1980, gave them a haven. Many took up arms and fought against their Iranian countrymen, earning the group the unofficial nickname monafegheen, or the “hypocrites.” That title has stuck, and most Iranians inside the country, regardless of their political tendencies, refer to them as such.

The group is loathed by most Iranians, mainly for the traitorous act of fighting alongside the enemy.

But it is the group’s activities in the decades since that have cemented its reputation as a deranged cult. For decades its command center was a compound in Iraq’s Diyala province, where more than 3,000 members lived in virtual captivity. The few who were able to escape told of being cut off from their loved ones, forced into arranged marriages, brainwashed, sexually abused and tortured.

All this was carried out under the supervision of the group’s leaders, Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, the husband and wife at the top of the organization’s pyramid. He has been missing since the U.S. invasion in 2003 and is presumed dead. She now runs the group and makes regular public appearances with her

powerful friends from the West — such as Bolton.

The group was long a fixture on the State Department's list of terrorist organizations for having killed American citizens. Bolton and others successfully lobbied to have the designation removed in 2012. That did little to change how average Iranians think of the organization.

In the seven years I lived in Iran, many people expressed criticism of the ruling establishment — at great potential risk to themselves. Some hoped for regime change by military force, others dreamed of a return of the monarchy and many more wanted to see a peaceful transition to a secular alternative to clerical rule. In all that time, though, I never met a person who thought the MEK should, or could, present a viable alternative.

But apparently that doesn't matter to its supporters in Washington. Of course they were paid for their loyalty. "Very few former U.S. government officials shilled pro bono for the MEK," said a former State Department official who worked on Iran. Among the long bipartisan list of people who have taken money from the group in exchange for speaking at its events are former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and former Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean. Bolton, the former official told me, was also paid.

Their many efforts failed to block the nuclear deal with Iran. Despite the long list of nefarious acts still carried out by Tehran, the biggest threat that Iran posed to international security — the issue that our allies and other world powers all agreed needed to be resolved — has been resolved.

Based on U.S. assessments and those of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran appears to be complying with the nuclear deal.

To those who claim that the nuclear deal isn't working, regime change remains the only solution. For the MEK, and Bolton, if his words are to be taken at face value, the only path to that could be war. The group has long been prepared to do whatever it takes to see that happen, including presenting fake intelligence about Iran's nuclear program.


A dividend of our protracted negotiations with Iran is the increased knowl-

edge we now have about the Islamic Republic and the population it rules over. It's a luxury we didn't enjoy in 2003, when exiled figures like Ahmad Chalabi were able to convince the Bush administration they could help transition Iraq into a thriving democracy.

We know enough about Iran that we can't fool ourselves into thinking that the MEK could ever provide a viable alternative to the current regime.

The MEK is the type of fringe group that sets up camp across the street from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and hands out fliers filled with unsubstantiated claims. This is America — we let crazy people talk. That's their right, and I would never suggest that they be prohibited from doing that. But giving the MEK a voice in the White House is a terrible idea.

In John Bolton they have someone who will do it for them.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Here's John Bolton Promising Regime Change in Iran by the End of 2018

Robert Mackey

March 24 2018

Among those most alarmed by President Donald Trump's selection of John Bolton as his new national security adviser on Thursday were supporters of the Iran nuclear deal, the 2015 international agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear program in exchange for a partial lifting of economic sanctions.

The Intercept

Rob Malley, who coordinated Middle East policy in the Obama administration, observed that Bolton's appointment, along with the nomination of Iran deal critic Mike Pompeo as secretary of state, seemed to signal that the agreement would most likely be "dead and buried" within months. Trita Parsi, leader of the National Iranian American Council wrote on Twitter: "People, let this be very clear: The appointment of Bolton is essentially a declaration of war with Iran. With Pompeo and Bolton, Trump is assembling a WAR CABINET."

Their alarm was understandable. Bolton, who made his name as a belligerent member of George W. Bush's State Department and a Fox News contributor, has not only demanded that the Trump administration withdraw from the nuclear deal, he also previously advocated bombing Iran instead. Bolton has spent the better part of a decade calling for the United States to help overthrow the theocratic government in Tehran and hand power to a cult-like group of Iranian exiles with no real support inside the country.

Just eight months ago, at a Paris gathering, Bolton told members of the Iranian exile group, known as the Mujahedeen Khalq, MEK, or People's Mujahedeen, that the Trump administration should embrace their goal of immediate regime change in Iran and recognize their group as a "viable" alternative.

"The outcome of the president's policy review should be to determine that the Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 revolution will not last until its 40th birthday," Bolton said. (The 40th anniversary of the Iranian revolution will be on February 11, 2019.) "The declared policy of the United States should be the overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran," Bolton added. "The behavior and the objectives of the regime are not going to change and, therefore, the only solution is to change the regime itself."

As the Iranian expatriate journalist Bahman Kalbasi noted, Bolton concluded his address to the exiles with a rousing promise: "And that's why, before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran!"

To understand how extraordinary it is that the man about to become the president's most senior national security official made this promise to the MEK, it is important to know that, until recently, the Iranian dissidents had spent three decades trying to achieve their aims through violence, including terrorist attacks.

After members of the MEK helped foment the 1979 revolution, in part by killing American civilians working in Tehran, the group then lost a bitter struggle for power to the Islamists led by the revolution's leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. With its leadership forced to flee Iran in 1981, the MEK's members set up a government-in-exile in France and established a military base in Iraq, where they were given arms and training by Saddam

Hussein, as part of a strategy to destabilize the government in Tehran that he was at war with.

In recent years, as *The Intercept* has reported, the MEK has poured millions of dollars into reinventing itself as a moderate political group ready to take power in Iran if Western-backed regime change ever takes place. To that end, it lobbied successfully to be removed from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations in 2012. The Iranian exiles achieved this over the apparent opposition of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in part by paying a long list of former U.S. officials hefty speaking fees of between \$10,000 to \$50,000 for hymns of praise like the one Bolton delivered last July.

But, according to Ariane Tabatabai, a Georgetown University scholar, the “cult-like dissident group” — whose married members were reportedly forced to divorce and take a vow of lifelong celibacy — “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 rush to the arms of what they consider a corrupt, criminal cult.

Despite such doubts that the MEK's political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, is any more reliable than Ahmad Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress proved to be, spending lavishly on paid endorsements has earned the group a bipartisan roster of Washington politicians willing to sign up as supporters. At a previous gala, in 2016, Bolton was joined in singing the group's praises by another former U.N. ambassador, Bill Richardson; a former attorney general, Michael Mukasey; the former State Department spokesperson P.J. Crowley; the former Homeland Security adviser Frances Townsend; the former Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I.; and the former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean. That Paris gala was hosted by Linda Chavez, a

former Reagan administration official.

At a similar event this January, the backdrop behind former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, as he praised MEK leader Maryam Rajavi, made the aim of the group's investment in American politicians clear.

Unsurprisingly, leading figures from among the exile group's Washington followers have expressed delight over Bolton's impending elevation to the White House. At the group's celebration of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, in Albania on Tuesday, Rajavi was joined on stage by Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City.

Although the official announcement from the White House was not made until Thursday, Giuliani told the group, to loud applause, that Bolton "is going to be President Trump's national security adviser." In case there was any doubt among the exiles that Bolton might not advise Trump to overthrow Iran's government, Giuliani assured them that "if anything, John Bolton has become more determined that there needs to be regime change in Iran, that the nuclear agreement needs to be burned, and that you need to be in charge of that country."

Moments later, Giuliani led the crowd in chanting "regime change."

Despite the fact that Trump ran for office as a critic of the decision to invade Iraq, Bolton still refuses to call the preemptive attack a mistake. That position stunned even Fox News's Tucker Carlson, during an interview two weeks ago. After Carlson pointed out that Bolton had called for regime change in Iraq, Libya, Iran, and Syria, and the first of those had been "a disaster," Bolton disagreed, saying, "I think your analysis is simple-minded, frankly."

"I think the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, that military action, was a resounding success," Bolton told Carlson. The chaos that followed in Iraq, he said, was caused by a poorly executed occupation that ended too soon. On the bright side, Bolton said, the mistakes the U.S. made in Iraq offered "lessons about what to do after a regime is overthrown" in the future.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Why Bolton's MEK Connection Matters

Daniel Larison

March 25, 2018

Jason Rezaian comments on Bolton's enthusiasm for the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) and what it means for U.S. Iran policy:

The MEK is the type of fringe group that sets up camp across the street from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and hands out fliers filled with unsubstantiated claims. This is America — we let crazy people talk. That's their right, and I would never suggest that they be prohibited from doing that. But giving the MEK a voice in the White House is a terrible idea.

In John Bolton they have someone who will do it for them.

Now that Bolton is in such an influential position in the Trump administration, his connection with and support for the MEK pose some real dangers for the U.S. He could use his position to funnel misinfor-







### Why Bolton's MEK Connection Matters



Georg Skalmurev/Flickr

MARCH 125, 2018 | 12:00 AM

mation from the MEK to the president to distort U.S. policy in their favor. He might use his position to advocate publicly on behalf of the MEK, and that would give them a de facto endorsement from the administration. Worse still, he could persuade the president that this totalitarian cult is the “real” Iranian opposition, which would simultaneously harm Iranian dissidents and saddle the U.S. with a discredited, deranged cult as its preferred alternative to the Iranian government.


Bolton’s connection with the MEK is not the only disqualifying thing in his record, but it is one of the more egregious red flags that should have prevented the president from ever offering him the job in the first place. If any other group had been removed from the list of foreign terrorist organizations a few years earlier, anyone publicly advocating on their behalf while they were still on the list would have tremendous difficulty getting work with the U.S. government, much less serving as one of the most important officials in the White House. Because the MEK hates the Iranian government, shilling for them is probably considered a plus in this administration. It is a measure of how warped the debate over Iran policy is that Bolton and others like him could openly shill for such a group without becoming pariahs.

Rezaian reminds us just what the MEK is:

But it is the group’s activities in the decades since that have cemented its reputation as a deranged cult. For decades its command center was a compound in Iraq’s Diyala province, where more than 3,000 members lived in virtual captivity. The few who were able to escape told of being cut off from their loved ones, forced into arranged marriages, brainwashed, sexually abused and tortured.

All this was carried out under the supervision of the group's leaders, Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, the husband and wife at the top of the organization's pyramid. He has been missing since the U.S. invasion in 2003 and is presumed dead. She now runs the group and makes regular public appearances with her powerful friends from the West — such as Bolton.

There has been a shameful parade of former U.S. officials, retired military officers, and has-been politicians making their annual pilgrimage to pay tribute to Maryam Rajavi in Paris every year. Bolton has been a faithful devotee for the last decade, and when he was just a former Bush administration official few people cared that he was disgracing himself with his appearances there. Now that he is going to be the next National Security Advisor, his horrible judgment and sketchy ties to awful groups should receive extensive scrutiny and they should make us extremely skeptical about everything he says and does in that position.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## 10 Reasons to Fear John Bolton

Medea Benjamin

March 27, 2018



And this is just for starters...  
Let's not mince words: John Bolton is a war-monger and his appointment to be Donald Trump's National Security Advisor is a threat to global security. Bolton advocates a foreign policy that exaggerates threats, belittles diplomacy, shows contempt for international institutions and is quick to use violence. The National Security Advisor position does not need Senate confirmation, so starting April 9, the hawk of all hawks will be perched at the White House.

Need specifics on why we should oppose Bolton? Here are some. Add your own.

1. Bolton wants to shred the Iran nuclear deal... and bomb Iran. Bolton hates the nuclear deal that was signed under Obama's watch not only by the U.S. and Iran, but also by Britain, France, Germany,



China, Russia, and the EU. Although the deal is working and even Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said it is in our national interest, Bolton calls the Iran deal a massive strategic blunder. On May 12, when Trump is required to re-certify that Iran has been complying with the deal, Bolton makes it more likely that the US will pull out of the deal, triggering a major international crisis. Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council, says, “People, let this be very clear: The appointment of Bolton is essentially a declaration of war with Iran.”

2. Bolton is in bed with an Iranian terrorist organization called MEK, a fringe group that was listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States until 2012 and is still considered a terrorist organization inside Iran. Bolton routinely meets with and accepts payments from the group, which has been responsible for the murder of American soldiers, the attempted kidnapping of a U.S. Ambassador, and many violent attacks inside Iran. Bolton considers the MEK a ‘viable opposition’ that he wants to use to overthrow the Iranian government. With Bolton in power, one of the most detested Iranian cults will be treated by the US government as legitimate representatives of the Iranian people.

3. Bolton will jeopardize talks with North Korea. The world breathed a

sigh of relief at the announcement that Presidents Trump and Kim Jung-un would meet in May. But with Bolton, that meeting may never take place, or could be disastrous. Bolton says, “Talking to North Korea is worse than a mere waste of time. Negotiations legitimize the dictatorship, affording it more time to enhance its nuclear and ballistic-missile capabilities.” Instead of talks, Bolton has called for the United States to launch a preemptive strike against North Korea, a strike that could spark a nuclear war.

4. Bolton hates the United Nations and international law. When George Bush nominated Bolton to be UN ambassador in 2005, he proved so controversial to even the Republican-controlled Senate that Bush had to sneak him in as a “recess appointment” when Congress was not in session. It is one thing to be critical of the UN but Bolton opposes its very existence. “There is no such thing as the United Nations,” he once said, adding, “If the U.N. Secretariat building in New York lost 10 stories, it wouldn’t make a lot of difference.” More than that, he is hostile to the concept of international law, having once declared, “It is a big mistake for us to grant any validity to international law even when it may seem in our short-term interest to do so—because over the long term, the goal of those who think that international law really means anything are those who want to constrain the United States.”

5. Bolton was a key instigator of the Iraq war and has no regrets. He was a major figure (along with Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld) pushing for the invasion of Iraq. During the Bush presidency, when he was Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control, he helped fabricate evidence about weapons of mass destruction that led to the March 2003 invasion. And he is one of the few original advocates for that war who still insist it was a good idea.

6. Bolton provided false information about Cuba. As Undersecretary of State, Bolton claimed that Havana was attempting to develop biological weapons and sell them to rogue regimes. Then he tried to fire two intelligence analysts who challenged his erroneous allegations. Bolton has also urged that stronger sanctions be imposed on Cuba, and put Cuba on his “axis of evil” list.

7. He is no friend of the Palestinians. When he was at the United Nations, he constantly protected Israel by vetoing all UN resolutions targeting Israel.

Bolton praised Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, breaking with decades of international consensus that the disputed city's status must be negotiated between the two sides. He opposes a Palestinian state, saying, "I don't think there are institutions on the Palestinian side that can live up to the commitments of a treaty with Israel....or could resist takeover by terrorist elements." His solution? Get rid of Palestinians by merging Gaza with Egypt and the West Bank with Jordan.

8. Bolton will create new problems with China. He has been an ardent supporter of diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, and was paid by the Taiwanese government. He advised the Trump administration to reconsider the "One China" policy, an agreement made in 1972 that requires countries to choose between diplomatic relations with China or diplomatic relations with Taiwan. His antagonistic stance toward China could have a negative impact on issues ranging from North Korea and the South China Sea to cyberspace and trade.

9. He hangs out with Islamophobes. Bolton has a decade-long history of associating with anti-Islam activist Pamela Geller, appearing on her internet radio program "Atlas on the Air" and on her video blog. Geller is well-known for her inflammatory public comments about Muslims and the idea that they are trying to impose Sharia law in the US. Bolton wrote the foreword to the book she co-wrote with fellow anti-Islamist Robert Spencer called "The Post-American Presidency: The Obama Administration's War on America."

10. His white walrus mustache should immediately disqualify him. According to former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon, president-elect Trump passed on nominating John Bolton to a senior Cabinet position because he didn't like Bolton's signature mustache. With his hairy upper lip, Bolton just didn't "look the part." We agree. Trump should immediately rescind the offer in favor of someone with less facial hair.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK's violent past looms over US lobby for regime change in Iran

Ted Regencia

March 29, 2018

**S**ecretive Iranian opposition group finds new White House ally in John Bolton, but remains a 'pariah' back home.

On June 28, 1981, a huge explosion ripped through the headquarters of Iran's ruling Islamic Republic Party, killing at least 74 government officials, including the country's chief justice, Ayatollah Mohammed Beheshti and more than 20 parliament members, gathered that Sunday evening in southern Tehran.



Iran blamed the attack on the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK), a left-wing political group, which also killed Americans before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The suspect reportedly placed the bomb in a rubbish bin near where party leader Beheshti, 52, was addressing the group.



The incident, one of the deadliest political killings in Iran’s history, is still remembered as the Haft-e-Tir bombing, so named after the date when it took place on the Persian calendar.

A busy square and a subway station in central Tehran were similarly named in honour of the victims.

Two months later, President Mohammad Ali Rajaei, Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar, and three other people were also killed when an explosive hidden

in a briefcase detonated inside the prime minister’s office.

The new president had barely escaped the June bombing.

The effect of the explosion reverberated through the parliament building nearby, and it took more than two hours to put out the fire that followed the blast, according to witness accounts.

A Harvard International Review article described the device as “very sophisticated”.

Bahonar’s secretary turned out to be an undercover MEK operative, and was identified by investigators as the person who planted the bomb. He and the Haft-e-Tir bombing suspect were never arrested.

### ‘No love lost for MEK’

The MEK’s history of violence has resurfaced in recent days, after US President Donald Trump appointed John Bolton as his national security adviser. The former US ambassador to the UN is a lobbyist for the group and its



“government-in-exile”, the Iran National Council of Resistance.

Bolton and the MEK support Trump’s threat to undo the Iran nuclear deal and advocate for “regime change” in Iran. But critics warned the group’s proximity to the levers of American power and the policy they espouse could be a recipe for more bloodshed in the Middle East.

The MEK said it has long renounced violence to advance its goals in Iran. It said it supports “a democratic Iran based on the popular vote”, and the separation of church and state. In September 2012, it was removed from the US “terror list”.

But when Bolton spoke before the group in July 2017 in Paris, members cheered loudly as he said it should be a US policy goal that the Iranian regime “will not last until its 40th birthday” on April 1, 2019.

## **MEK in Iraq**

“I have said for over 10 years since coming to these events, that the declared policy of the United States of America should be the overthrow of the mullah’s regime in Tehran.”

A year before that, Prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud, a former intelligence chief of Saudi Arabia, also spoke before the group, denouncing the “Khomeini cancer”, in reference to the Islamic Republic’s founder and first Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Declarations such as those, however, only make the MEK more unpopular in Tehran, diminishing the likelihood that it could play a role in the country’s political future, observers said.

“There is no sympathy towards the group in Iran,” said Marzieh Javadi, a Tehran-based foreign policy expert who closely follows Iran and US relations.

Among the Iranian public, there is a negative view towards the MEK not only because of its policy of regime change, but more so because of its role in the post-revolution political assassinations and the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s,

she said.

At the height of the war between Iran and Iraq, the MEK sided with Baghdad, sending as many as 7,000 of its members to Iraq's Camp Ashraf near the border with Iran.

According to the RAND Corporation think-tank, the MEK launched numerous raids across the border into Iran.

In exchange for its support of Saddam Hussein, MEK received "protection, funding, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, tanks, military training, and the use of land".

That decision by the MEK to collaborate with Saddam only magnified Iranian public opinion against the group, Javadi said.

"That was a very dark point in the history of Iran, and that is why there is hostility towards these people," Javadi said.

'Socialist ideology'

Saeed Jalili, a Tehran-based journalist and expert on the Iranian economy, said with the group's chequered past, it is doubtful the MEK has any significant following inside Iran now.

"I have not heard anyone asking them [MEK] to make a comeback [in Iran] or anything like that," he said.

Majority of Iranians "can't stand the idea of having a socialist regime", Jalili said referring to "cruel" single-party ruling system in communist countries.

"The fact that they are believed to be promoting a strict communist ideology makes them less likable here," he told Al Jazeera.

Iran's Khamenei criticises government's economic record

"Iranians believe it's no different than the one we already have."

Al Jazeera contacted former US senator Robert Torricelli, a lawyer of MEK, for comment. He did not reply as of the publishing of this story.

But in an article published in Politico in 2016, Torricelli said he has seen “no evidence” that the MEK “took part in terrorist activities against Iranians or Americans”.

Torricelli said the group saved American lives following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, by identifying locations of improvised explosive devices.

Founded in 1965 by a group of students from Tehran University, the MEK embraced a combination of Marxist philosophy and Islamic values, and supported an armed revolt against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last royal ruler of the country.

Before the revolution, the MEK carried out attacks on the Shah’s government and his American allies, including the killing of the Tehran police chief in 1972, and two US air force officers in 1975.

Right after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, MEK members were also believed to have participated in the hostage-taking at the US embassy in Tehran, which lasted for 444 days, according to the United States Institute of Peace and The National Interest foreign policy magazine.

But they later split with the dominant sectarian ruling party, and began targeting Muslim leaders and government officials. In retaliation, the government executed socialist figures and MEK members.

MEK’s rift with Iran worsened when its leader, Masoud Rajavi, aligned with Saddam in the eight-year Iran-Iraq War.  
‘Cult-like’

The organisation is now based in Paris and is led by Rajavi’s wife, Maryam Rajavi, an engineer and native of Tehran. It is unknown whether Masoud is still alive.

In her speeches as head of the MEK, Maryman has repeatedly highlighted

her policy on gender equality, saying the rights of women are “linked to the struggle against ... fundamentalism”.

Her organisation has also vowed to abolish the death penalty and promote freedom of assembly in a “free Iran”.

Torricelli praised MEK as “the most organised and disciplined of the Iranian opposition groups”.

## **Iran marks 39th anniversary of Islamic Revolution**

Al Jazeera also requested comment, but received no response, from the office of former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, who spoke at the Persian New Year event of MEK in Albania on March 20.

At the celebration, Giuliani told thousands of cheering MEK members that the appointment of Bolton as President Trump’s national security adviser is “very exciting”, while reminding them of Bolton’s 2017 promise of regime change in Iran by 2019.

“You remember John Bolton? You think he changed his mind? No. In fact, if anything, John Bolton has become more determined that there needs to be regime change in Iran, that the nuclear agreement needs to be burned, and that you need to be in charge of that country.”

Iranians, however, “fundamentally don’t trust MEK’s narrative of history and their actions”, said Amir Havasi, an independent journalist in Iran.

Not counting its history of violence, the MEK’s link to the Trump administration “makes them a total pariah in Iran” now, Havasi said, adding the organisation is even more unpopular than the monarchists – those who supported Iran’s overthrown royal ruler.

How the Rajavis run the MEK is also a mystery, according to Kayvan Hosseini, editor of Radio Farda, the Persian-language service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

He said former members accused the MEK of acting “like a cult”, and no one is allowed to criticise the Rajavis. There have also been reports of “forced divorces” and “group confessions” of members.

Hosseini said Maryam Rajavi has refused to speak to journalists and answer questions about her organisation.

“As long as they keep their door closed to independent journalists and their leaders refuse to answer to the media, it is not possible to know the truth about MEK.”

Meanwhile, Hosseini said it is not only the MEK but also other opposition groups who “actively seek” regime change in Iran.

But he said it is not up to any particular individual or organisation to decide who should be the “alternative” to the current government in Iran.

“That is a question for the Iranian nation. They should decide whether to keep their current government, or change it to any other form of government they desire.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Regime Change, Partition, and “Sunnistan”: John Bolton’s Vision for a New Middle East

Whitney Webb

March 30, 2018

**B**olton is likely to push for the creation of a new sectarian state out of Syrian and Iraqi territory, now that the groundwork has been laid and the path largely cleared to building a “new Middle East.” Iran is currently the only country in the region with the potential to foil that plan.



This article is Part II of a series exploring the past of soon-to-be National Security Adviser John Bolton and what his appointment will mean for U.S. foreign policy, with a focus on the Middle East, Latin America, and the Koreas. Part I examined Bolton’s past advocacy for Israel, often at the U.S.’ expense. Part II details how that same commitment to Israel has shaped his vision for the Middle East, a vision that calls for regime change in Iran, the division of both Syria and Iraq, and the creation of a new Sunni state. WASHINGTON – The announcement that John Bolton – perhaps the best known advocate for war



with Iran in American politics – would soon replace H.R. McMaster as National Security Adviser received mixed reactions within the United States and, as MintPress recently noted, great praise from Israel. However, news that Bolton would soon have a key role in the Trump administration caused panic among Iranians and Iranian-Americans as well as anti-war advocates.

In response to Bolton’s appointment, Trita Parsi, the president of the National Iranian American Council, issued a statement, warning:

Donald Trump may have just effectively declared war on Iran. With the appointment of John Bolton, and nomination of Mike Pompeo at State, Trump is clearly putting together a war cabinet.”

However, regime change in Iran through war is just a stepping stone in Bolton’s plan to create a “new Middle East” by redrawing the borders of both Iraq and Syria and ending all possible obstacles — like an independent Iran — to fundamentally changing the region’s balance of power.

## Bolton’s Iran plan

Though some may dismiss Parsi’s response as exaggerated or bombastic, Bolton’s actions and rhetoric over the years have made it clear that he is adamant in his desire to topple the current government of Iran by any means necessary.

Indeed, Bolton’s past indicates a near obsession with clearing the way for U.S. military action against Iran. As journalist Gareth Porter recently noted,

from 2002 to 2004, while he was the Bush administration's key policymaker on Iran, Bolton — by flouting State Department protocol and taking several unannounced trips to Israel — “actively conspired [...] to establish the political conditions necessary for the administration to carry out military action.” Bolton's behind-the-scenes dealings led Iran's nuclear program to become a matter overseen by the United Nations Security Council, as opposed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). He engineered that handoff because the then-director general of the IAEA, Mohamed El Baradei, posed an obstacle to framing Iran as a nuclear weapons threat. Bolton eventually used fabricated evidence, provided to him by an Iranian terrorist group that Bolton still openly supports, to convince the United Nations that Iran was secretly developing a nuclear weapon.

That terror group, Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK), was listed a “Foreign Terrorist Organization” by the United States government from 1997 and 2012 and, in the past, has conducted terror acts to accomplish its goals, killing Iranians as well as Americans in the process. More recently, MEK has worked with Israeli Intelligence to murder Iranian scientists. Since its removal from the government's terror group list, MEK has sought to reinvent itself as a “moderate” Iranian opposition group even though it has next to no support within Iran and has consistently been characterized as both “cultish” and “authoritarian.” In its bid to become the likely successors to the current Iranian government were Western-backed regime change to take place, MEK has garnered a slew of admirers across both parties of the U.S. political establishment due to its generous speaking fees. That is especially true in the Trump administration, as several key figures in his cabinet and advisers to the President have been linked to the group. For instance, Elaine Chao, Trump's Transportation Secretary, received \$50,000 in 2015 for a five-minute speech.

Bolton is just one more of the group's many high-profile “admirers” in the U.S. At a MEK gathering in France last year, Bolton told supporters and members of the group:

The declared policy of the United States should be the overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran. [...] The behavior and the objectives of the regime are not going to change and, therefore, the only solution is to change the regime itself. [...] And that's why, before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran!”



## Nuclear calumny

Since he first made the accusation in 2003, Bolton has continued to accuse Iran of having a covert nuclear weapons program, an accusation for which there is no evidence. Indeed, both Israeli intelligence and U.S. intelligence have long acknowledged that Iran has had neither the intention nor the capability of developing a nuclear weapon. Despite this, Bolton has called repeatedly to preemptively bomb Iran in order to stop a weapons program that does not exist.

Since Trump's election, Bolton has directly influenced Trump's Iran policy as well as Trump's recent decision to unilaterally scrap the Iran nuclear deal this upcoming May, despite Iran's total compliance with the agreement.

Reports have also indicated that Bolton was responsible for what some regarded as the most threatening line in Trump's debut speech at the United Nations, where he warned that he would pull the U.S. out of the deal if Congress and U.S. allies did not agree to renegotiate it entirely. According to Politico:

The line was added to Trump's speech after Bolton, despite Kelly's recent edict [restricting Bolton's access to Trump], reached the president by phone on Thursday afternoon from Las Vegas, where Bolton was visiting with Republican mega-donor Sheldon Adelson. Bolton urged Trump to include a line in his remarks noting that he reserved the right to scrap the agreement entirely, according to two sources familiar with the conversation."

With Bolton now set to have a top position in Trump's administration, his influence on the President's decision-making is likely to grow.

## Adelson's man

However, beyond Bolton's past and rhetoric, his commitment to the Israeli government – even when that commitment directly conflicts with the positions of the U.S. government – confirms that war may well be on the horizon. For instance, Danny Gillerman, the former Israeli ambassador to the UN, stated last Sunday that Bolton, while he was serving in the Bush administration, was prone to “direct fire on his own forces,” — i.e., the U.S. government

— in order to advance the goals of Israel.

In addition, Bolton's close relationship with Republican billionaire donor Sheldon Adelson, who has financially backed both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Donald Trump, also indicates that war with Iran is on the agenda. As MintPress recently reported, Adelson has long promoted Bolton and is the man largely responsible for H.R. McMaster's exit and Bolton's subsequent appointment. Unfortunately, Adelson's views on U.S. foreign policy, particularly in regard to Iran, are extremely dangerous.

For instance, while the negotiations that eventually led to the Iran nuclear deal were taking place, Adelson advocated for a U.S. nuclear attack on Iran without provocation, so the U.S. could "impose its demands [on Iran] from a position of strength."

Per Adelson's plan, the U.S. would drop a nuclear bomb in the middle of the Iranian desert and then threaten that "the next one is in the middle of Tehran" to show that "we mean business." Tehran, Iran's capital, is home to nearly 9 million people with 15 million more in its suburbs. Were Tehran to be attacked with nuclear weapons, an estimated 7 million would die within moments, significantly more than the number of Jews killed during the Holocaust of World War II.

Any sort of diplomatic engagement with Iran, according to Adelson, is "the worst negotiating tactic I could ever imagine."

In other words, Adelson — who is currently one of the most influential men in U.S. and Israeli politics — has called for dropping nuclear weapons on a country, including its heavily populated capital city, for no reason other than to show that the U.S. "means business." Given their close relationship, it is unsurprising — but nonetheless alarming — that Bolton has more or less echoed Adelson's positions, calling for preemptive strikes against Iran by either the U.S. or Israel and flatly rejecting a diplomatic solution.

Adelson — as well as the far-right Israeli government and, by extension, Bolton — wants regime change in Iran for two main reasons. First, Iran is a major supporter of Palestine and the Palestinian cause. Palestine resistance

group Hamas has consistently praised Iran’s aid to Palestine, and Iran’s foreign policy — a foreign policy born out of Iran’s many decades under the brutal rule of a U.S.-backed dictatorship — has demonstrated time and again its support of self-determination and its resistance to U.S. empire. Of course, Israel, as well as the U.S., are diametrically opposed to self-determination, particularly in Palestine.

Second, Iran has become a regional economic power, even when it was under heavy sanctions, which led the country to diversify its economy. Since the sanctions were lifted after the adoption of the Iran nuclear deal, Iran’s economic clout has continued to grow, as have its natural gas exports. In addition, Iran is set to become a major supplier of natural gas to the European Union, with European gas companies recently leading the push to develop the world’s largest gas field – jointly held by Iran and Qatar. Thus, Iran is an economically resilient and powerful country that is not only fully capable of resisting the ambitions of Israel — as well as the Gulf monarchies that have become increasingly allied with Israel — but also intent on doing so.

## **Syria and Iraq partition: playing with the map**

Beyond pushing for regime change in Iran, John Bolton has long demonstrated his commitment to helping Israel and its allies entirely remake the Middle East and thus fundamentally change the region’s balance of power. A key part of this has been the partition of other secular, independent nations in the Middle East, namely Syria and Iraq. It is largely for this reason that Bolton, a major advocate of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, still stands by the disastrous war — because it was an essential precursor to Iraq’s partition.

A major part of the groundwork for partition, the invasion of Iraq, and the current Syrian conflict, was laid out in the neo-conservative manifesto “A Clean Break,” whose lead author Richard Perle is Bolton’s mentor, and who, along with Bolton, later co-founded the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). Another co-author, David Wurmser, also went on to become an advisor to Bolton.

The title of the document comes from its suggestion that Israel make a “clean break from the slogan ‘comprehensive peace’ to a traditional concept

of strategy based on the balance of power.” The manifesto states: Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right — as a means of foiling Syria’s regional ambitions.”

“A Clean Break” also calls for “reestablishing the principle of preemption” — i.e., preemptive war — as well as the creation of a “new Middle East.” The 2003 invasion of Iraq that Bolton helped manifest (and that he continues to support) fulfilled several of the objectives laid out in “A Clean Break,” by removing Saddam Hussein from power and altering the region’s “balance of power.” Yet, now, with Saddam long gone and Syria weakened after years of fighting off foreign-funded proxies, the next step needed to cement this “new Middle East” is the partitioning of both Syria and Iraq.

The first argument for partitioning Iraq was made in 1982 by Zionist strategist Oded Yinon, whose plan — often called the Yinon plan or the plan for “Greater Israel” — calls for dividing Iraq into separate statelets for Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds. It similarly calls for the division of other secular Arab states, like Syria, into smaller states divided along ethnic or sectarian lines that are constantly at war with each other in order to ensure that Israel “becomes an imperial regional power.”

Unsurprisingly, Bolton has, since leaving his post in the Bush administration, consistently advocated for partitioning both Syria and Iraq. In 2014, Bolton asserted that Iraq was inevitably “headed toward partition.” In 2015, on Fox News, Bolton stated:

I think our objective should be a new Sunni state out of the western part of Iraq, the eastern part of Syria run by moderates or at least authoritarians who are not radical Islamists.”

A few months later, Bolton — in a New York Times op-ed — detailed his plan to create the Sunni state out of northeastern Syria and western Iraq, which he nicknames “Sunni-stan.” He asserts that such a country has “economic potential” as an oil producer, would be a “bulwark” against the Syrian

government and “Iran-allied Baghdad,” and would help defeat Daesh (ISIS). Bolton’s mention of oil is notable, as the proposed area for this Sunni state sits on key oil fields that U.S. oil interests, such as ExxonMobil and the Koch brothers, have sought to control if the partition of Iraq and Syria comes to pass.

Bolton also suggested that Arab Gulf States “could provide significant financing,” adding that “the Arab monarchies like Saudi Arabia must not only fund much of the new state’s early needs, but also ensure its stability and resistance to radical forces.” He fails to note that Saudi Arabia is one of the chief financiers of Daesh and largely responsible for spreading “radical” Wahhabi Islam throughout the Middle East.

Notably, Bolton directly mentions who would benefit from this partition, and it certainly isn’t the Syrians or the Iraqis. “Restoring Iraqi and Syrian governments to their former borders,” Bolton writes, “is a goal fundamentally contrary to American, Israeli and friendly Arab state interests.”

Control of northeastern Syria, currently occupied by U.S. forces, is set to be given to Saudi Arabia if the Saudis commit to spending \$4 billion to “rebuild” the area, a first step towards preventing the reunification of Syria and creating an “independent” sectarian state. Bolton, as national security adviser, is likely to push for the creation of a new sectarian state out of Syrian and Iraqi territory, now that the groundwork has been laid and the path largely cleared to building a “new Middle East.” However, as previously mentioned, Iran is currently the only country in the region with the potential to foil the plan to fundamentally reshape the Middle East.

**Bolton dangerous and in a hurry**

Bolton as Trump’s National Security Adviser not only means that war with Iran is imminent. It is a portent of coming attempts to entirely remake the Middle East in service to Israel’s ambitions and quest to become an “imperial regional power.”

However, given Bolton’s recent statements, neither war with Iran nor attempts to redraw the borders of the Middle East are events to be delayed to some

distant future. Indeed, Bolton recently promised Iranian opposition groups that regime change in Iran would occur before next year. Not only that, but the groundwork for partitioning Iraq and Syria has already been laid, thanks to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the Trump administration's current attempts to turn control of occupied Syria over to the Saudis.

Thus, Bolton's appointment is as timely as it is dangerous. As Richard Painter, the former chief White House ethics lawyer in the George W. Bush administration, recently remarked:

Hiring [Bolton] as the president's top national security advisor is an invitation to war, perhaps nuclear war. This must be stopped at all costs.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## John Bolton support for Iranian opposition spooks Tehran

Najmeh Bozorgmehr, Katrina Manson

April 2, 2018

**N**ew US national security adviser has been vocal in backing anti-regime groups

Alarm bells rang in Iran as soon as Donald Trump named John Bolton as his national security adviser. Mr Bolton is even more hawkish towards the Islamic republic than the US president: he has openly called for regime change, suggested there needs to be military strikes to curb Iran's nuclear activities and insisted the atomic accord Tehran signed with world powers be torn up. But it is his support for a banned Iranian opposition group, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), that spooked officials in Tehran.

FT

Ali Shamkhani, Iran's top security official, said it was "shameful" that a "seemingly superpower country" had appointed a national security adviser who received "a salary from a terrorist sect". He was referring to Mr Bolton's decision to address a gathering

of MEK and other Iranian dissidents in Paris last year. The former ambassador to the UN used the gathering to say the MEK — which Washington designated a terrorist group until 2012 — was a “viable” alternative to the Islamic regime.

“The outcome of the president’s policy review should be to determine that Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1979 revolution will not last until its 40th birthday,” Mr Bolton said at the gathering. “The declared policy of the United States should be the overthrow of the mullahs’ regime in Tehran.”

Mr Bolton has often suggested that the US should do more to support Iranian opposition. When a wave of protests swept across Iran in January — which Tehran blamed on the MEK as the “pawn” of foreign intelligence services — he tweeted: “If the Iranian opposition is prepared to take outside support, the US should provide it to them”.

“The regime in #Iran is like a lot of autocratic regimes — it looks impregnable, but kicking it is like a rotten door being kicked in,” he added in a second tweet.

The MEK, which has been in exile for years, is Iran’s most organised and only armed opposition group. Its affiliate organisation, the National Council of Resistance in Iran has a powerful lobbying operation in Washington. But Iranians say that if Mr Bolton genuinely believes that the MEK can be used to weaken the Islamic regime it would be a flawed policy.

“Should Mr Trump bring in MEK, the gap between the Islamic republic and its critics will be narrowed...because even those opponents who seek the overthrow of the Islamic republic prefer the current rulers to MEK,” says Amir Mohebbian, a commentator close to Iran’s conservative forces.

Officials in Washington briefed on the Trump administration’s strategy against Iran say the MEK plays no part in its planning. Mr Trump has been ramping up the pressure on Iran, which he accuses of fostering extremism and fuelling conflicts in the Middle East. The appointment of Mr Bolton and the nomination of Mike Pompeo, another Iran hawk, as secretary of state has



added to speculation that the administration will further toughen its stance. Many expect the US to pull out of the nuclear accord next month.

Thousands of Iranians rally outside the United Nations Headquarters in New York, on September 20, 2017 to denounce the presence of the Iranian regime President Hassan Rouhani at the UN General Assembly. The participants in the rally, staged by the Organization of Iranian American Communities, urged the world powers, particularly the U.S., to recognize the rights of the Iranian people to change their government and called for the establishment of a commission of inquiry into the 1988 massacre of 30,000 political prisoners.

The MEK was active in the 1979 Islamic revolution and was believed to have been involved in the killing of American civilians in Iran and the 1980 US embassy siege in Tehran. But after losing a power struggle with clerics, it went into exile in Iraq.

The group then fought alongside Iraqi forces in the war with Iran in the 1980s. That caused Tehran to execute thousands of its members who were in jail — the biggest atrocity against any Iranian political group.

Analysts say it has little support inside Iran today, where it is regarded as a terrorist organisation and has been accused of assassinating senior politicians and targeting civilians. The regime also alleges it killed at least four nuclear scientists between 2010 and 2012 in collaboration with Israel, Iran's arch enemy.

Often described by Iranian and western political observers as a cult, the MEK has an ideology that is a mix of revolutionary Shia Islam, Marxism and nationalism. Its junior members are forced take a vow of celibacy, and it is believed to have several thousands of members spread through Iraq, Albania and France.

But even Iran hawks in Washington who favour regime change tend to dismiss the MEK's influence in Iran.

“The Iranian people hate the MEK so the notion that they are somehow

going to be part of the future of Iran is laughable, completely,” says Danielle Pletka, an Iran hawk at the American Enterprise Institution, a conservative think-tank where Mr Bolton is a senior fellow.

The MEK denies it ever paid money to Mr Bolton or any Americans to attend its events as expenses or speaker fees. Mr Bolton, whose office declined to comment, was joined at the MEK event in Paris by other Republican luminaries such as former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani and Newt Gingrich, a former house speaker.

“Bolton probably sees the MEK as a fellow traveller in the drive for regime change in Iran,” said Cliff Kupchan, chairman and Iran expert at Eurasia Group, while adding that Mr Bolton would not pin his hopes on MEK alone. “Lots of US politicians have taken MEK money; that doesn’t make it OK, but it lessens the blight on Bolton.”

If Washington does seek to promote the MEK as a legitimate opposition group, Iran’s rulers could attempt to exploit rally Iranians behind the theocratic regime, analysts say. “The Islamic republic has always used MEK to justify its own radicalism and failures and keep up the illusion of an enemy,” says Saeed Laylaz, a reform-minded analyst. “An overthrow of the Islamic republic already scares Iranians on fears of domestic or regional instability let alone a day would come when people see their alternative is MEK.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Bolton's Ascent Gives Iranian Group a New Lease on Life

Rhys Dubin and Dan De Luce

April 30, 2018

**W**ith a supporter in the White House, the MEK might finally have a voice in U.S. policy.

With John Bolton installed as President Donald Trump's new national security advisor, an Iranian dissident group dedicated to regime change will now have someone sympathetic to its cause whom it can turn to in the White House.



Bolton has long been an advocate for the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran — known in Persian as the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK — and has been a speaker at several of its events. The organization was founded in opposition to Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in the 1960s and was eventually forced into exile after the 1979 revolution, first in Iraq with help from Saddam Hussein and then scattered throughout Europe and the United States in the 2000s.

REPORT

## Bolton's Ascent Gives Iranian Group a New Lease on Life

With a supporter in the White House, the MEK might finally have a voice in U.S. policy.

By Rhys Dubin and Dan De Luce



Known for its insular and secretive leadership structure, as well as its hard-line stance on ousting the Iranian regime, the group has a history of cultivating relationships with Western lawmakers — and Americans in particular.

Until recently though, the MEK had been broadly shunned by career officials at the State and Defense departments, as well as the White House. Now however, with a cabinet stacked with Iran

hawks and Bolton leading the National Security Council, the MEK has a rare chance to assert itself as a serious player in U.S. policymaking.

“Bolton is positively predisposed to the MEK,” says a congressional foreign-policy aide with knowledge of the group. “They will have some access to this White House at the least.”

The MEK has a long history of lobbying for its distinctive brand of political activism, especially in Washington. Given the fractious nature of other Iranian opposition activists in exile, the group’s organization — and significant funding — has made it a visible feature of D.C. debates on regime change.

“The MEK has always had the one advantage of being consistent and well organized,” says a Washington-based analyst who focuses on Iranian opposition figures. The analyst requested anonymity to discuss the group, which is known for taking aggressive action against its public critics and critical press coverage.

“Especially in D.C., there’s no pro-Iran lobby, so you already have a fairly good pitch when you come and say you want to fight against the Islamic Republic. It gets you a good audience,” the analyst says.

Most of the MEK’s outreach, much of which is financial, has been directed at House and Senate leaders — both Democrats and Republicans. The congressional aide, for instance, describes attending a lavish luncheon for Nowruz, the Iranian New Year, hosted by an MEK-affiliated group in the Russell Senate Office Building. Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin, the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, addressed the gathering, and MEK leader Maryam Rajavi delivered a video address from her home in France.

“It was straight-up ‘regime change in Iran,’” the aide says. “I almost respect how up front they were. We were all suddenly at an MEK rally.”

On the House side, a spokesperson for the House Foreign Affairs Committee plays down the importance of the group. The “MEK is one of many Iranian-American organizations that closely tracks U.S. policy toward Iran and the activities of Congress,” the spokesperson says.

The State Department and NSC declined to comment directly on whether the administration views the MEK as a viable opposition group. “As President Trump has clearly stated, he wants to see a free and prosperous future for the people of Iran,” says Robert Palladino, a spokesman for the NSC. “We believe that future should be of their choosing.”

But the MEK’s energetic outreach has produced some notable public relations successes. A 2016 gala in Paris was attended by Bolton, former U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson, former U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Homeland Security Advisor Frances Townsend, and former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, among others. Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani is also a regular attendee of the group’s events.

Bolton also attended a July 2017 gathering in Paris, where he praised the MEK’s potential role in regime change. “There is a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs, and that opposition is centered in this room today,” he said. “The declared policy of the United States of America should be the

overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran.”

American advocates for the group are paid well for their appearances — reportedly up to \$50,000 per speech. A former senior State Department official says the MEK would offer prospective speakers between \$20,000 and \$30,000 for speeches at the group's headquarters in Paris. Bolton was also allegedly paid for his time, though in the past he has refused to divulge the amount.

With Bolton's ascension to the NSC however, the group may have scored its greatest prize yet. While the MEK previously has had supporters on both sides of the aisle in Congress, this is the first time it has had an avowed ally this close to the president.

The MEK now has a direct channel to the highest levels of decision-making in the United States, which is not something they had previously,” says Ariane Tabatabai, an assistant professor at Georgetown University.

For its part, the MEK's political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, praises Bolton's appointment.

“The National Council of Resistance of Iran has always welcomed a firm policy on the theocracy ruling Iran,” Ali Safavi, a member of the council's foreign affairs committee, says via email. “In our view, the clerical regime is the primary enemy of regional and indeed world peace, and is the main source of instability, crisis, and warmongering in the region.”

How officials such as Bolton might use the MEK, and vice versa, is still an open question though. Former U.S. officials, Western diplomats, and Iranian experts have long dismissed the group as lacking popular standing inside the country.

“I suspect Bolton's interactions with the MEK were above all motivated by financial interests,” says Karim Sadjadpour, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “The MEK may be a backward cult with little to offer, but they are the enemy of his enemy. And they pay handsomely.”

The MEK's unusual ideology has no widespread following in Iran, and several former U.S. government officials, as well as analysts with firsthand experience of the group, describe it as "cultish."

After the 1979 revolution, the group fled Iran and settled in Iraq, where they allied with Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War in an attempt to topple the Iranian government — a move that Iranians of every political stripe have never forgotten. "This is a group that sided with the adversary during the most traumatic event in recent Iranian history," Tabatabai says.

Since then, the MEK has maintained only a tenuous connection to Iran itself. After the war, unable to return home, the group was confined to a camp in Iraq's Diyala province. It stayed there until 2012, when it was forced to move to another outpost, Camp Liberty, near Baghdad.

Throughout the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Shiite groups carried out attacks targeting both camps.

"When the Shiite-dominated government took shape after the U.S. invaded, they hated the MEK," says Daniel Fried, who was at the time the U.S. government coordinator charged with relocating the group. "They alleged that it was used by Saddam Hussein in the early 1990s to repress Shiites in the south." "The Iraqi government was ready to kill all these people," says Fried, now a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council.

As of 2016 though, all MEK members from Camp Liberty were moved out of Iraq with U.S. assistance — many to European countries.

"We resettled a lot of the MEK people from Iraq in Albania," says Daniel Benjamin, the State Department counterterrorism coordinator during that period, now at Dartmouth University. "They were the only ones who would take them."

But for the repatriation to take place, Washington first had to remove the group from a U.S. list of terrorist organizations. It had been placed on the blacklist for killing Americans in Iran in the 1970s during the shah's rule. "It became the goal of the U.S. government to get them out of there. That

is the reason they were delisted,” Benjamin says. “It happened under the secretary’s authority, not because they had met the requirements for not being a terrorist group.”

Fried, the diplomat charged with shuttling back and forth between the MEK leadership, Iraqi government, and the European countries that might accept them, also notes the strange politics involved in the negotiations. “They had a huge stable of American supporters, senior political people,” he says.

With the group now completely exiled from the region and removed from Iranian domestic politics, some have questioned its utility to hawkish policymakers should the United States pursue a more explicit policy of regime change.

“They’re not the leading edge of any kind of regime change movement,” says Barbara Slavin, the head of the Future of Iran initiative at the Atlantic Council. “Many Iranians are eager for change, but they don’t want to go from the frying pan of an Islamic government to the fire of the MEK.”

One well-connected conservative activist in Washington, seen as a hawk on Iran, also expresses a deep wariness about the group. The MEK are occasionally useful as a de facto intelligence network, but it should never be seen as an organization that could assume power in Tehran, he says.

“If you wanted to roll out any political strategy that has any political legitimacy in Iran, you would not roll it out with the MEK,” the activist says.

Nevertheless, Bolton and others on the NSC could still use the group as one tool among many to harass the Iranian government. “They’re useful as provocation,” says the congressional aide with knowledge of the group. “They’re useful as a signal to the Iranian government that we’re coming to get you.”

Given the MEK’s broad base of support on Capitol Hill, the group could also be useful in drumming up congressional support for the administration’s increasingly aggressive stance toward the Iranian government.

“This is a group that has shown itself to be very adept at garnering political




support,” Benjamin says. “If you’re sitting in the West Wing, you’re looking at this group and saying, “These guys can actually get me some real support for this policy.””

In the past, such efforts were typically checked by officials with deep expertise in the region. The State Department and Defense Department, for instance, have historically been reluctant to give the MEK much credence. “The State Department is under no illusion about the MEK as a serious political actor or intel source,” the Washington-based analyst says.

Sadjadpour of the Carnegie Endowment says the intelligence community holds similar views. “In the aftermath of the Iraq [weapons of mass destruction] fiasco, U.S. intelligence professionals are doubly skeptical of information provided to them by opposition groups with dubious sources and methods,” he says.

Now though, with an experienced political operator like Bolton at the helm and a marginalized foreign-policy bureaucracy, the MEK could gain some traction at the White House.

“A lot of these folks who really understand these dynamics are being pushed out because they aren’t being listened to,” Tabatabai says. “Perhaps under a different administration someone like Bolton would be isolated, but I don’t know if that’s the case anymore.”

 Access the article from [\\_\\_\\_](#).



## Giuliani's MEK Pandering and Trump's Iran Obsession

Daniel Larison

May 5, 2018

**B**enjamin Netanyahu's stage performance about Iran seeking a nuclear weapon not only was based on old material, but evidence shows it was fabricated too.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim in his theatrical 20-minute presentation of an Israeli physical seizure of Iran's "atomic archive" in Tehran would certainly have been the "great intelligence achievement" he boasted if it had actually happened. But the claim does not hold up under careful scrutiny, and his assertion that Israel now possesses a vast documentary record of a covert Iranian nuclear weapons program is certainly fraudulent.

Netanyahu's tale of an Israeli intelligence raid right in Tehran that carted off 55,000 paper files and another 55,000 CDs from a "highly secret location" requires that we accept a proposition that is absurd





## Giuliani's MEK Pandering And Trump's Iran Obsession



on its face: that Iranian policymakers decided to store their most sensitive military secrets in a small tin-roofed hut with nothing to protect it from heat (thus almost certainly ensuring loss of data on CDs within a few years) and no sign of any security, based on the satellite image shown in the slide show. (As Steve Simon observed in *The New York Times* the door did not even appear to have a lock on it.)

The laughable explanation suggested by Israeli officials to *The Daily Telegraph*— that the Iranian government was afraid the files might be found by international inspectors if they remained at “major bases” — merely reveals

the utter contempt that Netanyahu has for Western governments and news media. Even if Iran were pursuing nuclear weapons secretly, their files on the subject would be kept at the Ministry of Defense, not at military bases. And of course the alleged but wholly implausible move to an implausible new location came just as Netanyahu needed a dramatic new story to galvanize Trump to resist the European allies' strong insistence on preserving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Act (JCPOA) nuclear deal with Iran.

In fact, there is no massive treasure trove of secret files about an Iran "Manhattan Project." The shelves of black binders and CDs that Netanyahu revealed with such a dramatic flourish date back to 2003 (after which a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) said Iran had abandoned any nuclear weapons program) and became nothing more than stage props like the cartoon bomb that Netanyahu used at the United Nations in 2012.

## **Disinformation Campaign**

Netanyahu's claim about how Israel acquired this "atomic archive" is only the latest manifestation of a long-term disinformation campaign that the Israeli government began to work on in 2002-03. The documents to which Netanyahu referred in the presentation were introduced to the news media and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) beginning in 2005 as coming originally from a secret Iranian nuclear weapons research program. For many years U.S. news media have accepted those documents as authentic. But despite the solid media united front behind that narrative, we now know with certainty that those earlier documents were fabrications and that they were created by Israel's Mossad.

That evidence of fraud begins with the alleged origins of the entire collection of documents. Senior intelligence officials in the George W. Bush administration had told reporters that the documents came from "a stolen Iranian laptop computer", as The New York Times reported in November 2005. The Times quoted unnamed intelligence officials as insisting that the documents had not come from an Iranian resistance group, which would cast serious doubt on their reliability.

But it turned that the assurances from those intelligence officials were part

of an official dissimulation. The first reliable account of the documents' path to the United States came only in 2013, when former senior German foreign office official Karsten Voigt, who retired from his long-time position as coordinator of German-North American cooperation, spoke with this writer on the record.

Voigt recalled how senior officials of the German foreign intelligence agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst or BND, had explained to him in November 2004 that they were familiar with the documents on the alleged Iran nuclear weapons program, because a sometime source—but not an actual intelligence agent—had provided them earlier that year. Furthermore, the BND officials explained that they had viewed the source as “doubtful,” he recalled, because the source had belonged to the Mujahideen-E Khalq, the armed Iranian opposition group that had fought Iran on behalf of Iraq during the eight year war.

BND officials were concerned that the Bush administration had begun citing those documents as evidence against Iran, because of their experience with “Curveball” – the Iraqi engineer in Germany who had told stories of Iraqi mobile bioweapons labs that had turned to be false. As a result of that meeting with BND officials, Voigt had given an interview to *The Wall Street Journal* in which he had contradicted the assurance of the unnamed U.S. intelligence officials to the *Times* and warned that the Bush administration should not base its policy on the documents it was beginning to cite as evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program, because they had indeed come from “an Iranian dissident group.”

## Using the MEK

The Bush administration's desire to steer press coverage of the supposedly internal Iranian documents away from the MEK is understandable: the truth about the MEK role would immediately lead to Israel, because it was well known, that Israel's intelligence agency Mossad had used the MEK to make public information that the Israelis did not want attributed to itself – including the precise location of Iran's Natanz enrichment facility. As Israeli journalists Yossi Melman and Meir Javadanfar observed in their 2007 book on the Iran nuclear program, based on U.S., British and Israeli officials, “In-

formation is ‘filtered’ to the IAEA via Iranian opposition groups, especially the National Resistance Council of Iran.”

Mossad used the MEK repeatedly in the 1990s and the early 2000’s to get the IAEA to inspect any site the Israelis suspected might possibly be nuclear-related, earning their Iranian clients a very poor reputation at the IAEA. No one familiar with the record of the MEK could have believed that it was capable of creating the detailed documents that were passed to the German government. That required an organization with the expertise in nuclear weapons and experience in fabricating documents – both of which Israel’s Mossad had in abundance.

Bush administration officials had highlighted a set of 18 schematic drawings of the Shahab-3 missile’s reentry vehicle or nosecone of the missile in each of which there was a round shape representing a nuclear weapon. Those drawings were described to foreign governments and the International Atomic Energy Agency as 18 different attempts to integrate a nuclear weapon into the Shahab-3.

Netanyahu gave the public its first glimpse of one of those drawings Monday when he pointed to it triumphantly as visually striking evidence of Iranian nuclear perfidy. But that schematic drawing had a fundamental flaw that proved that it and others in the set could not have been genuine: it showed the “dunce cap” shaped reentry vehicle design of the original Shahab-3 missile that had been tested from 1998 to 2000. That was the shape that intelligence analysts outside Iran had assumed in 2002 and 2003 Iran would continue to use in its ballistic missile.

## **New Nose Cone**

It is now well established, however, that Iran had begun redesigning the Shahab-3 missile with a conical reentry vehicle or nosecone as early as 2000 and replaced it with a completely different design that had a “triconic” or “baby bottle” shape. It made it a missile with very different flight capabilities and was ultimately called the Ghadr-1. Michael Elleman, the world’s leading expert on Iranian ballistic missiles, documented the redesign of the missile in his path-breaking 2010 study of Iran’s missile program.

Iran kept its newly-designed missile with the baby bottle reentry vehicle secret from the outside world until its first test in mid-2004. Elleman concluded that Iran was deliberately misleading the rest of the world – and especially the Israelis, who represented the most immediate threat of attack on Iran – to believe that the old model was the missile of the future while already shifting its planning to the new design, which would bring all of Israel within reach for the first time.

The authors of the drawings that Netanyahu displayed on the screen were thus in the dark about the change in the Iranian design. The earliest date of a document on the redesign of the reentry vehicle in the collection obtained by U.S. intelligence was August 28, 2002 – about two years after the actual redesign had begun. That major error indicates unmistakably that the schematic drawings showing a nuclear weapon in a Shahab-3 reentry vehicle – what Netanyahu called “integrated warhead design” were fabrications.

Netanyahu’s slide show highlighted a series of alleged revelations that he said came from the newly acquired “atomic archive” concerning the so-called “Amad Plan” and the continuation of the activities of the Iranian who was said to have led that covert nuclear weapons project. But the single pages of Farsi language documents he flashed on the screen were also clearly from the same cache of documents that we now know came from the MEK-Israeli combination. Those documents were never authenticated, and IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei, who was skeptical of their authenticity, had insisted that without such authentication, he could not accuse Iran of having a nuclear weapons program.

## More Fraud

There are other indications of fraud in that collection of documents as well. A second element of the supposed covert arms program given the name “Amad Plan” was a “process flow chart” of a bench-scale system for converting uranium ore for enrichment. It had the code name “Project 5.13”, according to a briefing by the IAEA Deputy Director Olli Heinonen, and was part of a larger so-called “Project 5”, according to an official IAEA report. Another sub-project under that rubric was “Project 5.15”, which involved ore processing at the Gchine Mine.” Both sub-projects were said to be carried

out by a consulting firm named Kimia Maadan.

But documents that Iran later provided to the IAEA proved that, in fact, “Project 5.15” did exist, but was a civilian project of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, not part of a covert nuclear weapons program, and that the decision had been made in August 1999 – two years before the beginning of the alleged “Amad Plan” was said to have begun.

The role of Kimia Maadan in both sub-projects explains why an ore processing project would be included in the supposed secret nuclear weapons program. One of the very few documents included in the cache that could actually be verified as authentic was a letter from Kimia Maadan on another subject, which suggests that the authors of the documents were building the collection around a few documents that could be authenticated.

Netanyahu also lingered over Iran’s denial that it had done any work on “MPI” or (“Multi-Point Initiation”) technology “in hemispheric geometry”. He asserted that “the files” showed Iran had done “extensive work” or “MPI” experiments. He did not elaborate on the point. But Israel did discover the alleged evidence of such experiments in a tin-roofed shack in Tehran. The issue of whether Iran had done such experiments was a central issue in the IAEA’s inquiry after 2008. The agency described it in a September 2008 report, which purported to be about Iran’s “experimentation in connection with symmetrical initiation of a hemispherical high explosive charge suitable for an implosion type nuclear device.”

## No Official Seals

The IAEA refused to reveal which member country had provided the document to the IAEA. But former Director-General ElBaradei revealed in his memoirs that Israel had passed a series of documents to the Agency in order to establish the case that Iran had continued its nuclear weapons experiments until “at least 2007.” ElBaradei was referring to convenient timing of the report’s appearance within a few months of the U.S. NIE of November 2007 concluding that Iran had ended its nuclear weapons-related research in 2003.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presents material he claims proves Iranian nuclear weapons development during a press conference in



Tel Aviv, April 30 2018. (AP/Sebastian Scheiner)

Netanyahu pointed to a series of documents on the screen as well a number of drawings, photographs and technical figures, and even a grainy old black and white film, as evidence of Iran's nuclear weapons work. But absolutely nothing about them provides an evidentiary link to the Iranian government. As Tariq Rauf, who was head of the IAEA's Verification and Security Policy Coordination Office from 2002 to 2012, noted in an e-mail, none of the pages of text on the screen show official seals or marks that would identify them as actual Iranian government documents. The purported Iranian documents given to the IAEA in 2005 similarly lacked such official markings, as an IAEA official conceded to me in 2008.

Netanyahu's slide show revealed more than just his over-the-top style of persuasion on the subject of Iran. It provided further evidence that the claims that had successfully swayed the U.S. and Israeli allies to join in punishing Iran for having had a nuclear weapons program were based on fabricated documents that originated in the state that had the strongest motive to make that case – Israel.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani Takes Cash to Speak to Terrorist Cult; Media Find This Unnoteworthy

Adam Johnson

—  
May 7, 2018

**FAIR**

As FAIR (1/11/18) has noted before, US media—in an effort to find images of Iranian “dissidents”—routinely normalize the fringe group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), despite the fact that it has virtually no support or legitimacy in Iran. This was seen again this past week when a number of major outlets reported on a speech Trump advisor Rudy Giuliani gave at an MEK conference; the outlets failed to note that the group is widely loathed inside Iran, and seen as an illegitimate cult by experts across ideological lines.

The MEK has next to no support in Iran itself, where it’s hated for working with Israeli intelligence and fighting alongside Saddam Hussein in Iraq’s war against Iran in the 1980s that killed roughly 500,000 Iranians. The group—which was formerly disowned by the last major protest movement inside Iran, the Green Movement—has carried out several terrorist

bombings in Iran, and was officially listed by the US State Department as a foreign terrorist organization for 16 years, until it was removed by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2012, after a lobbying effort by pro-regime change groups inside the United States.

Members of the MEK cult cannot have sex. Nor, according to former member Masoud Banisadr, can they have “sexual thoughts.” “The idea was that we were in a war to take back Iran, so you cannot have a family until the war is won,” the ex-PR person for the MEK told Vice (9/2/14) in 2014:

This was the excuse the outside world would hear, but inside we were told your spouses are a barrier between you and the leadership. We were ordered to surrender our soul, heart and mind to [MEK leader Massoud] Rajavi and his wife.

Several outlets, apparently unfamiliar with the MEK or its assortment of front groups, like the “Organization of Iranian-American Communities,” casually referred to it as some type of generic dissident group:

“The speech was hosted by the Organization of Iranian-American Communities, a group that aims to promote democracy in the Islamic Republic and was supportive of the December protests there.” —Politico (5/5/18)

“Rudy Giuliani delivers the keynote speech at the annual Iran Freedom Convention.” —Fox News (5/5/18)

“The 2018 Iran Freedom Convention for Democracy and Human Rights is meant to voice support for the Iranian citizens who protested against their leadership in December.” —CBS News (5/5/18)

“At an Iranian freedom event in DC, Giuliani, citing NSA Bolton, made the motion of ripping up a paper when talking about what the Trump administration will do with the Iran nuclear deal.” —ABC News reporter Tara Palmeri (5/5/18)

None of the above outlets bothered to mention the MEK’s cult-like nature when reporting on the so-called “Freedom Convention,” or the fact that Giuliani has been paid thousands of dollars by the group. According to Politico (in another article, from 2016):

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.

Shouldn’t this be mentioned? Isn’t this relevant to what purpose the “conference” serves, and why its voice is legitimized and boosted by Western media and Trump flacks?

Part of what makes the MEK’s strategy so effective is their rebranding themselves as benign-sounding, Western-friendly democrats just fighting for “freedom.” That media play along with this fiction is evidence of 1) widespread ignorance of the most basic facts of Iranian politics, even among nominal foreign reporters, and 2) how desperate Western media are for images of pro-US, pro-Israel regime-change advocates—a cohort that is close to nonexistent in non-cult form.

Though it wasn’t in reference to Giuliani’s speech, HBO’s John Oliver (Last Week Tonight, 4/22/18) committed a similar oversight two weeks ago, describing footage of an MEK crowd as “a group of Iranian dissidents.” That’s true, in a very narrow, technical sense—in the same way the Westboro Baptist Church could be referred to as “US dissidents,” which would be equally misleading in terms of the impression conveyed.

One notable exception was the Washington Post’s Ishaan Tharoor (5/7/18), who pointed out the MEK’s cult status, as well as their payoffs to Giuliani, in his breakdown of the event.

The fact that almost no one else brought up the cult-like nature of Giuliani’s associates indicates that most in US media are entirely uninterested in conveying fundamental facts about what’s going on in Iran. A troubling gap in its own right, but doubly so when the present administration is mounting a well-documented and deliberate effort to undermine and overthrow that country’s government.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## M.E.K.: The Group John Bolton Wants to Rule Iran

Nilo Tabrizy

May 7, 2018

The United States has steadily been ratcheting up the pressure on Iran, including designating the country's military as a foreign terrorist organization and setting the stage for a potential confrontation in the Persian Gulf.

The man who has reportedly been behind much of this? President Trump's national security adviser, John R. Bolton.

*The New York Times*

Mr. Bolton is a longtime Iran hawk who has supported the Mujahedeen Khalq, known as M.E.K. It is a fringe dissident group that calls for regime change in Iran. Mr. Bolton has said he has backed the controversial group for over a decade.

### What is the M.E.K.?

The M.E.K. was one of the first organizations add-



ed to the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations in 1997 (it was removed from the list in 2012). During the 1970s, it was suspected of being behind the assassination of six Americans and the bombings of American companies in Iran. The group's aim is to the overthrow the current regime in Iran.

Why dose Mr. Bolton support this fringe group and what does that mean now that he's the president's national security adviser? Our vidoe traces his past statements and breaks down what's at stake.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The dishonest case against the Iran deal

Ryan Cooper

—  
May 8, 2018

**D**on't listen to the warmongers. President Trump will announce today whether or not he will recertify the Iran nuclear deal. He has been hinting that he will refuse to do so this time, throwing the whole carefully negotiated framework crafted by his predecessor into disarray.

### THE WEEK

A parade of warmongers, cretins, and outright liars have been pushing for Trump to do this since he started his presidency. They may well succeed — but that doesn't change the fact that the Iran deal, which halted the country's nuclear weapons program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions, is working perfectly well. It should not be breached.

Iran deal critics are barely even trying to construct logical arguments for their position. National Security Adviser John Bolton is, of course, all-in on tear-

## OPINION

## The dishonest case against the Iran deal

*Don't listen to the warmongers*



Illustrated | Spencer Platt/Getty Images

ing it up. When he took office he leaked a five-page memo for ginning up a context for breaching the deal, then blaming the dissolution on Iran. The plan was so hamfisted that nobody would be convinced, but that's just Bolton for you. He's not a man who bothers with niceties.

No, he's a guy with close ties to the bizarre organization Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a quasi-cult and formerly Marxist Iranian group opposed to the Iran government. It presents itself as the official democratic opposition, but in reality it has virtually zero support inside Iran itself. After murdering many Americans in Iran before the 1979 revolution, MEK was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, but lobbied to be removed by bribing numerous Washington elites from both parties (through various shell organizations), which finally got them taken off in 2012. (It is incredibly illegal to take mon-



ey from official terrorist groups, but that didn't stop people like Ed Rendell, Howard Dean, or Bolton.) At an MEK conference last year, Bolton boasted: "[B]efore 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran."

Then there is Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who made an anti-deal speech recently which essentially boiled down to "Iran Is Bad" and cited as evidence only that Iran had a nuclear program way back in 2003 about which they hadn't come clean.

Or consider the preposterously-named Foundation of Defense of Democracies, whose senior fellow Reuel Marc Gerecht (previously best known for his 2002 article "An Iraq War Won't Destabilize the Mideast") has three separate op-eds in the *The Atlantic* attacking the deal. One article bellows that the Iran deal merely reveals Obama's pathetic "aversion to the use of American military power," a second charges that the deal somehow makes the U.S. complicit in Iranian "imperialism," while a third argues that the nuclear deal stops the U.S. from violently confronting Iran and thereby letting the world "know that we are deadly serious about maintaining American hegemony and shutting down nuclear proliferation in the Middle East."

These arguments are so ludicrously slanted they can barely be parsed on their own terms. The third one is a straightforward beg-the-question fallacy, arguing that a deal designed to stave off war is bad because it forecloses war. The actual content of the deal, and whether Iran is living up to its side, go almost totally unmentioned. Instead it's all about showing Strength by confronting the Evil Regime. Even before this latest op-ed spree Gerecht had by his own admission written tens of thousands of words advocating for war with Iran. The conclusion in this case could not be more obviously foreordained.

An important political background here is indicated by Gerecht's revealing comment on "nuclear proliferation." In reality, the only actually nuclear-armed state in the Middle East is Israel. Gerecht sees no contradiction there because the actual purpose of FDD — which got its start as an overtly pro-Israel propaganda outlet — is backing the Israeli government line to the hilt, especially if it happens to be far-right. FDD has been campaigning against the deal since well before it was agreed, insisting it wasn't tough enough, and that Iran could not be trusted to follow its terms. Iran's adherence to it since then, of

course, hasn't changed their position one iota.

At any rate, all this should put the hawks' carping into context. The real core of the Iran deal has virtually nothing to do with what the country was doing 15 years ago — which as Paul Pillar points out, the general shape of which was already known well before the deal was signed. Obviously, what really matters is what Iran is doing now, and on that score the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors have consistently reported that Iran is living up to its end of the bargain. They are keeping their nuclear programs and facilities within the deal's limits, and allowing inspectors the extensive access needed to confirm this fact.

Ultimately, proving a negative is very difficult, but the IAEA staff come as close as one could realistically get. Moreover, as Daniel Larison points out, the quickest way to enable Iran to restart a crash nuclear weapons program would be to unilaterally abrogate the deal, allowing them to kick out the inspectors and do whatever they want.

The IAEA is full of professional nuclear physicists, diplomats, and security experts. It is the most credible voice in the world on nuclear security questions — and at a minimum, it's surely not in the pocket of the Iranian government. The people on the other side of the debate are either bloodthirsty neocons who never saw a war of aggression they didn't like, or the Israeli government and its apologists. What they want is an end to Iran as a regional power, and to make the United States shoulder the burden. Let us decline the invitation.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## That Time John Bolton Promised Regime Change In Iran

Caitlin Johnstone

May 10, 2018

In July of last year neoconservative death cultist John Bolton, now the National Security Advisor of the United States, gave a speech at the Grand Gathering of Iranians for Free Iran in which he openly called for regime change in Tehran.

Bolton, who is so stupid, crazy and evil that he remains one of the only high-profile individuals on this planet who still insists that the Iraq invasion was a great idea, spoke about the need to prevent the Iranian government from achieving “an arc of control” through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. He decried the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), claiming that Iran was still a nuclear threat under the existing agreement, and spoke glowingly of aggressive sanctions against Tehran. He concluded his speech with the following statement:

“There is a viable opposition to the rule of the

Caitlin Johnstone

ayatollahs, and that opposition is centered in this room today. I had said for over 10 years since coming to these events, that the declared policy of the United States of America should be the overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran. The behavior and the objectives of the regime are not going to change, and therefore the only solution is to change the regime itself. And that's why, before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran!"

Whoa there, Grandpa Clusterbomb. Back up a bit.

"There is a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs, and that opposition is centered in this room today."

Who was that in that room? Who were those people applauding so enthusiastically to Bolton's regime change rhetoric? Who are these people Mustache Satan sees as a "viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs"?

Well that's actually where it gets even more freaky, believe it or not.

These Grand Gatherings of Iranians events are actually put on by the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, also known as the Mojahedin-e Khalq or MEK, a group of a few thousand members who vocally oppose the Iranian government. The MEK is widely considered a cult, using very cult-like methods of indoctrination including exerting control over the personal and sex lives of its members and forcing them to go through weekly "ideological cleansings".

Previously listed as a terrorist organization by the US government because it has killed Americans and has an extensive history of committing acts of terrorism, in 2012 the MEK was taken off the State Department's terrorist list by Secretary of State and virulent Iran hawk Hillary Clinton. Clinton's job, incidentally, is currently occupied by another notorious Iran hawk in Mike Pompeo.

As noted in 2012 by the New York Times, a bizarre amount of lobbying went into getting MEK taken off the terror list, the provocative nature of which was justified by the claim that "United States-Iran relations are already at such a low point that it is unlikely to make them much worse." Among those

lobbying for the move was former CIA Director James “Ha ha, of course we meddle in foreign democracies” Woolsey and other CIA affiliates.

This would be the same CIA, by the way, which recently ramped up covert operations in Iran under the guidance of aggressive Iran hawk “Ayatollah Mike” D’Andrea.

The MEK reportedly has weirdly deep pockets which have enabled it to spend millions of dollars rehabilitating its image in recent years, and to pay out sizable fees for panelists and speeches by experts willing to advocate in favor of its regime change agenda. Rudy Giuliani, currently one of President Trump’s attorneys, led a “regime change” chant at another MEK event in March.

So the US president has just authorized aggressive sanctions against Iran after a highly dishonest speech to the American people, and now there’s a well-funded extremist group all set and groomed to become the “viable opposition” to the government of that country with the blessings of the CIA and the president’s bloodthirsty National Security Advisor.

Sound familiar? Maybe sorta kinda exactly the same as what we’ve seen in the buildups to staged coups on Syria, Libya and Ukraine?

Americans have been reluctant to consent to boots on the ground in the Middle East since Iraq, which is why the US war machine has been switching its emphasis to psyops, armed regional militant groups, and airstrikes/drone warfare. But just because there are no flag-draped coffins flying home doesn’t mean that America will be any less culpable if violence erupts in Iran in the wake of crushing, destabilizing Iran sanctions. It will have been deliberate, and the bloodshed, suffering and chaos caused will be on this administration’s hands.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Regime change – be careful what you wish for

Robert Azzi

May 13, 2018

American policy, John Bolton wrote in the Wall Street Journal in January, “should be ending Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution before its fortieth anniversary.”

“Recognizing a new Iranian regime in 2019” he wrote, “would reverse the shame of once seeing our diplomats held hostage for four hundred and forty-four days.”

CONCORD  MONITOR

Regime change!

revenge!

Revenge as a pillar of American foreign policy!

John Bolton’s op-ed echoed Bibi Netanyahu’s 2015 speech to Congress, where the Israeli prime minister exploited the dark atavistic need of many Ameri-

Opinion > Columns

## Robert Azzi: Regime change – be careful what you wish for



cans to get revenge – payback – for what they believe are unresolved foreign policy issues.

Some still can't see beyond the 1979 hostage crisis or beyond 9/11.

Incapable of processing all that America has done to destabilize the Middle East – especially the 1953 overthrow of Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 – a combination of fear and rage makes many Americans unable to move beyond a need to strike out at peoples whom they believe are challenging their Western, Judaeo-Christian world order.

That's the message from Netanyahu and Bolton – and today from Donald

Trump; how can the people who did these things be trusted, especially when we've yet to fully extract our pound of flesh for depredations they visited upon us?

That, today, is part of why an intellectually challenged, historically ignorant President Trump chose to unilaterally violate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

Ignorant of the fact, perhaps, that in 1957 Iran became one of the first beneficiaries of America's "Atoms for Peace" program; that by 1968, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi – whom America had placed upon a peacock throne after overthrowing Mossadegh in 1953 – had established the Tehran Nuclear Research Center, which still operates.

That in 1970, Iran ratified the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, making its program subject to International Atomic Energy Agency verification – a program that continues and will continue beyond JCPOA – something Israel, for example, a nuclear-armed state, has never done.

Nine years later everything changed.

On Jan. 16, 1979, the shah was overthrown and, within a month, Ayatollah Khomeini triumphantly returned to Iran and established the Islamic Republic – subjecting millions of Iranians, recently liberated from 26 years of tyrannical rule by the shah – to decades more tyranny, this time by theocrats.

Months later, Iranian students, many waving signs with Mossadegh's picture on them, stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran and took 52 hostages, holding them for 444 days.

In partial response, America openly supported Iraq in an eight year war against Iran, a catastrophic war with over a million casualties, further isolating and radicalizing the ayatollahs.

In response, too, the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian terrorist organization that had first campaigned against the shah, and which then became an enthusiastic supporter of the ayatollahs, fell out with the regime and launched



a terror campaign against them.

A 1992 State Department report identified MEK – originally known as the People’s Holy Warriors of Iran – as responsible for killing six Americans in Iran, including three military officers. In 1997, MEK was among the first organizations placed upon America’s list of foreign terrorists.

After a concerted effort, MEK was removed from the list of designated terrorist organizations in 2012.

It was removed due to the generous MEK-financed efforts of Americans like former CIA directors James Woolsey and Porter Goss; former FBI director Louis Freeh; former AG Michael Mukasey; Obama’s first national security adviser James Jones. MEK supporters include Democrats Howard Dean, Ed Rendell, Wesley Clark, Bill Richardson and Lee Hamilton, and Republicans Newt Gingrich, Rudy Giuliani, Fran Townsend, Tom Ridge and Andrew Card.

John Bolton, a longtime backer of the Mujahideen-e Khalq, has actually spoken at eight MEK rallies.

Long live killers of Americans – as long as they are our our terrorists!

Netanyahu and Bolton were lead cheerleaders – lacking only pom-poms – for Bush’s 2003 illegal invasion of Iraq, which fractured the Middle East, exacerbated sectarian tensions and resulted in chaos, violence and terror that continues to this day.

Terror that continues to this day.

This isn’t a column to defend Iran. Its missile program and military and terror engagement needs to be confronted – but not by tearing up JCPOA. That’s not what the accord was designed to do.

This, too, is not a column to defend the JCPOA – it needs no defense. As the most significant anti-proliferation accord of the last quarter-century, and perhaps as a template for future negotiations with other states, it needs pro-

tection, not justification.

It needs saving, not savaging.

Iran, up to the moment President Trump violated JCPOA, was in full compliance with the accord and has been since it was adopted in 2015.

Critically, the issue is not Iran's nuclear program – or lack of one. The issue is the manner it has been able to project its regional hegemony – a hegemony gifted to it by George W. Bush and Dick Cheney.

No, the issue is the ego of a man trying to reverse the perceived “shame of once seeing our diplomats held hostage” – and willing to risk the security of a nation by going to war over it.

The issue is the ignorance of a jealous, petty, narcissistic autocrat determined to reverse every program initiated by President Barack Obama – regardless of its value.

The issue is pettiness.

When Trump moved to reinstate American nuclear sanctions on Iran, calling the JCPOA a “horrible, one-sided deal that should have never, ever been made,” he risked the possibility of not only further empowering Iranian hard-liners – who were already in tension with those who argue for more engagement with America and the West – but perhaps force Tehran to seek alliances inimical to American interests, including with Russia and China.

Trump's, Netanyahu's and Bolton's gambit is a reckless attempt to try to sustain Israel's regional conventional and nuclear military hegemony – a hegemony increasingly challenged by a politically ascendant Iran.

Blinded by their egos, limited by their ambitions, together they fail to realize that in confrontation there will be no winners, that in confrontation the only regime change affected might, in the end, be their own.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The return of the regime-change hawks

Ashley Smith

May 16, 2018

The most fanatical wing of the foreign policy establishment is running the show under Trump--and the consequences for the world could be dire, writes Ashley Smith.

### **THEY'RE BACK.**

After nearly a decade in exile from the headquarters of U.S. imperialism, foreign policy extremists so radical that even known neoconservatives dismissed them as kooks have returned to power in the Trump administration.

Together with Trump, they have set the U.S. and its allies Israel and Saudi Arabia on a path to intensified conflict with Iran by ripping up the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action--the nuclear accord--with Tehran.

**SocialistWorker**

Trump's latest appointees to his cabinet of horrors, Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State and John Bolton as national security advisor, have long been on record as calling for military action against Iran.

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At the tail end of the administration of Bill Clinton, the self-described neo-conservatives came together to form the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). Its signatories included past and future war criminals Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz and, perhaps the most radical of them all, Bolton.

ASHLEY SMITH

## THE RETURN OF THE REGIME-CHANGE HAWKS

May 16, 2018

The most fanatical wing of the foreign policy establishment is running the show under Trump--and the consequences for the world could be dire, writes **Ashley Smith**.



**THEY'RE BACK.**

After nearly a decade in exile from the headquarters of U.S. imperialism, foreign policy extremists so radical that even **known neoconservatives dismissed them as kooks** have returned to power in the Trump administration.

Together with Trump, they have set the U.S. and its allies Israel and Saudi Arabia on a path to intensified conflict with Iran by ripping up the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action--the nuclear accord--with Tehran.

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Left to right: National Security Advisor John Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence (Wikimedia Commons)

Just **last year in a meeting in Paris**, Bolton praised the MEK as "a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs" and thundered that "the declared policy of the United States of America should be the overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran."

**TRUMP'S REGIME-change fanatics hope to restore U.S. foreign policy to what it was during their glory days under George Bush Jr.**

The neocons agitated for the U.S. to adopt a Reaganite policy of rolling back any and all rivals and so-called “rogue states” that opposed the Washington consensus of free trade globalization.

While championing unilateral tactics in pursuit of this project, the neocons were careful to stress that such aggressive assertion of American power was in the interests of U.S. allies and the world system.

They identified Saddam Hussein’s Iraq as one of the pivotal regimes that had to be overthrown to christen a new epoch of U.S. hegemony. Under pressure from the neocons, the Clinton administration made regime change in Baghdad the official U.S. policy in his Iraq Liberation Act.

The neocons reached their pinnacle of dominance under the Bush administration, especially after 9/11, which they used as a pretext to try to enact their regime-change fantasies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Their aim was to impose U.S. supremacy over the Middle East and Central Asia, and their strategic oil reserves. Washington hoped to thereby lock in U.S. control over its European allies, as well as its rising rivals, especially China, all of which relied on the region for their energy supplies.

In the Middle East, the neocons, especially Bolton, agitated for regime change not only in Iraq, but also in Syria--and, most importantly, Iran. As one British official put it at the time, “Everyone wants to go to Baghdad. Real men want to go to Tehran.”

The neocon’s imperialist fantasies collapsed in Iraq. The 2003 invasion produced a mass resistance, which bogged down the U.S. occupation in endless counterinsurgency warfare.

In the process, the U.S. decimated an already ravaged country. Over a million people lost their lives, some 5 million were displaced, and the Iraqi state and nation split along sectarian lines between Shia and Sunnis, as well as an ethnic one between Kurds and Arabs. Ironically, instead of imposing a new government loyal to the U.S., Bush ended up backing a sectarian Shia one whose

leaders' allegiance was to Iran.

Iran, one of the countries on Bush's so-called "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea, emerged as the real victor of the Iraq War, with the predominant influence of the Shia-dominated post-Hussein government. Thus, the war, the intent of which was to impose U.S. rule throughout the region and the world, turned into, in the words of retired Gen. William Odom, the single "greatest strategic disaster in United States history."

WITH THE U.S. defeat in Iraq compounded by the Great Recession, the U.S. ruling class turned to Barack Obama to restore and rehabilitate the power and credibility of American imperialism. Taking up the Bush administration's own retreat in his second term, Obama abandoned regime change as a policy.

Instead, he developed a new imperial strategy of extracting the U.S. from ground wars in the Middle East, not as an abandonment of the project of American imperial domination of the world, but so that the U.S. could conduct what his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called a "Pivot to Asia" to contain China's rise and force it to accept Washington's hegemony and its free trade policies.

Unfortunately for Obama, the Arab masses weren't content with the existing Middle East order of despotic capitalist states co-existing with Israeli apartheid. In 2011, they rose up in the Arab Spring, staging mass protests for democracy and equality that challenged both U.S. allies and antagonists.

The Obama administration at first tried to back the existing order. When that proved untenable, the U.S. opted not for regime change, but an "orderly transition"--getting rid of dictators (mostly), but preserving the repressive core of the state. This was the outcome of the pro-democracy uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and of the U.S. intervention in support of a rebel army in Libya.

Elsewhere, the U.S. tolerated suppression of democratic risings, ignoring, for instance, Saudi Arabia's orchestration of a brutal counterrevolution in Bahrain. Then, when the nightmare in Iraq led to the rise of ISIS, the Obama administration focused all its military firepower on the self-proclaimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria.

As part of this retrenchment, Obama opted to reach a negotiated deal with Iran over its nuclear program. In return for a shutdown of the program and stringent inspections, much of the onerous sanctions regime on Iran was lifted.

In the process of all of this, the U.S. suffered a relative decline as the region's imperial overlord, while Iran continued its rise as a regional power, consolidating its network of allies--from Syria, where it and Russia helped the Assad regime crush the Syrian Revolution, to Iraq, to Hezbollah in Lebanon and its Houthi allies in Yemen.

Faced with the rise of Iran as a regional power, its bitter regional rivals Israel and Saudi Arabia intensified their effort against Tehran. Israel increased its strikes against Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria, and Saudi Arabia intensified its proxy war with Iran in Yemen.

TRUMP SEIZED the presidency with the promise that he would "Make America Great Again" by implanting a unilateralist strategy he called "America First."

In the administration's National Security Strategy document, it made its intentions plain: abandon free trade globalization for economic nationalism, including protectionism; impose racist and Islamophobic border controls; downplay the so-called "war on terror" to focus on the great power competition with China and Russia; and confront so-called "rogue states" Iran and North Korea.

For the first year of his presidency, the establishment faction in the administration prevented Trump from implementing the full conclusions of these stated goals.

The billionaire bigot's alt-right consigliere, Steve Bannon, the most consistent proponent of the America First program, was pushed out. The chief accomplishments of the first year of Trump fit into a traditional Republican agenda of tax cuts, deregulation, and maintenance of the system of free trade globalization.

This past March, however, Trump conducted a housecleaning of his administration. Out were figures closely associated with the Republican and corporate establishment, like Gary Cohn, Rex Tillerson and H.R. McMaster. Their rivals--neocon hawks Pompeo and Bolton and the arch-protectionist Peter Navarro--took the helm.

This team has begun to push further toward implementing Trump's America First program, starting with protectionist measures against China, and continuing with the war threats against North Korea and Iran.

With the regime changers back in power, Trump ripped up the nuclear accord, based on the erroneous claim that Iran has continued to develop its nuclear weapons program.

Trump and his Israeli fellow reactionary Benjamin Netanyahu are lying--the UN watchdog assigned to monitor Iran's program has repeatedly verified that it is in compliance, and U.S. intelligence and military officials confirm this.

Never guided by fact, however, Trump nixed the agreement, throwing the Middle East and indeed global structure of imperialism into chaos and conflict. The establishment has reacted in horror with Obama's former national security advisor straying from the usual diplomatic niceties to denounce Trump as "our wrecking ball in chief."

BRITISH FOREIGN Secretary Boris Johnson represents the former imperialist high command's complaints about Trump when he says the president has "no Plan B" for what happens next.

But Pompeo, Bolton and Trump's incompetent, motormouth lawyer Rudolph Giuliani certainly do. They want regime change in Iran now. Giuliani already told the Israeli press that Trump is "committed to regime change" as "the only way to achieve peace in the Middle East."

The revived regime-changers believe that, despite Iran's gains in the region, its regime is weak. It has run up its debt to pay for the counterrevolutionary war in Syria to prop up Bashar al-Assad; its economy, though growing, has



failed to benefit the country's workers and poor; it faced insurrectionary protests at the end of last year; and it now confronts a wave of strikes.

Eager to take advantage, the Trump administration has begun to take us all down the path to war with Iran similar to that blazed by Bush in Iraq.

Trump has long been encouraging Saudi Arabia and Israel to confront Iran to stop it from consolidating its position in Syria once ISIS is finally defeated. Both states have taken his termination of the nuclear accord as a green light to attack.

The day after the announcement, Israel conducted a massive campaign of air strikes against Iranian military bases in Syria. Similarly, Saudi Arabia intensified its bombing campaign against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Trump's renegeing on the nuclear accord has also disrupted Washington's system of alliances.

Trump snubbed the four other United Nations Security Council members, including Germany's Angela Merkel and especially French President Emmanuel Macron, who went out of his way to visit Washington and beg Trump to renew the treaty.

Not only that, but administration officials have threatened France and Germany, who have made significant investments in Iran over the last few years, with sanctions if they don't heed American dictates and terminate those contracts.

The U.S. has done the same with China and Russia. These imperial rivals will be forced to choose between backing sometime ally Iran and facing yet more intense conflict with the U.S.--or conceding to the U.S. and losing important ground they've gained in the Middle East.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE to predict the consequences of all of this. The regime-changers may not get their way in the end.

But we do know this much: If the U.S. attempts to crack the Iranian regime, it could detonate a war far more severe than anything we've witnessed, including the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The U.S. would not be taking on a collapsing regime like Saddam Hussein's. Iran has a strong state, buttressed by a modern economy, with significant backing from Russia and China, and a popular base that the hard-liners in the ruling class have already started to mobilize to stand up against U.S. and Israeli war threats.

Even if Trump doesn't start a direct U.S. war, his administration has already intensified a regional conflict between, on one side, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and on the other, Iran. So far, this conflict has been fought out over Syria and Yemen, but with saber-rattling on all sides, it could degenerate into a larger war between these rival powers.

The consequences for relations among the imperialist states are similarly unpredictable. Will Germany and France buckle under U.S. pressure? Already, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire has threatened to break with Trump and uphold the Iran nuclear accord and France's investment in the country, declaring: "We have to work among ourselves in Europe to defend our European economic sovereignty."

What will Russia and China do? And what will be the spillover effects of ending the Iran nuclear accord on Trump's summit with Kim Jong-un over North Korea's nuclear program. Any rational actor, which Kim certainly is, would certainly doubt the credibility of Trump in making any agreement with North Korea.

What's more, the U.S. and North Korea are miles apart to begin with. Trump is demanding rapid denuclearization, while Kim wants a slow process so that he can use his missiles as a bargaining chip to preserve his regime.

FACED WITH the Trump administration's implementation of America First unilateralism and threats of regime change in Iran, the international left will yet again be tested on the question of imperialism.

Much of the so-called “anti-imperialist left” failed that test in Syria, betraying international solidarity with a popular revolution to line up Assad’s regime, Iran and Putin’s Russia.

The left can’t afford to fail this even more consequential test. Here in the U.S., we must first and foremost oppose the cancellation of the Iran accord, Trump’s threats of regime change and the encouragement of Israel and Saudi Arabia to launch attacks on Iran and its allies.

There should be no illusions about Trump’s Democratic predecessors in the White House. While they may have different strategies and tactics than Trump, they were no less committed to U.S. imperialism’s domination of the world.

In particular, Obama’s Iran accord was negotiated not out of some pacifist morality, but to protect the U.S. and Israeli monopoly on nuclear weapons in the region and set the stage for the so-called “pivot to Asia.”

At the same time, the left can’t give any political support to other imperial powers like France or Germany, Washington’s rivals like China and Russia, or regional powers like the Iranian state. Instead, we should build international solidarity for Palestine and for popular struggles for equality and democracy, like those of Iranian workers.

Only this combination of anti-imperialism and international solidarity is an adequate response to a system that is intensifying conflicts between imperialist and regional powers throughout the world.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK Money Can't Buy Love – but It Can Buy a Lot of Politicians

Philip M. Giraldi

May 30, 2018

Iran's radical Marxist cult Mohajedeen e Khalq, better known by its acronym MEK, is somewhat reminiscent of the Israel Lobby's American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in that it operates somewhat in the shadows and is nevertheless able to punch well beyond its weight by manipulating politicians and understanding how American government functions on its dark side.



MEK promotes itself by openly supporting a very popular hardline policy of “democratic opposition” advocating “regime change” for Iran while also successfully selling its reform credentials, i.e. that it is no longer a terrorist group. This latter effort apparently convinced then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on 2013 as she and President Barack responded to the group's affability campaign by delisting MEK from the government list of terrorist organizations. This shift in attitude towards MEK was a result

of several factors. First, everyone in Washington and the Establishment hates Iran. And second, the Executive Order 13224, which designates Iran's Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization, ipso facto defines any group fighting against it as one of the good guys, justifying the change.

MEK is best described as a cult rather than as a political movement because of its internal discipline. Its members are, according to the testimony of those who have somehow escaped, subjected to considerable indoctrination best described as brainwashing. Though not exactly imprisoned, adherents are kept isolated and separated insofar as possible and cannot contact their families. Their possessions are collectivized so they have no money or other resources. If they are in contravention of the numerous rules that guide the organization they are punished, including physically, and there are reports of members being executed for trying to escape.

The current head of the group is Maryam Rajavi, the wife of the deceased co-founder of MEK, Massoud. She is reported to be politically savvy and speaks excellent English learned in part to enable her to communicate with adoring American politicians. The group itself was founded in 1965. Its name means "People's Holy Warriors," derived from its Marxist/populist roots and its religiosity.

It was not unlike the Taliban which developed in adjacent Afghanistan. During the 1970's it rebelled against the Shah and was involved in bombing and shooting American targets. It executed U.S. Army Lt. Col. Lewis Hawkins in 1973 as he was walking home from the U.S. Embassy and in 1975 it killed two American Air Force officers in their chauffeur-driven car, an incident that was studied and used in CIA training subsequently as an example of how not to get caught and killed by terrorists. Between 1976 and 1978 the group bombed American commercial targets and killed three Rockwell defense contractors and one Texaco executive.

MEK welcomed the Iranian revolution and also the occupation of the U.S. Embassy but soon fell afoul of the Ayatollah Khomeini regime. It eventually moved to join Iran's enemy Saddam Hussein in Iraq and participated on the Iraqi side in the bloodletting that followed when the two countries went to war in 1980-8. For that reason alone, MEK is particularly hated by most Ira-

nians and the repeated assertion that it is some kind of “Iranian democracy” alternative is ridiculous as the people in Iran would never accept it. In terms of the duplicity surrounding its marketing, it is reminiscent of Iraqi con artist Ahmed Chalabi, who also had little following inside Iraq but was able to convince Pentagon geniuses like Paul Wolfowitz that he represented some kind of democratic movement. At the time Chalabi was also secretly working for Iran.

MEK was protected by Saddam and later by the U.S. invaders who found a weapon to use against Iran useful. They were housed in Camp Ashraf near Baghdad, and later, after Ashraf was closed, at so-called Camp Liberty. In 2013, when the Iraqis insisted that they go elsewhere the President Barack Obama facilitated their removal to Albania under the auspices of the United Nations refugee program, with the \$20 million dollar bill being footed by Washington. The organization’s political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), meanwhile established itself in Paris under the control of Maryam Rajavi, in part to place it closer to the American and European sources of its political legitimacy and financing. In 2001, to make itself more palatable, the group had renounced violence.

The MEK folks in Albania have become a bit of a problem. Through various additional migrations, they have multiplied and now number around 3,000 and have largely adhered to their cultish ways even though one of the original objectives of the move into Europe was to somehow deprogram and “deradicalize” them in an environment far removed from Iran-Iraq. Part of the problem is that the Albanian government likes the U.N. subsidies used to support the MEK associates, but it will not let them work as they have no legal status and they cannot resettle or lead normal lives. So they resort to criminal activity that includes promotion of fraudulent charities, drug trafficking and even a form of slavery in which their own people are sold and traded as laborers. The temporary solution has been to move the MEK out of a run-down university property in the capital Tirana to a more remote site in northern Albania dubbed Ashraf-3, but local people believe that that is just kicking the can down the road and that MEK should be forced to go somewhere else, preferably in the United States, which seems to like them so much.

Also, Albania is majority Muslim and has been subjected to the same Saudi

Arabian ultra-conservative Wahhabi promotion backed by lots of money that has plagued many states in the Middle East. Albanians accustomed to the mild form of Turkish Islam suddenly found themselves confronting the Sunni-Shia divide and also the MEK as agents of both Saudi Arabia and Israel. Many outraged Albanians see the unreformed MEK in their midst as a terror time bomb waiting to go off, but the government, under pressure from the U.S. Embassy has not sought their removal.

Meanwhile back in the United States, everything involving the non-deradicalized MEK is just hunky dory. MEK and the NCRI are enemies of Iran and also seem to have plenty of money to spend, so they buy high ranking American speakers to appear at their events. Rudy Giuliani and John Bolton have appeared regularly, as have Senators John McCain, Lindsey Graham, and Jeanne Shaheen. At a 2015 appearance in Paris, Giuliani brought the crowd to its feet by calling for “Regime change!” after shouting out that the “Ayatollah must go!” In August 2017, Senators Roy Blunt, John Cornyn, Thom Tillis and Carl Levin met with Rajavi in Paris. Newt Gingrich also considers himself a friend of the Iranian resistance while Elaine Chao, Secretary of Labor and wife of Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell spoke in Paris for five minutes in 2015 and was paid \$50,000. The payments made to the other politicians have not been revealed.

And then there is the Saudi and Israeli angle. Saudi Arabia is now the major funder of MEK/NCRI. Its intelligence chief Turki al-Faisal spoke before the group in 2017. Israel funded the group in its early days and its external spy service Mossad continues to use MEK stay-behinds in Iran to assassinate scientists and tamper with computer systems. The CIA, which recently expanded its anti-Iran task force, it also works closely with MEK. And Giuliani, Bolton, Chao are all in the White House inner circle, which, not coincidentally, is buying for Iranian blood.

Lost in all of the above is any conceivable American interest. It is difficult to even make the claim that Iran threatens the United States or any vital interest and the drive to decapitate the Mullahs, both literally and figuratively, really comes from Riyadh and Tel Aviv. And there is potential collateral damage where it really might matter as MEK cultists continue to sit and fester in a holding pattern maintained by Washington in the heart of Europe. What

comes next? War of some kind with Iran is appearing to be increasingly likely given recent remarks by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, threatening to crush the Iranians. Is Washington intending to send the MEK warriors on sabotage missions inside Iran, something like the resistance to the Germans in World War 2? Maybe Giuliani and Bolton know the answer to that question.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Iran's Mujahideen-e Khalq has friends at the White House

Bernd Debusmann

June 3, 2018

US President Donald Trump's speech announcing the United States' withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran fell just short of calling for regime change in Tehran. However, that has long been the aim of Trump's new national security adviser, John Bolton, and the Iranian exile group he champions.



The group is the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK). It has a controversial history and is backed by several prominent public figures in the United States. They see the MEK as a viable opposition to the Iranian theocracy but, despite years of trying to influence US policies at the highest level, the exiles never managed to find a friend at the White House. Now, they have.

How much the anti-mullah Iranian exiles are emboldened by Trump's scathing criticism of the Iran

## Iran's Mujahideen-e Khalq has friends at the White House

The way MEK leaders and their American backers see it, the end is near for the Iranian theocracy.

Sunday 03/06/2018



Viable opposition? An opponent of Iranian regime chants slogans near placards showing portraits of Maryam Rajavi, the Paris-based head of the MEK's political wing, during a protest in Brussels. (Reuters)



Bernd Debusmann



deal and the ascent of Bolton to national security adviser is clear from something that happened May 5 in Washington.

The MEK called a gathering of more than 1,000 followers the “Convention for Regime Change by Iranians.” The keynote speakers at the event were Rudy Giuliani, a long-time Trump friend and recent addition to his team of lawyers; and Bill Richardson, a former US ambassador to the United Nations and governor of

New Mexico.

Richardson warmed up the crowd with a question. “Are you ready for regime change in Iran?” he asked. “Yes, we are,” roared the crowd in the ballroom of a five-star Washington hotel.

Giuliani, greeted like a rock-star, won cheers by describing as “my hero” Maryam Rajavi, the Paris-based head of the MEK’s political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). “We are all going to be in Iran pretty soon,” Giuliani said.

Giuliani and Richardson have been frequent speakers at MEK events. They have supported the group’s campaign to be taken off the US State Department’s list of terrorist organisations. The Clinton administration put the MEK on the list in 1997. It was a time it hoped to open a dialogue with Iran, whose leaders detest the MEK for having sided with Saddam Hussein in the Iraq-Iran war.

Among the people who lobbied for the MEK to be taken off the list were former CIA chiefs James Woolsey and Michael Hayden as well as former chairmen of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter Pace and Hugh Shelton. Others who supported the MEK were former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge and former FBI Director Louis Freeh.

In 2012, Hillary Clinton, then secretary of state, took the group off the terrorist organisations list. It now has offices on Pennsylvania Avenue, a short walk from the White House.

The way MEK leaders and their American backers see it, the end is near for the Iranian theocracy and renewed US sanctions promised by Trump will hasten it. This view is largely based on Iran's economic problems and mass protests across the country in December and January, initially against economic policies and later against the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei.

At the Washington convention, organisers displayed maps showing 141 towns and cities where they said protests had taken place. It was the largest public display of discontent since the 2009 Green Movement when hundreds of thousands took to the streets to protest elections they considered rigged to favour Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Whether mass protests could sweep away the Iranian leadership the way they ousted Hosni Mubarak in Egypt is very much open to doubt. Still, Trump, in his tear-up-the-deal speech assured disgruntled Iranians of his backing, saying: "I want to deliver a message to the long-suffering people of Iran: The people of America stand with you... The future of Iran belongs to its people."

The leadership of the people, or so Bolton and other pro-MEK Iran hawks say, should belong to Rajavi, whose official title is president-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran. For years, her organisation has been showered with praise for efficiency by a string of Iran hawks but many Iran experts say the exiles enjoy little internal support.

The experts draw parallels with the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an exile

group set up by Ahmed Chalabi. He had the ear of US President George W. Bush and received millions of dollars to hasten the downfall of Saddam Hussein and take over the Iraqi government. The INC had little influence in post-Saddam Iraq.

How much influence Bolton will have on US policy on Iran remains to be seen. However, Trump's warning that Iran would have "bigger problems than it has had ever before" if it worked on a nuclear bomb echoed his security adviser's language on previous occasions, if toned down for consumption on the world stage.

In 2015, as negotiations on the Iran deal drew into their final stage in Geneva, Bolton was even more blunt. In an opinion article in the New York Times, he wrote: "The inconvenient truth is that only military action... can accomplish what is required."

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## John Bolton's ties to Iranian MEK make him more lobbyist than statesman

Behnam Gharagozli, Jon Roozenbeek, Adrià Salvador Palau

June 8, 2018

**C**omment: Bolton's ties to the cult-like, violent, exiled Iranian group the MEK, are extremely alarming, write Behnam Gharagozli, Jon Roozenbeek and Adrià Salvador Palau.

When it comes to Iran, John Bolton has always been one of the most hawkish figures in the US foreign policy establishment.



In July 2017 for example, he told a group of Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK) supporters in Paris that “before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran!”. In that same speech, Bolton declared that the official policy of the United States should be regime change in Iran.

Bolton, a long-time proponent of American-sponsored regime change in Iran and new national security adviser to the Trump administration, is now

## John Bolton's ties to Iranian MEK make him more lobbyist than statesman

Comment: Bolton's ties to the cult-like, violent, exiled Iranian group the MEK, are extremely alarming, write Behnam Ghazvini, Jon Rooksbeck and Adria Salvador Palas.



MEK leader Maryam Rajavi meets John Bolton in Albanian capital, Tirana, 2017 [Getty]

better placed than ever to fulfill his long-standing dream of toppling the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is a dream, however, that would in fact be a nightmare for the United States, Iran and the rest of the region.

But recently we have learned that Bolton's dream might have come with a price tag: MEK expert Joanne Stocker asserts that the MEK likely paid Bolton at least \$180k in "speaker fees", making him more a lobbyist than a statesman.

To appreciate the significance of Bolton's ties with this shadowy group, it is important to understand the MEK's history.

After its founding in 1965, the MEK morphed into an Islamist-Marxist organisation that sought to overthrow the Shah of Iran through armed conflict.

The MEK's original alliance with Ayatollah Khomeini, who shared this goal of overthrowing the Shah, quickly fell apart after the Shah's departure in 1979, as the two forces had sharply different visions for post-revolutionary Iran.

The MEK and Khomeinists soon found themselves in open civil war in Iran from 1979-1983. The conflict came to an end when, as the result of a number of factors including greater popular support, the Khomeinists prevailed against the MEK and pushed the group into exile.

Subsequently, the MEK, in what is considered by most Iranians as an act of

treason, sided with Saddam Hussein against Iran during the eight year war in the 1980s. Unfortunately for them, this alliance would merely lead to yet another military defeat for the MEK at the hands of the Iranian armed forces.

During Operation Mersad in 1988, Iranian forces defeated an invading MEK force that had support from Saddam Hussein. Not only did the MEK fail to make any military gains against the Iranian regime with this move, siding with Saddam Hussein during the war destroyed any widespread support the group had left in Iran.

Despite this string of military losses, the MEK never ended its quest to gain power in Iran. The group enjoyed continued support from Saddam even after 1988 as they were housed at Iraq's Camp Ashraf.

The group continued to carry out assassination plots against Iranian officials and even supported Saddam Hussein's violent suppression of Shia and Kurdish rebellions in Iraq. The group earned a reputation as a cult as its members would set themselves on fire, reportedly under orders from the leadership.

The MEK hasn't exclusively targeted the Shah and the Islamic regime. Its bombing campaign against the Shah, which killed Americans, earned the group a terrorist organisation designation from 1997 to 2012.

This ghastly past however, has not stopped individuals such as John Bolton from reportedly receiving money from the group, despite MEK members and supporters facing criminal prosecution in the United States.

The group's ideology has also shifted tremendously according to its political needs. Initially anti-Israeli and anti-American, the group now enjoys support from both states. What's more, many reports indicate that the group gets funding from Saudi Arabia as part of the ongoing cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Academics and policymakers alike state that the MEK does not enjoy widespread support inside Iran. Indeed, most Iranians who do not support the current clerical regime also vehemently oppose the MEK.

Bolton cosyng up to the group in his quest to overthrow the clerical regime in Iran is incredibly troublesome.

Not only would regime change in Iran potentially cost the United States trillions of dollars, tasking a group such as the MEK to carry out such a goal is downright foolish.

By supporting a group that is viewed so unfavourably (even by those opposed to the clerical regime), Bolton is working against himself: The Iranian leadership will use Bolton's MEK links to rally the Iranian people behind the flag.

There are yet more troubling issues: With such close ties to a cultish organisation that the Department of State officially labelled as a terrorist organisation for approximately 15 years, how could Bolton have possibly received a security clearance to work at such a high level in the White House?

Even those who support regime change in Iran should be skeptical of Bolton's ties with this group. Given the MEK's constantly shifting ideology, its cultish behaviour, history of violence and support for actors like Saddam Hussein, it's highly doubtful that such a result would serve American interests even if Bolton's plans for regime change in Iran via the MEK were successful.

Even if the Iranian public were to simply forget that this organisation supported its arch nemesis in an eight year war that killed hundreds of thousands of Iranians and caused hundreds of billions of dollars of damage to both sides, the United States and Israel would have no guarantee that the MEK would not revert back to its original anti-American and anti-Israeli ideology upon assuming power in Iran.

The Middle East is a constant reminder that just because a group welcomes American support to achieve its objectives one day, does not mean that they will remain pro-American the next.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## US Forces Albania to Take IS Fighters After Hosting MEK

Anne and Massoud Khodabandeh

June 8, 2018

“Albania will become a coordination center for fighters returning from ISIS to the Balkans,” announced Bulgaria’s Prime Minister Boyko Borissov during a joint press conference with Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama during a conference against violent extremism, which took place in Tirana this week.

Lobe  
Log

Neither prime minister offered additional details, such as who is pushing this plan or with whom it is being negotiated. This vagueness generated criticism that Rama had not only failed to consult with parliament on this matter of grave importance to his country but perhaps he himself was not fully consulted.

Albania has been used before to host undesirables. In 2005, the United States sent five inmates from Guantanamo Bay there. Between 2013 and 2016,

Washington also relocated 2,901 Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) extremists there from Iraq, which had been trying to expel them since 2003.

Now, the Trump administration is telling Albania to host and de-radicalize former Islamic State (ISIS or IS) fighters who originated from the Balkans region. According to Colonel Bardhyl Kollcaku, head of Albania's Intelligence and Security Agency, "We have the appropriate experience to contribute in the study and addressing the phenomenon of foreign fighters."

If the MEK had been de-radicalized, Kollcaku's assertion would be credible. But they weren't.

In 2013, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pragmatically removed the MEK from the US terrorism list to allow members to be sent to third countries so that Iraq could be rid of them. European countries would not take them because of their terrorist past. Instead, the Albanian government agreed to take them only on the promise that a de-radicalization institute be established to reintegrate the extremists back into society.

This did not happen. The allocated budget, lodged with the American embassy in Tirana, has not been touched. Instead, after Donald Trump became president and set about dismantling every detail of Barack Obama's legacy, the MEK were "allowed" to regroup.

Regrouping meant that the MEK would continue to call for violent regime change against Iran, backed by US extremists like Rudi Giuliani and John Bolton who now occupy influential posts in the Trump administration. As a result, Albania has become a front-line enemy state in relation to Iran.

Regrouping also meant re-enslaving members, who are not paid and have no human rights. It also meant building a closed camp in a remote part of the country to which Albanian authorities and security services have no access. As though Albania wasn't having a hard time already cracking down on criminal and mafia gangs, now the MEK are implicated in criminal activity. Among several individuals arrested for money laundering last month, two Israelis were found to be associated with FARA NGO. This is the same company involved in building the closed military training base in Manez to which rank-

and-file MEK fighters were moved last autumn.

At the same time that was happening, word got out that the widows and orphans of killed IS fighters would soon be transferred to the MEK's deserted buildings in the Albanian capital of Tirana. Such rumors were dismissed at the time. Now it appears that the truth is much worse. Actual IS fighters will be sent to Albania.

It's possible, however, that the IS fighters will follow a similar trajectory as the MEK in Albania. Western powers have seen Syria and Iraq fall away from their influence. Hezbollah governs Lebanon, and a restive population wrapped up in the politics of Palestine is challenging the stability of Jordan. These are uncertain times in the Middle East. Some individuals in Western power structures have broached the possibility of creating a bespoke covert mercenary force to bring fresh chaos and violence into the mix. Although the MEK has been such a handy tool for aggravating Iran, former IS fighters could, with the right training, constitute a similar force against other countries.

And although John Bolton recently remarked that regime change against Iran is now off the Trump administration's agenda, continued patronage of the MEK belies that claim. So, this is not just Albania's problem. The West needs to urgently ask, "What use is the Islamic State now?"

Massoud Khodabandeh is the director of Middle East Strategy Consultants and has worked long-term with the authorities in Iraq to bring about a peaceful solution to the impasse at Camp Liberty and help rescue other victims of the Mojahedin-e Khalq cult. Among other publications, he co-authored the book "The Life of Camp Ashraf: Victims of Many Masters" with his wife Anne Singleton. They also published an academic paper on the MEK's use of the Internet. Anne Khodabandeh is a UK expert in anti-terrorist activities and a long-standing activist in the field of deradicalization of extremists. She has written several articles and books on this subject, along with her husband, who is of Iranian origin.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The US and NATO Are Establishing Terrorist Bases in Europe

Wayne Madsen

June 14, 2018

**N**ATO and the United States, which, together, claim to be fighting some sort of amorphous “global war on terrorism,” have enabled a terrorist group to establish bases in two NATO member states.

NATO and the United States, which, together, claim to be fighting some sort of amorphous “global war on terrorism,” have enabled a terrorist group to establish bases in two NATO member states – France and Albania – and one NATO protectorate, Kosovo. After evacuating forces of the anti-Iranian terrorist group Mojahedin-e-Khalq from their former bases in Iraq, the United States and NATO facilitated the group’s establishment of a well-guarded military base in Manez, Albania, near Tirana. In addition to hosting MEK members, NATO has convinced Albania to accept members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), who surrendered to



SECURITY

## NATO's Terrorist Bases in Europe

Wayne Madsen

June 13, 2018

Western special forces in Syria and Iraq.

The MEK was founded in 1965 and it has the unusual distinction of taking action to overthrow both the former government of the Shah of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Iran by relying on terrorist actions. In the early 1970s, the MEK embarked on a program of assassinating Iranian officials and U.S. personnel in Iran. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 saw the MEK's program of bombings and shootings increase in intensity. The MEK is led by the husband-wife team of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, who opponents and ex-members of the MEK describe as leaders of what has become known as the "Rajavi Cult." The Rajavis abhor criticism and have been known to silence former MEK members-turned-critics by having them constantly harassed or worse, assassinated.

The MEK's most notable terrorist actions included:

the attempted kidnapping in 1970 of the U.S. ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur II, the nephew of the famed World War II general.

the attempted assassination in 1972 of U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Harold Price with an improvised explosive device (IED).

the assassination in 1973 of U.S. Army officer Louis Lee Hawkins in Tehran. That same year, the MEK assassinated U.S. Air Force officers Col. Paul Shaffer and Lt. Col. Jack Turner.

the 1973 bombings of Pan-American World Airlines and Shell Oil offices in Tehran.

the assassination in Tehran in 1976 of three American employees of Rockwell International — William Cottrell, Donald Smith, and Robert Krongard. U.S. President Gerald Ford said he hoped that “the murderers will be brought to justice.” Instead, they are treated as heroes and the future government of Iran by bi-partisan leaders in Washington.

MEK threats to kill Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter during their respective May 1972 and December 1977 visits to Iran.

the 1978 assassination of Texaco oil executive Paul Grimm in Ahwaz, Iran.

assisting in the 1979 takeover by Iranian militants of the U.S. embassy in Tehran.

the 1979 bombing in Tehran that killed the democratically-elected Iranian President, Mohammad Ali-Rajai, and Prime Minister, Mohammad Javad Bahonar.

During the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein permitted the MEK, also known as the “People’s Mojahedin,” to establish bases inside Iraq. Saddam armed the MEK and provided them with financial and logistical support to carry out terrorist attacks inside Iran. In 1988, the MEK, with Saddam’s assistance, launched a ground invasion of Iran.

In Operation Mersad, Iranian forces defeated the MEK, which had hoped to establish control over Iranian territory to establish a rival Iranian govern-

ment. Had the MEK succeeded, the Middle East would have seen its first genuine terrorist state. Establishment of a terrorist state would have to wait until the Syrian civil war, when ISIL proclaimed an independent caliphate in occupied territory in Syria and Iraq.

After the United States ousted Saddam in the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, the MEK forces were confined to U.S.-protected compounds in Iraq, the most prominent being Camp Ashraf, the former U.S. military's Camp Liberty. The new Iraqi government demanded the MEK forces leave Iraq. Acceding to Iraqi demands, the United States re-located 3,000 MEK members to the Manez base in Albania, which the MEK calls "Ashraf 3." The MEK, which reportedly receives support from Israel's Mossad, is said to be involved in money laundering and sex trafficking through the intensive use of crypto-currencies like Bitcoin.

Not surprisingly, MEK forces joined with ISIL forces in battling against Syrian and Iraqi government forces. The MEK saw ISIL as a natural ally in fighting pro-Iranian governments in Baghdad and Damascus. It was well-known to Western intelligence agencies that the MEK and ISIL had established an alliance, but, nevertheless, the Barack Obama administration removed the MEK from the U.S. State Department's terrorist list in 2012. From 1997 to 2012, the United States officially designated the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization.

After ISIL forces were routed in Syria and Iraq, the United States pressured Albania to allow the Islamist terrorists to join their MEK allies in Albania. ISIL terrorists and their families have reportedly been housed in buildings in Tirana that were formerly occupied by MEK members prior to their transfer to the Manez base. From their Albanian base, MEK operatives have easily entered Kosovo, the location of another major NATO military base at Camp Bondsteel, near Ferizaj in eastern Kosovo. MEK terrorists, allied with sympathizers in Albania and Kosovo, have targeted Shi'a and Sufi Islamic institutions. It is also believed by some Albanian journalists, who have been intimidated by the Albanian government and MEK, that Ashraf 3 and Camp Bondsteel are being used to train MEK and other Middle Eastern mercenaries for a war against Iran to effect a NATO-led regime change operation.

The Albanian and Kosovo governments enjoy top-level access to the Trump administration. Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and Kosovo President Hashim Thaci, himself a one-time terrorist leader of the Kosovo Liberation Army, are represented in Washington by Brian Ballard, a former Trump presidential campaign official who runs Ballard Partners, a lobbying firm based in Tallahassee, Florida.

Thanks to the political influence of the Rajavis, Rama, and Thaci, an unholy troika of the MEK, Albania, and Kosovo has blossomed under NATO's nose in the Balkans. This troika's tentacles extend throughout the Balkans and into Western Europe, particularly France, Italy, and Germany.

In June 2003, the Rajavi-operated MEK compound in the Paris suburb of Auvers-sur-Oise was raided by French police on the orders of anti-terrorist magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière. Maryam Rajavi was arrested, along with over 100 other MEK members. Intense political pressure from Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. Congress resulted in criminal charges, including those involving money laundering, being dropped by the French government.

The Office for the Protection of the German Constitution (DPA) has accused the MEK of not only money laundering but receiving charitable donations in return for "assisting" refugees. The Germans charges that the MEK's charitable donations were spent on terrorist operations.

In 2004, a U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation report stated that the MEK financed its operations "through a complex international money laundering operation that uses accounts in Turkey, Germany, France, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates."

The MEK enjoys widespread support in the Trump White House, as well as in the U.S. Congress. One of the MEK's biggest boosters is Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton. On April 1, 2017, Bolton addressed an MEK Nowruz (Persian New Year) conference in Albania and declared that the MEK would be celebrating taking power in Tehran before 2019. Bolton added, "I have believed for over a decade now that the declared policy of the United States should be regime change in Iran. And the sooner the better, for the sake of international peace and security." Over many years, Bolton has



repeatedly spoken at MEK events in Paris and New York and has reportedly accepted a total of \$180,000 in speaker's fees from the organization. The MEK primarily receives financial backing from Saudi Arabia and Israel. Some of the funds are funneled to Western politicians as honoraria in return for their speeches at MEK events in venues like Paris, Tirana, and New York.

In addition to Bolton, a frequent recipient of MEK speakers' honoraria is former New York Mayor and Trump's personal lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani, a person who is so corrupt, the Italian mafia wanted to have him "eliminated." Two former CIA directors, James Woolsey and Porter Goss, have spoken at MEK events, along with one former FBI director, Louis Freeh, Jr.

The MEK is represented in Washington by the law firm of Joseph diGenova and his wife, Victoria Toensing. DiGenova almost became Trump's personal attorney. However, diGenova took his name out of consideration due to conflicts of interest and Giuliani accepted the job.

In June 2017, the MEK and ISIL coordinated a terrorist attack on the Iranian parliament in Tehran and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The terrorists were armed with AK-47s, hand grenades, and explosive-laden suicide vests. At least 12 people were killed in the attacks. The Trump White House defended the MEK/ISIL attack in stating, "We underscore that states that sponsor terrorism risk falling victim to the evil they promote." Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called the White House statement "repugnant."

The Trump administration's neocons, notably Bolton and Giuliani, are hell-bent on regime change in Iran. They are ramping up their terrorist army in the Balkans for such a future war.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani, Gingrich to address controversial Iranian group

Nahal Toosi

June 28, 2018

The Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, formerly considered a terrorist group, has several friends close to Trump and is seeing some of its longtime goals advanced.

Two close confidants of President Donald Trump are scheduled to speak Saturday before a controversial Iranian opposition group previously designated as a terrorist outfit, raising fresh questions about the group's Washington influence as Trump pursues a pressure campaign against Tehran.

POLITICO

Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and informal adviser Newt Gingrich are listed as headliners for Saturday's "Free Iran" conference in Paris, organized by the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq and its affiliates. For 15 years, the U.S. designated the MEK a terrorist group, while analysts describe it as a cult – both allegations the group rejects.

The MEK holds frequent conferences, but this weekend’s gathering comes at a heady moment for the group. Several of the politicians it has cultivated in recent years, with the help of handsome speaking fees, are now key figures in Trump’s orbit — including not only Giuliani and Gingrich but National Security Adviser John Bolton.

Trump has also taken several steps in line with the group’s desire to oust Iran’s Islamist rulers. They include Trump’s exit from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which the MEK repeatedly criticized, and increased sanctions and other pressure that some Trump aides hope will weaken the regime in Tehran.

On Tuesday, a State Department official announced that other nations, including China and India, must stop purchasing Iranian oil by Nov. 4 or face U.S. sanctions. Iran is already experiencing significant economic pain, sparking a series of recent protests that have rekindled hopes in Washington for a popular revolution that would install a more moderate government.

State Department and White House officials declined to speak on the record or on background when asked whether the Trump administration has had any contact with the MEK or its affiliates, and it’s not clear whether Gingrich, Giuliani or Bolton have discussed the group with Trump.

Giuliani did not respond to requests for comment, but the former New York City mayor has spoken at MEK events in the past, leading chants in recent months of “regime change” and openly talking about the possibility of MEK rule in Iran. Gingrich, another long-time MEK backer, confirmed that he will attend the Paris event.

In emails, Gingrich declined to discuss his conversations with Trump, but he argued that the MEK has been unfairly “maligned.” “In meetings I have been in they draw very large, enthusiastic crowds and have sustained a spirit of opposition,” Gingrich wrote. “Their sources inside Iran including reporting on recent mass demonstrations indicate a level of support greater than any other group I have seen.”

The appearance of Giuliani and Gingrich at the conference “underscores

once more how some of Trump's top surrogates are advocates of regime change in Iran," said Dartmouth College's Daniel Benjamin, a former Obama administration counterterrorism official with expertise on the MEK.

The MEK, which reportedly pays its speakers tens of thousands of dollars, has enlisted allies from across the U.S. political spectrum. Other scheduled speakers listed by the group for Saturday include former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, a Democrat, and Fran Townsend, who served as homeland security adviser in the Republican presidential administration of George W. Bush.

Officials involved with the MEK and its more polished affiliate, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, did not answer multiple requests for comment.

The Clinton administration designated the MEK a terrorist group in 1997 due to its decades-long armed campaign against Iran's current theocratic regime and its predecessor, the U.S.-backed monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The MEK is alleged to have carried out a string of bombings in the 1970s that killed several Americans then in Iran, including military personnel. The MEK, which was founded by a group of leftists and has some Marxist ideological roots, also earned the enmity of many Iranians because of its support for Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s.

The Obama administration reversed the group's terrorist designation in 2012 amid arguments that the group had shed its militant past. The group's defenders say it is waging a heroic fight against Iran's repressive theocratic government, and note that it has supplied some useful intelligence about events within Iran, including about the country's nuclear program. The MEK and its affiliates say they support a secular democratic government in Iran.

However, many analysts say that, even if it no longer espouses violence, the MEK has come to resemble a cult. It imposes strict rules on members, its funding sources are mysterious and it has little genuine support within Iran. The MEK is led by Maryam Rajavi, and, supposedly, her husband Massoud, who has not been seen publicly in years.

Despite what the MEK may hope for from the Trump administration, aides to the president have denied that regime change is an official U.S. goal. But Iran experts say the administration's policy suggests otherwise.

In the spring of last year, for instance, Joel Rayburn, a senior National Security Council official who deals with the Middle East, spoke with Washington think-tanks experts about the possibility of creating a coalition of Iranian minority groups — such as the Kurds, the Baluch or the Azeris — to try to topple the regime, according to a former senior Trump administration official. (National Security Council spokesmen declined to offer comment.)

Since his May 8 withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, which lifted sanctions on Iran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, Trump has re-imposed a raft of sanctions directly on Iran. He is also threatening to sanction European and other countries that do business with the country.

Soon after, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a speech laying out U.S. grievances with Iran and listing 12 demands that many analysts said were tantamount to a call for regime change. In the days afterward, Pompeo downplayed that idea.

“It’s not about changing the regime,” he told Voice of America’s Persian language service. “It’s about changing the behavior of the leadership in Iran to comport with what the Iranian people really want them to do.”

The new economic pressure from Washington is taking a toll on Iran. Several large European companies have said they’ll quit the Iranian market to avoid potential U.S. penalties. Further rattling Iran’s economy were remarks from a State Department official, speaking on background to reporters Tuesday, who said the Trump administration expects other countries to stop purchasing Iranian oil, the country’s top export.

The news, which rocked oil markets, further dashed the hopes of Iranians who believed the nuclear deal might transform the country’s economy but have endured continued economic stagnation. That contributed to a wave of demonstrations in December and January which were snuffed by a harsh government crackdown that reportedly left at least 25 dead and thousands

arrested.

Protests have flared again in recent days, apparently driven by economic grievances. As in the December-January protests, there were also hard-to-verify reports of Iranians openly criticizing the regime and demanding that it stop spending money on military activities in other countries and invest more on its citizens at home.

The senior State Department official who spoke to reporters on Tuesday seized that narrative.

“Iranians are basically fed up with the regime squandering the nation’s wealth on not-particularly productive ventures abroad,” the official said. “This situation exists because of the regime’s behavior.”

Still, some Iran experts warned that any Trump administration effort to try to take credit for the protests could backfire, especially given many Iranians’ dim views of Trump. Far from seeing the U.S. president as their ally against the Islamist regime, many instead despise Trump for imposing a travel ban, upheld this week by the Supreme Court, that bars most Iranians from setting foot on U.S. soil.

“Iranians are both bitter about American pressure and their own government,” said Suzanne Maloney of the Brookings Institution, who added, however, that, “one way or another the regime will try to discredit and taint those who dissent as somehow driven by outside support or orchestration.”

Another Iran analyst, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that even if the protesters are tired of the current regime, that doesn’t mean they have any sympathy for the MEK.

“Iranians don’t want to replace one regime with another,” he said. The MEK is “a regime in exile tied to Marxism. They just don’t have the backing in Iran.”

Still, the Trump administration appears eager to fan the unrest, especially online.

The web site of America’s “virtual embassy in Iran” – the U.S. has no formal diplomatic presence in Iran – is filled with statements and announcements bashing the Iranian government on issues such as human rights and terrorism.

The Iran unit at the State Department also operates a Twitter feed in the Persian language that has been unusually aggressive under Trump.

One tweet, sent out in mid-February, features a menacing caricature of Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, saying the phrase “A resistance economy” even as a chart behind him shows the falling value of Iran’s currency. “How would you describe this cartoon?” the tweet asks readers.

On Tuesday, it tweeted a poll asking if readers thought Iran’s economic condition was adequate.

Pompeo, too, has gotten in on act. Using his official Twitter handle, the secretary of state has sent out a series of images and comments in recent days emphasizing the plight of ordinary Iranians. On Wednesday, Pompeo tweeted out a photo that appeared to show Iranians protesting.

“It should surprise no one #IranProtests continue,” he wrote. “People are tired of the corruption, injustice & incompetence of their leaders. The world hears their voice.”

The messages on the U.S. diplomatic accounts in many ways echo the extensive social media network set up by the MEK and its affiliates, which also hype any instance of protest in Iran. In recent days, the group’s Twitter accounts have frequently re-tweeted Pompeo’s comments, while prominently featuring news of Trump’s efforts to re-impose sanctions.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Trump Administration's MEK Fan Club

Daniel Larison

June 28, 2018

**N**ahal Toosi reports on the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) fans with ties to the Trump administration:

Two close confidants of President Donald Trump are scheduled to speak Saturday before a controversial Iranian opposition group previously designated as a terrorist outfit, raising fresh questions about the group's Washington influence as Trump pursues a pressure campaign against Tehran.

Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and informal adviser Newt Gingrich are listed as headliners for Saturday's "Free Iran" conference in Paris, organized by the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq and its affiliates.

The MEK is a deranged totalitarian cult with no support inside Iran and a record of killing Ameri-





cans and committing acts of terrorism. It is an ongoing disgrace that American politicians and officials lend this group support and help them to push their dangerous regime change fantasies. It might be tempting to dismiss the MEK's fans as disreputable opportunists out to make a quick buck (and there is some truth to that), but the problem is that their public embrace of this group has aided the MEK in selling itself as a legitimate opposition group. National Security Advisor John Bolton has been a regular attendee at these events for many years, and while he apparently won't be attending this year there is no question that he is still on board with the MEK's goal of regime change.

Far too many people with close ties to the president have been and continue to be vocal shills for an awful organization that is widely loathed in Iran for siding with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war. Pro-MEK boosterism in Washington has been a problem for years, but now that the group has the ear of some of the president's confidants and advisers it makes it even worse. The fact that some of the president's top advisers and allies back the MEK just confirms that this administration has nothing but contempt for the Iranian people and proves that its Iran policy is horribly misinformed.

about the author

Daniel Larison is a senior editor at TAC, where he also keeps a solo blog. He has been published in the New York Times Book Review, Dallas Morning News, World Politics Review, Politico Magazine, Orthodox Life, Front Porch Republic, The American Scene, and Culture11, and was a columnist for The Week. He holds a PhD in history from the University of Chicago, and resides in Lancaster, PA.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## US' Iran Regime-Change Plan: Hit Economy, Orchestrate Protests, Engage MEK Cult to Chant “Democracy”

Elliott Gabriel

June 28, 2018

While the hard-hit Iranian economy is likely to continue reeling, driving more protesters into the streets, one shouldn't mistake their pain for a desire to subject themselves to a totalitarian cult with hardly a fraction of the support enjoyed by the Shia clergy helping the Islamic Republic.



WASHINGTON — Iran's latest wave of protests against the suffering state of the economy and the plunging value of the rial appeared to have come and gone by Wednesday, as crowds dissipated and businesses opened up shop following a two-day strike. While clashes between security forces and protesters during the protests were far from widespread, the very fact that the protests broke out hints at the extreme duress Iran is undergoing thanks to President Donald Trump's renewed economic war on the country.

Judging by the enthusiastic response to the demonstrations in the U.S., Saudi, and Israeli press, anti-Iranian forces are clearly banking on the possibility that the sanctions that will soon be reimposed in the next several months could dislodge the Islamic Republic, clearing the way for a regime friendly to the West.

Thus we have witnessed anti-Iran publications like the Israeli Jerusalem Post frothing over with excitement over scenes of alleged Iranian citizens chanting “Death to Palestine,” “Let go of Syria – think about us,” and the much-beloved anti-Ayatollah Khamenei mainstay “Death to dictator.”

While videos from Iran depict what could very well be an organic groundswell of social protest against government policies, photos published in papers like the Post show a different story: middle-aged Persian men gripping English-language signs and the flags of the toppled Iranian monarchy, along placards bearing the portrait of an unlikely figure: the moustached, mysterious and long-disappeared charismatic cult leader who is considered an outlawed terrorist and traitor to the nation — Massoud Rajavi.

<https://twitter.com/SoniaKatiMota/status/1011477212443406336>

Rajavi was the leader of the group that lies at the center of the anti-Iran alliance’s “regime change” dreams: Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), or the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI). A fanatical militant group whose title translates literally to the “The People’s Holy Warriors,” this eccentric left-nationalist, pseudo-religious cult has been led by Massoud’s wife, Maryam Rajavi, since the 1980s.

Formed in 1965, the group’s tortured history has seen it transformed from a movement of communist-influenced, Islamist-tinged anti-imperialists who carried out attacks on U.S. military officers in Iran into an authoritarian de facto mercenary army serving anyone opposed to the Islamic Republic – be it Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Israel, or the United States.

The group wields major PR clout and outsized influence in Western capitals through countless front groups like the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI), through which it depicts itself as “a political coalition that

represents all of Iran's religious, ethnic, and political groups proportionately;" stresses feminist, Islamist, free-speech and pro-free-market values; and is firmly "committed to a secular, democratic, non-nuclear republic" in Iran. The RAND Corporation described the group as "skilled manipulators of public opinion," but a cursory look at its publications shows a rather ham-fisted and self-celebratory pile of cultish jargon. Throughout the past week, publications like Iran Focus or Iran News Update – the latter of which bills itself as "Insider News & Analysis in Iran" – have pumped out articles boosting NCRI as "the only viable alternative to the Iranian regime" and claiming: As protests in Iran continue to multiply and intensify, the regime's claim to power is looking more and more tenuous. If the people were to overthrow their tyrannical government, the only democratic organization in the position to take over governance would be the NCRI ... The regime's reign of terror is at its close."

The MEK was one of the first groups to be named a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department, but its extreme opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran and generous donations to politicians has led to its eventual delisting. The roster of politicians and influential figures tied to the MEK and its fronts spans much of the U.S. political spectrum, from the far right to the left-of-center.

Trump's White House is a virtual all-star cast of MEK associates – explaining the administration's frenzied push to scrap the nuclear deal and push to topple Tehran. Among the top supporters of MEK is White House National Security Advisor John Bolton, whose hatred of Iran's government verges on the pathological.

A congressional foreign-policy aide who attended an Iranian New Year celebration hosted by an MEK front group told Foreign Policy magazine: Bolton is positively predisposed to the MEK ... they will have some access to this White House, [to say] the least."

## **From revolutionary anti-imperialists to bizarre mercenary cult**

The MEK once enjoyed a decently-sized support base within Iran and even played a role in the 1979 Iranian Revolution that overthrew U.S.-loyal Shah



Reza Pahlevi and opened up a new period of national independence for the nation. Following the revolution, the group’s political struggles with the faction led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and failure to secure widespread support led it to deploy its Shah-era “armed struggle,” or terrorist tactics, against officials and clergy loyal to Khomeini, claiming the lives of dozens of key figures in the newly-formed government.

The Mojahedin (jihadists), whom the Islamic Revolution’s leader regularly derided as monafeghin (hypocrites) – an allusion to those in the Quran who conspired against the Prophet while feigning loyalty – became the top enemies of the Islamic Republic.

Faced with the full brunt of the Islamic Republic’s retribution, the group fled to Iraq in the 1980s and became a virtual “Iranian Legion” for Saddam Hussein, who equipped the group with heavy armor, uniforms, and artillery so that it could fight alongside Iraqi forces during the Iran-Iraq war. Following the war, the self-styled “national liberation army” launched a series of cross-border raids against Iranian civilian and military targets, sacrificing nearly all of its remaining support among Iranians.

The drop in Iranian support led to a push to replenish MEK ranks by targeting family members, wealthy potential donors, and expatriate Iranians in Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. True to their form as a cult, the group promised to connect prospective recruits with a lifeline of assistance as the

trade-off for their enlisting in the group.

According to the RAND Corporation: Many were enticed not with promises of an opportunity to fight the IRI, but rather through promises of paid employment as translators, assistance in processing asylum requests, free visits to family members, public-health volunteer opportunities, and even marriage. All ‘recruits’ were brought into Iraq illegally and then required to hand over their identity documents for ‘safekeeping,’ effectively trapping them at MeK compounds. These findings suggest that many MeK recruits since 1986 were not true volunteers and have been kept at MeK camps in Iraq under duress.”

Tens of thousands of the group’s members remained under the protection of the Iraqi dictator, even participating in the bloody massacres that followed the Shia Arab and Kurdish uprisings of 1991, until the fall of the Ba’athist regime in 2003 when the U.S.-led coalition bombed the Saddam loyalists’ camps.

Seeing continued use for the MEK for their own anti-Iran efforts, however, the U.S. placed 3,800 members of the group under protective custody at Camp Ashraf, the sprawling city-sized base built for them by Saddam. Those who escaped the group had to undergo cult deprogramming.

According to RAND, the group – which claims to uphold women’s equality – ensured that lines were “painted down the middle of hallways separating them into men’s and women’s sides” at the camp, prior to their expulsion by Iraqi forces in 2013. Many were shipped by the U.S. to Albania, the only country willing to accept them.

Yet while a major portion of the group’s membership spent over three decades imprisoned in Ba’athist Iraqi camps near the border with Iran, a significant chunk of the group – such as leader Maryam Rajavi – nestled into the Iranian expatriate communities in Paris, Washington, and other capitals. The group spent decades relentlessly lobbying Western governments and lawmakers to support its attempts to bring “reform” to Iran, and has even furnished intelligence to U.S. and Israeli intelligence agencies in hopes to provide a casus belli for hostile policies and even military actions versus Tehran.

## The “Iranian Resistance” wags the dog in Washington

In the U.S. capital, the group was enormously successful in its efforts to recruit an auxiliary brigade of highly influential top politicians to its cause. Even the far-right Washington Times, owned at the time by charismatic cult leader Reverend Sun Myung-Moon, issued glossy “special report” inserts hailing the militaristic group as the bringers of “freedom” to Iran. The publication included words of praise from Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), the late Saudi Prince Turki bin Faisal al-Saud, and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), among many, many, others.

A brief list of these MEK supporters in the Republican Party reads like a who’s-who of anti-Iran officials from the neoconservative administrations of Presidents George W. Bush and Donald Trump:

- In 2000, future Bush administration attorney general and Republican then-Senator John Ashcroft intervened on behalf of MKO military commander Mahnaz Samadi, who has been detained by immigration authorities due to her failure to disclose past terrorist ties — hailing the former anti-Iran combatant as a “highly regarded human-rights activist” and a “powerful voice for democracy.”

- Former Pennsylvania Governor and first U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge praised the National Council of Resistance in Iran as “the single most visible, most credible, and most effective democratic movement with a clear and specific program to bring a democratic Iran to existence,” led by the “steady hand and inspiring leadership” of cult leader Maryam Rajavi.

- Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Miami, Florida, who served as Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has been a major leader in legislation calling for regime-change measures against Cuba, Iran, Syria, and Venezuela, and even called for Fidel Castro’s assassination in 2006. In 2003, she came out in defense of MEK as a group that “loves the United States” and is an ally in the “war on terrorism.”

- Tea Party leader, Bush confidante and former House Majority Leader Dick Armey promoted the MEK while working for lobbying firm DLA Piper.

Armey also represented Saeid Ghaemi, an Iranian expatriate in the U.S. who paid almost \$910,000 to the lobbying firm “for Armey’s services bringing issues relating to Iran to the attention of Congress, the State Department, the Department of Defense, the White House, the National Security Council and the Department of Treasury.” And then we have the top luminaries from President Donald Trump’s circle, including:

- Former New York City Mayor and top White House lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who co-signed a letter along with various bipartisan officials urging a newly-inaugurated Trump to “establish a dialogue” with NCRI, and was revealed to have been a paid advocate for the removal of MEK from the State Department terror group list. Giuliani has been an almost annual guest at MEK functions in Paris and a regular anti-Iranian voice on television. In 2015, Giuliani stood before a crowd of MEK supporters in Paris and shouted:

The ayatollah must go! Gone! Out! No more! 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!”

- Trump adviser and GOP elder Newt Gingrich, who ripped on former President Obama for bowing to the king of Saudi Arabia, but was caught on camera bowing to Maryam Rajavi – whom the conservative ultra-patriot sees as an Iranian version of U.S. founding father George Washington.

- Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, the elite Taiwanese-American wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has received honoraria in the amounts of \$50,000 and \$17,500 to speak for MEK front groups like the Iranian-American Cultural Association of Missouri and the NCRI. At the same Paris event attended by Giuliani, Chao sat as guest of honor alongside “president-elect” cult leader Rajavi before delivering a feminist-themed speech slamming Iran’s government.

And then, of course, there’s John Bolton, a ravening ultra-hawk with a nearly obsessive hatred of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Speaking to Foreign Policy magazine, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace senior fellow Karim Sadjadpour commented:



I suspect Bolton’s interactions with the MEK were above all motivated by financial interests ... The MEK may be a backward cult with little to offer, but they are the enemy of his enemy. And they pay handsomely.”

The same can likely be said about the rest of the elected “representatives”-for-hire in Washington, whose belief in the MEK’s ability to lead a post-IRI Iranian state is no doubt on par with their trust in the late Rev. Moon’s claims to be the one and only messiah.

While the hard-hit Iranian economy is likely to continue reeling, driving more protesters into the streets, one shouldn’t mistake their social demands or financial pain for a desire to subject themselves to a totalitarian cult with hardly a fraction of the support enjoyed by the Shia clergy helming the Islamic Republic — no matter the extent to which Washington and the Saudis attempt to foist the Rajavi group on the Iranian nation.

Yet despite the group’s dearth of political legitimacy, the congressional aide who spoke to FP understands why they remain a mainstay in the U.S. Capitol: They’re useful as provocation ... They’re useful as a signal to the Iranian government that we’re coming to get you.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK Moves to Center of New US Iran Policy

Exit News

June 29, 2018

Yesterday, Politico reported that Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and former advisor Newt Gingrich will travel to Paris to speak at a conference of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) tomorrow in Paris.

The MEK are a guerrilla movement fighting first against the Shah and later against the Iranian government, who were exiled first to Iraq and then to Albania. Albania houses 3,000 MEK members.

Since last year, a slew of US politicians have visited the MEK in Albania, often without any public announcement, or under cover of meeting some Albanian politicians. These include former FBI director Louis J. Freeh, US Senator John McCain (who addressed a MEK conference), and a delegation of US Senators Thom Tillis, Roy Blunt, and John Cornyn.

**exit**  
news

Politics & Policy

## MEK Moves to Center of New US Iran Policy

29-06-2018 at 07:36



A few months later, US Congressman Ted Poe introduced a bill in the House of Representatives calling upon the government of Iraq “to compensate the former residents of Camp Ashraf [the former MEK camp] for their assets seized by groups affiliated with the Government of Iraq.”

After the resignation of Secretary of State Rex

Tillerson earlier this year, MEK leader Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the MEK, released a video on Facebook with following declaration:

Now is the time to expand and spread the bastions of rebellion for freedom. I call on my compatriots across the country to rise up and join this uprising.

The involvement of Giuliani and Gingrich, which follows the unilateral withdrawal of the US from the agreement with the Iranian government, is yet another sign of the increasing political support for regime change in Iran driven by the MEK members exiled in Albania.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Rudy Giuliani calls for Iran regime change at rally linked to extreme group

Arron Merat, Julian Borger

June 30, 2018

**D**onald Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, addressed a rally staged by an extreme Iranian opposition group in Paris on Saturday, calling for regime change in Tehran.

Giuliani spoke to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella coalition largely controlled by the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MeK), which was once listed as a terrorist organisation in the US and Europe and is still widely viewed as a Marxist-Islamist cult built around the personality of its leader, Maryam Rajavi.

"We are now realistically being able to see an end to the regime in Iran," Giuliani told a crowd of about 4,000, many of them refugees and young eastern Europeans who had been bussed in to attend the rally in return for a weekend trip to Paris.



“The mullahs must go, the ayatollah must go, and they must be replaced by a democratic government which Madam Rajavi represents,” Giuliani said. “Freedom is right around the corner ... Next year I want to have this convention in Tehran!”

The former New York mayor, who became a cyber security adviser in the White House before being named as Trump’s personal lawyer in April, is one of a long line of American conservative hawks to attend the NCRI annual conference. Another prominent guest on Saturday was Newt Gingrich, a former House speaker and a close Trump ally.

In his speech, Giuliani said the fall of the government in Tehran would be brought about by economic isolation.

“When the greatest economic power stops doing business with you, then you collapse ... and the sanctions will become greater, greater and greater,” he said.

In May, Trump abrogated the 2015 international nuclear deal with Iran and ordered a campaign of intense economic pressure, threatening sanctions against any foreign company doing business with Iran and calling for an end to trade in Iranian oil by November. Giuliani suggested that the current wave of protests in Iran was being orchestrated from outside.

“Those protests are not happening spontaneously,” Giuliani said. “They are happening because of many of our people in Albania [which hosts an MeK compound] and many of our people here and throughout out the world.”

It was unclear whether “our people” was intended to mean the US or the MeK.

The guest of honour at last year’s NCRI conference was John Bolton, who has since become Trump’s third national security adviser. Bolton told the 2017 rally US policy should be to make sure the Islamic Republic “will not last until its 40th birthday” – 1 April 2019.

The policy of the Trump administration is not officially to call for regime

change, though top officials have often hinted at it. Outlining his approach in May, the secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, said it was up to the Iranian people to relieve the pressure on the country by changing their government.

Giuliani was one of 33 senior US officials and military brass at the year's conference on Saturday. Bill Richardson, former US ambassador to the United Nations, US energy secretary and Democratic governor of New Mexico, was also in attendance.

Stephen Harper, former prime minister of Canada, also delivered a speech advocating regime change in Iran.

It was unclear if the speakers at the Saturday conference were paid. The NCRI and MeK have been known for paying very high fees.

Most observers of Iranian politics say the MeK has minimal support in Iran and is widely hated for its use of violence and close links to Israeli intelligence.

In sweltering temperatures on Saturday, about 4,000 people arrived by bus at the Parc des expositions centre. Many were draped in the MeK flag, which replaces the sign for "Allah" on the Iranian flag with a yellow lion. Others wore yellow sun hats displaying the hashtag "#Maryam Rajavi".

Around half of the attendees were Iranian. The other half consisted of an assortment of bored-looking Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Germans and Syrians who responded to a Facebook campaign promising travel, food and accommodation to Paris for a mere €25. Hundreds of Syrian refugees settled in Germany also attended. Many snoozed under trees during speeches.

"We saw the deal on Facebook and we agreed to come on a holiday," said a young Syrian mother as she sat on the conference floor, fanning her two young children. "I have never seen Paris. I don't know anything about the MeK."

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Despicable Hawkish Embrace of the MEK

Daniel Larison

July 1, 2018

The Trump administration's MEK fans participated in the group's annual rally in Paris over the weekend:

Giuliani spoke to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella coalition largely controlled by the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MeK), which was once listed as a terrorist organization in the US and Europe and is still widely viewed as a Marxist-Islamist cult built around the personality of its leader, Maryam Rajavi.

"We are now realistically being able to see an end to the regime in Iran," Giuliani told a crowd of about 4,000, many of them refugees and young eastern Europeans who had been bussed in to attend the rally in return for a weekend trip to Paris.

"The mullahs must go, the ayatollah must go, and



they must be replaced by a democratic government which Madam Rajavi represents,” Giuliani said. “Freedom is right around the corner ... Next year I want to have this convention in Tehran!”

It is bad enough that prominent Americans and other Westerners lend support to a totalitarian cult because it happens to share their loathing of the Iranian government, but it is even worse that they are helping to rehabilitate this group as if it were a legitimate and democratic alternative to that government. This not only whitewashes a despicable organization that has the blood of Americans and Iranians on its hands, but it is an insult to genuine Iranian political reformers and dissidents. The MEK has no support in Iran or the Iranian diaspora, and no one wants anything to do with it except for paid Western shills and the government of Saudi Arabia. No matter what happens in Iran, the MEK won't be returning there next year or for a long time to come. They are understandably reviled in Iran for their crimes and treachery, and anyone embracing them reveals an intense hostility to Iran and an equally profound ignorance of the country and its people.

Unfortunately, Bolton, Giuliani, and Gingrich aren't just has-beens getting paid to recite talking points. If they were, their support for this group might be disgraceful but ultimately irrelevant. The danger is that these men are among Trump's closest advisers and allies, and it seems more likely than not that they are pushing an agenda of regime change in Iran. As long as these Trump allies are cheerleading for the MEK publicly, we should assume that they are offering the president similarly warped and poisonous advice privately as well.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Trump Attorney Meets Exiled Iranian MEK, Promises Regime Change

MintPress News

July 2, 2018

Last year, at the same conference, Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton told the MEK they would be ruling Iran by 2019.

Addressing a meeting of violent opposition group the People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK) in Paris, U.S. President Donald Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, said the United States would keep applying pressure on Iran's government until it collapses.



"We are now realistically being able to see an end to the regime in Iran," Giuliani told supporters of MEK, an organization that calls for the violent overthrow of Iran's government, supported Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, and was listed as a terrorist organization by the United States until 2012. Giuliani told the group of exiles: "Trump doesn't turn his back on freedom fighters."

Giuliani was also joined by former U.S. House Speaker and informal Trump adviser Newt Gingrich, former FBI Director Louis Freeh, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, two former French foreign ministers and five members of the British Parliament.

This is not the first time U.S. officials have attended MEK events. Despite the group's former classification as a terrorist organization, Giuliani, along with Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton and former Obama administration National Security Adviser James Jones, have been known to attend MEK events for nearly a decade.

Last year, at the same conference, John Bolton, who had not yet been appointed to the Trump administration, told the MEK they would be ruling Iran by 2019. The organization, which was originally founded as a student group, participated in the 1979 Iranian Revolution to oust the Shah, but lost out in a power struggle with the larger faction led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Currently it is based in a heavily militarized compound outside Paris.

A report by *The New Yorker* in 2012 revealed that the United States had covertly trained MEK members in Nevada during the Bush administration, an operation that required the utmost secrecy due to the organization's official classification as terrorist. MEK members, according to *The New Yorker*, were trained in communication and intelligence providing, as well as weapons and tactics.

The MEK has also been known to have links to Mossad, the Israeli secret service. Meanwhile, Iranian government leaders have continued calling for Iranian unity in the face of U.S. attacks.

“The enemy's plan is to create gaps and separations between the establishment and the people, and this design reflects their stupidity because they do not know that the Islamic Republic is nothing but the Iranian nation, and these two cannot be separated,” Iranian leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khomeini said.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Stephen Harper criticized for speaking at ‘Free Iran’ event hosted by dissident group

CBC

July 5, 2018

Former prime minister Stephen Harper is being criticized for his decision to speak at a “Free Iran” rally in Paris, organized by a group once listed as a terrorist organization that critics say “has all the characteristics of a cult.”

The exiled opposition group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) was previously classified as a terrorist organization by Canada, but it was dropped from the list in 2012, following the lead of the United States and the European Union.



However, many Iranians have reservations about the group, including Mason Ghafghazi. The associate professor at the University of Toronto does not condone former or current politicians to be associated with the group but says MEK has been very successful in attracting Western politicians.

“A Conservative former prime minister of Canada would be the last person who [would] want to associate with this. MEK has participated in assassinations inside Iran. It’s collaborated with Saddam Hussein in attacking Iran. It is accused of helping Saddam Hussein oppress the Iraqi people and this group has only become an unarmed group because the U.S. disarmed them in 2003,” Ghafghazi told The Current’s guest host Mike Finnerty. “Mr. Harper is the highest ranking Canadian former politician as far as I know who has attended the rallies. But these things have been going on forever.”

Harper wasn’t the only Canadian politician at Saturday’s rally. Conservative House Leader Candice Bergen, former foreign affairs minister John Baird and Liberal MP Judy Sgro were also in attendance. The Current requested interviews them and other MPs who have attended MEK events in the past, but no one was available.

On its website, the MEK says it “seeks to replace Iran’s religious dictatorship with a secular, pluralistic, democratic government.” Ghafghazi calls the group “an Islamist-Marxist cult.”

“You don’t have to go further than their logo, their name and their slogan to see these things. Their logo is a circle and machine gun,” he said. “It’s formed around a cult of personality around the Rajavi couple, Maryam Rajavi and Masoud Rajavi, who disappeared in 2003.” Shahram Golestaneh, president of Iran Democratic Association, supports the group’s goals and says criticism surrounding the MEK is unwarranted.

He argued the group was placed on the terrorist list as an appeasement by the then-Iranian president Mohammad Khatami in 1997 to adhere to the constant demands from the Iran regime and Tehran government. Golestaneh says, however, that the de-listing in 2012 wasn’t strictly a political move.

“It was ordered by the courts across the globe. Every court that they have gone into ... ruled in favour that they should not be listed as a terrorist entity. And all of those rulings were unanimous,” Golestaneh told Finnerty. “How can nine judges on the bench of a high court of the European Union, be all ... wrong?”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## British MPs should be ashamed of supporting regime change in Tehran

Peter Osborne

July 6, 2018

The backing inside the Tory party for the MEK, once on the US's terrorist list, is a sign of a party that has taken leave of its senses.

Britain's prime minister has been fighting a valiant, losing battle to rescue British relations with Iran in the wake of US President Donald Trump's reckless attempts to wreck them.

But last week Theresa May was dealt a devastating blow to her authority after several Tory MPs defied her by going to Paris for a meeting designed to promote regime change inside Iran. This event is the latest sign that the prime minister and her foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, are facing a mutiny over Iran.



## No regime change

Former cabinet minister Theresa Villiers was among senior Tories who travelled to Paris last week to hear Rudy Giuliani, former mayor of New York and Trump's highly influential lawyer, call for the downfall of the Iranian government.

This meeting was a direct defiance of British government policy, which aims to save the Iran nuclear deal intact, and is against engineering a change of government in Iran. Indeed, Johnson assured Parliament in May that "I do not believe that regime change in Tehran is the objective that we should be seeking."

Three Tory MPs – along with one Labour MP – travelled to the event, organised by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a front organisation for Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organisation (MEK), once listed by the US as a terror organisation.

There is no question that these reflect a powerful and vocal body of sentiment inside the Conservative Party.

This has been clear ever since the House of Commons debate on Iran on 9 May. The overwhelming majority of Conservative MPs favoured Trump's policy of dismantling the JCPOA - and condemned May's policy of keeping it. The overwhelming majority of speakers (I calculate 19) in the debate spoke out against the JCPOA, and only five were explicitly in favour.

Those opposing the JCPOA included former defence secretary Michael Fallon and former cabinet minister Stephen Crabb. Former leader Iain Duncan Smith also spoke out against the deal in a Commons debate later in May.

## Troubling questions

These interventions raise troubling questions about the judgment and the allegiance of Tory backbenchers. So yesterday I approached the three Tory MPs who attended last weekend's conference in Paris with a series of questions.

I asked them: who paid for and authorised their attendance at the MEK conference? Why as a signatory for the JCPOA are members of the current government pushing for the toppling of a signatory nation? Is it the government's policy to pursue regime change in Iran? Do they think the MEK actually have popular legitimacy in Iran?

There was no reply from any of them. Tory MP Matthew Offord's office even hung up the phone on MEE rather than answer legitimate questions.

Then I asked the Conservative Party's central office if they knew about and had given permission for the Tory MPs to attend. Once again – no response. A wall of silence from all involved. The support inside the Tory party for the MEK looks like a sign of a party that has taken leave of its senses.

Here is an organisation with a proven history of terrorism, including against Western interests. Though founded by the husband and wife team of Masoud and Maryam Rajavi, the MEK reportedly forces members to divorce and give up their children to foster care so as to avoid the distraction of familial love.

It has other characteristics of a cult.

For instance, former members also describe participating in regular public confessions of their sexual fantasies. The clear ambition of last week's meeting was to use the MEK as a vehicle to bring down the current government in Iran.

## **No coherent plan**

This conference in Paris comes against a menacing international background. The Trump administration is working flat out to destabilise Iran through the installation of brutal economic sanctions. Some observers believe the conduct of the US is very similar to the CIA destabilisation campaign aimed at Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953.

The CIA then at least had a clear alternative future in mind for Iran – restoration of the shah under American tutelage. In American terms, this policy

was a success for the next two decades. Trump's people have no coherent plan for Iran.

The cultivation of the MEK – an opposition group based outside Iran and thought to be supported by a rickety coalition of international backers including Saudi Arabia – has strong echoes of Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress in the run-up the Iraq invasion in 2003.

Chalabi was hugely influential in convincing the neo-conservative backers of the Iraq invasion that he had strong support inside Iraq and could turn the country into a model state. He was proved wrong.

Giuliani boasted how Trump had “turned his back on that very dangerous nuclear agreement with Iran”. He further boasted that recent popular protests inside Iran have been orchestrated from outside the country, insisting that they “are not happening spontaneously”.

And he ended his speech exclaiming: “Next year, at this time, I want us to have this convention in Tehran!”

Ominously, last year's chief speaker at the Paris conference was John Bolton, one of the most eloquent advocates of the Iraq invasion, who has now become Trump's national security adviser. This means that Trump has decided to repeat – in a larger and more dangerous country – all the errors of American policy in Afghanistan and Iraq.

He intends to hand over Iran to politicians with no democratic legitimacy – and no more loyalty to the United States and Western values than America's former protégés, the Taliban and al-Qaeda. British MPs should be ashamed of helping him.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Western signs of support for Iranian dissident group will only deepen the divide with Tehran

Sam Khanlari

July 7, 2018

In September 2012, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper at the helm, Ottawa terminated diplomatic relations with Tehran. Nearly six years later, this Conservative position of total disengagement and isolation has become an entrenched feature of Canada's foreign policy in the Middle East.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau did pledge during the last election campaign to re-establish diplomatic relations with Iran — and even took some steps to do so thereafter — but the Liberals have recently signalled that they are no longer committed to fulfilling this promise.

Instead, Harper was in Paris last weekend at a “Free Iran” rally hosted by a fringe group of militant Iranian exiles known as the Mujahedin-e Khalj (MEK). The former prime minister joined several prominent officials from U.S. President Donald Trump's





administration, including Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and former House speaker and Trump advisor Newt Gingrich. National security adviser John Bolton, though he wasn’t at the rally this year, has also endorsed the group’s push for regime change in Iran.

Harper’s newfound approval of the MEK’s agenda, a group that his own government considered a terrorist organization until 2012, comes only month after he backed the Trump administration in “ending the dangerous appeasement of Iran” by abrogating the 2015 nuclear agreement. (When pressed for comment by the National Post, Harper’s spokesperson

did note that he does not necessarily support a MEK-led Iran.)

Together with the U.S. administration’s more explicit backing of the MEK, Western officials bent on regime change are cultivating the veneer of a government-in-exile, which only strengthens the hand of warmongers and damages the prospects of grassroots democratic progress propelled from within Iranian civil society.

Considering the numerous protests that have rocked Iran over the past several months — some of which have included slogans against the country’s ruling elite — it may appear prudent to seek out those who present an alternative vision for governance in Tehran. The MEK, however, carries little support among Iranians and is not capable of delivering that vision to Iran.

The organization possesses deep roots in Iranian politics, tracing back to its opposition of the Shah’s rule in the 1960s. But the MEK relinquished its legitimacy among many Iranians through a campaign of terror tactics and support for Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Iran in the 1980s.

In July 1988, based outside of Baghdad, the MEK mounted a small-scale invasion of Iran with the hopes of inciting a domestic revolt in Tehran. But popular support in Iran did not materialize, according to a report prepared for the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, partly because the MEK “had allied itself with the instigator of the war and had killed Iranian conscripts.”

As Michael Axworthy wrote in *Revolutionary Iran*, following the war with Iraq, there was “a strong feeling of revulsion and hatred toward the MEK among many ordinary Iranians.”

Its impact goes beyond Iran. The MEK has American blood on its hands, and Iraq’s sheltering of the group was provided as a justification for the U.S. invasion in 2003 by the Bush administration. As noted earlier, the group was listed as a terrorist organization by Canada, as well as the European Union and the United States for its string of international assassinations.

Despite this troubled past, the MEK’s sophisticated lobbying apparatus has attracted Trump officials and the Democratic leadership alike. According to a recent investigation by NBC News, the group’s shadowy influence is buttressed by funding from Israeli and Arab intelligence agencies — funds that the MEK then spends to commission the support of Western officials and, as hinted by Giuliani, foment unrest in Iran.

Although the group’s leadership is being touted as a secular, democratic alternative to Iran’s clerical establishment, exiled members describe the organization as an authoritarian personality cult that enforces “weekly ideological cleansings” and family separation among its ranks.

## **MEK recruitment**

Unable to attract much support from the Iranian diaspora, the MEK utilizes social media bots and susceptible audiences of refugees to augment their messages and rallies. As New York Times reporter Elizabeth Rubin, who has profiled the group extensively, wrote in 2011, the MEK “is not only irrelevant to the cause of Iran’s democratic activists, but a totalitarian cult that will come back to haunt us.”

It is abundantly clear that Canada's Liberal government is unwilling to spend any political capital on fulfilling its pledge to re-establish links with Iran, and the latest sign of support by Harper for the MEK will only exacerbate the estrangement between Ottawa and Tehran.

The region has undergone major changes since Harper's decision to unilaterally sever relations with Tehran in 2012. The ongoing demonstrations in Iranian towns and cities could constitute a class awakening, with major political repercussions for Iran's government.

That is why projecting an agenda of regime change onto Iran's populace, particularly as the United States upends the diplomatic reset that produced the nuclear agreement, will only isolate ordinary Iranians and endanger the efforts of the country's grassroots democratic movements. Championing the MEK will only deepen their struggle.

This column is part of CBC's Opinion section. For more information about this section, please read this editor's blog and our FAQ.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Rudy Giuliani has a conflict of interest problem

Jeet Heer

July 10, 2018

THE NEW  
REPUBLIC

The former mayor of New York continues to represent many foreign clients in his private practise while also serving as the president’s private lawyer, an arrangement that runs the risk of violating federal ethics laws, according to a Washington Post report. As the newspaper notes, “Among the clients represented by Giuliani’s consulting firm is the city of Kharkiv, Ukraine, whose mayor was a leading figure in Party of Regions, the Russia-friendly political party at the center of the federal conspiracy prosecution of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort.”

Giuliani also represents the anti-Iranian Mujahideen-e-Khalq (or MEK), which was listed by the State Department as a terrorist group until 2012. The MEK has been involved in killings of many Iranians and was once allied with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. The former mayor of New York spoke at

an MEK event in France recently.

Giuliani denies he's done any lobbying on behalf of such clients. "I've never lobbied [Trump] on anything," Giuliani told The Washington Post. "I don't represent foreign government in front of the U.S. government. I've never registered to lobby." One loophole that Giuliani seems to be exploiting is that he's not taking any fees for being Trump's lawyer. "I think Rudy believes because he is doing the job pro bono the rules do not apply to him, but they do," commented Carrie Menkel-Meadow, a legal scholar at University of California-Irvine.

As with many conflict of interest problems in the Trump era, Giuliani's activities involve an innovative merging of private and public interests. It could well be that Giuliani in technical terms is not lobbying, but it's hard to deny that he's using his unique access the president to shape foreign policy. Giuliani often comments on foreign policy during television appearances, something the president is likely to hear about. Giuliani also has extensive private conversations with Trump. The line between Giuliani's work as the president's lawyer and his other activities for his client is murky.

Jeet Heer @HeerJeet

Jeet Heer is a contributing editor at the The New Republic.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Baffling Relationship between American Politicians and the MEK

Ashton Hashemipour

July 10, 2018

It's no secret that most American politicians want political change in Iran. Whether it be President Donald Trump, Barack Obama, or George W. Bush, regime change (or a significant change in the regime's behavior) has been a goal of U.S. administrations since the dawn of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Nor have U.S. politicians attempted to hide this: Congressmen across the aisle, for example, have met with Reza Pahlavi, the former Iranian prince whose father was ousted from power during the Islamic Revolution, to discuss regime change. Pahlavi, among many others in the Iranian diaspora, has called on all American politicians to support a democratic, liberal Iran.

American calls for regime change have certainly focused on this idea of a democratic, liberal Iran. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Senator Ted Cruz, and National Security Advisor John Bolton (among



many others) have openly advocated for such change. But it's not just Republicans: both House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer have also called for Iranians to be freed from the chains of the Islamic Republic. These politicians have decried the lack of human rights in Iran, the lack of democracy, and the suffering of the Iranian people.

Given this context, the relationship between some American politicians and the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, is baffling. The MEK, guided by an undemocratic fusion of Marxism and Islamism, has conducted terrorist attacks against Americans and Iranians alike yet has support from a plethora of U.S. conservative and liberal politicians (including many who advocate for the democratization of Iran), such as Rudy Giuliani, Bolton, Pompeo, Pelosi, and Edward Rendell. Given the MEK's inability to meaningfully change Iran, the support of U.S. politicians for the Mujahedin will only have negative effects for the United States, namely that it will alienate the Iranian people and give hardliners in the Islamic Republic a chance to capitalize on this support.

## **What is the MEK?**

The MEK was established in 1965 as a leftist organization staunchly opposed to the American-backed Shah of Iran. Until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the MEK, originally founded upon the ideals of Marxism and Islamism, engaged in a plethora of terrorist attacks, targeting Americans civilians and government workers. Many of its members were either imprisoned or executed while the Shah was in power.

During the Revolution, the MEK helped supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini overthrow the Shah. Yet after a few years of rule by the Islamic Republic, Khomeini saw that the MEK's ideology was at odds with his vision for the country, and he ordered his forces to arrest and execute Mujahedin members. The Mujahedin responded by assassinating members of the Islamic government, including the Prime Minister in a 1981 bombing.

In 1980, Saddam Hussein, sensing instability in Iran, decided to invade. The MEK, seeing an opportunity to destabilize the Islamic government joined him in fighting their own countrymen. Saddam's use of chemical weapons, and his bombing of Iranian cities, did not deter the MEK in their support



of him, which continued throughout the war. Saddam even helped arm the MEK, allowing them to conduct suicide attacks in Iran. The MEK's support of Saddam, along with the earlier attacks against American officials, led the U.S. government to designate it as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

After the war, the MEK largely focused on assassinations: the Mujahedin have targeted senior officials of the Revolutionary Guard, clerics, and even former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami. Further, they continue to call for regime change in Iran, hosting an annual "Free Iran" rally, at which many Western politicians speak. In the most recent years, however, the MEK, which now calls itself the National Council of Resistance of Iran, has shifted its focus from bombing campaigns to lobbying Western politicians for support.

## American Support

In spite of the MEK's recent history of terrorism, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2012 removed the organization from of the FTO list, un-freezing its assets and allowing it to engage in financial interactions with those in the United States. The organization, however, in spite of its claim to want democracy in Iran, remains internally undemocratic and is monumentally unpopular among those living in Iran. One can go so far as to say that it is a personality-based cult: Iran scholar Ervand Abrahamian stated that if "[MEK leader] Massoud Rajavi got up tomorrow and said the world was flat, his members would accept it."

That hasn't stopped American politicians—the same ones who claim to support a liberal, democratic Iran—from backing the MEK. And while this is not to say that supporting the MEK is enshrined in U.S. policy, the high level of support that it maintains among many American politicians is alarming. Rudy Giuliani is a regular at the MEK's Free Iran conference. John Bolton gave a jarring speech at last year's conference, claiming that the group would be celebrating the downfall of the Islamic Republic in Tehran the next year (which didn't happen). Even Pelosi, a Democrat who supported the Nuclear Deal, put out a statement in support of the group. This does not seem to be a partisan issue: influential American politicians, whether in Congress or in the administration, have supported a group that has conducted terrorist at-

tacks, not only against Iranian government officials but also against American civilians.

There seems to be one of two implications for this support: either the politicians supporting the MEK do not understand that it remains a domestically unpopular and undemocratic terrorist organization, or they acknowledge this but believe that regime change in Iran should be encouraged at any cost.

Though it is true that there has been a change in the MEK's behavior since the early 2000s, the first possibility is nonetheless laughable. There have been no significant leadership changes since the MEK's support of Saddam Hussein: Maryam Rajavi is still the leader of the organization and has been (along with her husband who disappeared in 2003) since 1985. Further, there have been no ideological changes in the group since Rajavi took leadership.

Their change in behavior is not due to a change in ideology; rather, it is due to circumstances. During the American invasion of Iraq, the MEK was forcibly disarmed, and its camps were destroyed. Since then, the MEK has simply not had the ability to conduct bombing campaigns in Iran as it did during the Shah's reign, the Islamic Revolution, and the Iran-Iraq war. Thus, they have shifted their focus to lobbying western politicians for change in Iran, which seems thus far to be working: speakers at this year's conference, who have given rousing addresses in support of the MEK's mission, include Giuliani, Newt Gingrich, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and former French Foreign Minister Bernard Kushner. As a result of this lobbying, they've probably also realized that bombing campaigns will not help their case with the West.

It would thus be irresponsible to suggest that the MEK has changed. It remains an undemocratic organization under the leadership of the same people who ordered terrorist attacks against Iranians and Iraqis alike: there is a reason that Massoud Rajavi has been wanted in Iraq since 2010 for Crimes Against Humanity. The only change is the method that they use to gain power—they've shifted from violence to intense lobbying.

Thus, even if regime change is the ultimate goal, given that the MEK has not undergone significant ideological changes, why would U.S. politicians support

a group that has conducted terrorist attacks against its own government of officials and civilians?

The first reason is money. The Mujahedin pays a lot of money to secure Western politicians' attendance at their annual conference. Giuliani, for example, has received tens of thousands of dollars from the group to speak and advocate for the group.

Secondly, it's entirely possible that these politicians support the MEK, not with the ultimate goal of seeing them take over Iran, but rather, with the goal of instigating instability. Domestic instability and upheaval in Iran would force the government to address its own internal problems at the expense of other concerns, such as maintaining a strong presence in Syria or arming proxies in the region (e.g. Hizbollah, Houthi rebels). This would allow the United States, and its Middle Eastern allies in Saudi Arabia and Israel, to lessen the Islamic Republic's influence in the region. Perhaps they view the Mujahedin as the group most able to and most willing to sow these seeds of unrest.

## Implications of American Support

Despite its talk of freeing Iran and the friends that it has made in the West, the Mujahedin is hated among the Iranian people. For many Iranians, the MEK's decision to fight alongside Saddam, and its indiscriminate attacks on Iranian civilians, destroyed any possible sympathetic feelings. Further, according to a poll taken by George Mason University, less than one percent of Iranian-Americans—the largest group in the Iranian diaspora—support the MEK.

Thus, wide American support comes at an extremely high cost. Firstly, the MEK does not have nearly enough support to foment a revolution in Iran. As of 2011, the State Department estimated that the MEK has between five thousand and 13,500 members, scattered across Iraq, Europe, and the United States—hardly a group numerous or unified enough to stand up to the Islamic Republic of Iran or meaningfully change the country in any way. To put this in perspective, the Islamic Republic squashed the 2009 Green Movement, which brought out millions of concentrated protesters.

Perhaps more importantly, however, U.S. support of the MEK will only alienate the people of Iran, the very people to whom Western politicians, from Trump to Pelosi to the conference’s speakers, have tried to appeal. Any American call for freedom in Iran—any message in support of the Iranian people—will be marred by this widespread support of a terrorist organization. The only people who will be strengthened by this support are Iranian hardliners, whose ultimate message is that the United States despises Iran, wants the country to fail, and is not a reliable partner. Supporting the MEK will only strengthen that narrative.

Although supporting the MEK provides a way for American politicians to ostensibly advocate for a democratic revolution in Iran, the costs of supporting a terrorist group far outweigh any benefits. To weaken the Iranian government and gain the support of the Iranian people, the United States should attempt to act as a friend to the Iranian people, instead of supporting a terrorist organization, banning Iranians from entering the country, and putting crippling sanctions on Iran, which hurt civilians more than the government. But given the immense amount of lobbying from anti-Iran groups—from America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD)—it is highly unlikely that such a change in the mindset of American politicians will occur.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani works for foreign clients while serving as Trump's attorney

Josh Dawsey, Tom Hamburger and Ashley Parker

July 10, 2018

Giuliani said in recent interviews with *The Washington Post* that he is working with clients in Brazil and Colombia, among other countries, as well as delivering paid speeches for a controversial Iranian dissident group. He has never registered with the Justice Department on behalf of his overseas clients, asserting it is not necessary because he does not directly lobby the U.S. government and is not charging Trump for his services.

*The Washington Post*

His decision to continue representing foreign entities also departs from standard practice for presidential attorneys, who in the past have generally sought to sever any ties that could create conflicts with their client in the White House.

"I've never lobbied him on anything," Giuliani said, referring to Trump. "I don't represent foreign government in front of the U.S. government. I've never registered to lobby."



## Giuliani works for foreign clients while serving as Trump's attorney



Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani talks with reporters at Trump Tower in New York on January 12, 2017. (Jabin Botsford / The Washington Post)

BY JOSH DAWSEY, TOM HAMBURGER AND ASHLEY PARKER  
JULY 30, 2018 4:55 PM PT

WASHINGTON POST

Rudy Giuliani continues to work on behalf of foreign clients both personally and through his namesake security firm while serving as President Trump's personal attorney - an arrangement experts say raises conflict-of-interest concerns and could run afoul of federal ethics laws.

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Carrie Menkel-Meadow, a legal-ethics professor at the University of California at Irvine, said it is generally unwise for the president's attorney to have foreign business clients, because of the high likelihood they will have competing interests.

"I think Rudy believes because he is doing the job pro bono the rules do not apply to him, but they do," Menkel-Meadow said.

Since Trump hired him in April, Giuliani has repeatedly crossed the lines traditionally followed by presidential lawyers. He has regularly opined on Iran, North Korea and other policy issues outside his purview while also publicly revealing details about his discussions with his client and with the office of special counsel Robert S. Mueller III, which is investigating whether the Trump campaign assisted Russia in interfering with the 2016 election. Among the clients represented by Giuliani's consulting firm is the city of

Kharkiv, Ukraine, whose mayor was a leading figure in the Party of Regions, the Russia-friendly political party at the center of the federal conspiracy prosecution of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort. His firm worked for the mayor in 2018 and is expected to work for him again later this year, Giuliani said in an interview.

Kharkiv has contracted with a subsidiary of Giuliani's consulting firm, Giuliani Partners, to help set up a new office of emergency management there, according to Giuliani and others involved in arranging the deal. Giuliani traveled to Ukraine in November to meet with Kharkiv officials and then hosted a delegation from the city in New York in March, about three weeks before he was hired as Trump's attorney, according to officials and Ukrainian news reports.

Another Giuliani client is the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK, an Iranian resistance group operating in exile that was listed as a terrorist group by the State Department as recently as 2012. Giuliani said he has regularly received payments from MEK over the past 10 years; he declined to disclose his fees. Giuliani acknowledges giving a paid speech to the group in May in Washington, and he delivered another speech at an MEK gathering outside Paris on Saturday advocating regime change in Tehran. He said before the conference he planned to spend "three or four days" in Paris helping the group.

His consulting firm has also been hired by cities in Brazil and Colombia looking for new policing strategies and for ways to reduce crime, Giuliani said. He recently returned from a trip to Brazil to meet with clients before leaving for the MEK conference.

Lobbying experts said some of Giuliani's work for overseas clients is likely to require registration under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA), which mandates disclosure to the Justice Department of attempts "to influence U.S. public opinion, policy, and laws" on behalf of foreign entities or individuals. Although violations are punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine, the Justice Department has prosecuted only a handful of cases in recent decades.

Joshua Ian Rosenstein, a partner at the Sandler Reiff law firm, which special-

izes in FARA and other lobbying registration questions, pointed to Giuliani's MEK speech in Washington in May as an example of political activity requiring registration.

"Political activity is a broad term," Rosenstein said in an emailed statement. "It includes any actions - including speeches, PR work and media outreach - that are intended to or anticipated to influence the U.S. government or the U.S. public with regard to the formulation, adoption, or modification of the policies of the U.S., or with regard to the political or public interests, policies, or relations of a foreign political party."

Two White House spokesmen declined to comment on Giuliani or whether his work for foreign entities posed any conflict of interests for the president. But Giuliani's talkative and freewheeling style has irritated many White House officials, who say his frequent pronouncements are unhelpful and have often put the president in difficult positions. Giuliani often gives Trump personnel advice, White House aides said, and he said in a recent Post interview it would be good for Trump to have a more "political" chief of staff than John F. Kelly ahead of the 2018 midterms.

"He seems to be blending the services of a lawyer with the services of policy in the White House," said William Jeffress Jr., a lawyer who represented Vice President Richard B. Cheney's chief of staff Lewis "Scooter" Libby. "If you begin to stray to seek to influence the president or the White House, that could be a problem. If you are seeking to influence the government in representing a foreign power, then you have a duty to register."

Giuliani has also lobbied the president to promote his son, Andrew, a low-level White House aide who has clashed with Kelly and others in the West Wing. The elder Giuliani said that before becoming Trump's attorney, he asked about a promotion he believed Trump had promised his son and the president responded in the affirmative. He said he has not talked to the president about the issue since becoming his attorney.

But three White House officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations said Giuliani continued to lobby Trump for his son's promotion after he became the president's lawyer.



Andrew Giuliani, who works in the White House Office of Public Liaison, often arranges sports teams' visits to the White House and has been a regular Trump golfing partner for years. He suggested in an interview with The Post that some at the White House have bristled at his efforts to root out leaks. "I've been lucky enough to know the president for close to 30 years and known him well for 20 years," Andrew Giuliani said. "I find him to be similar to an uncle, and I'm lucky enough to be very close to his family."

Trump remains pleased with Giuliani, lunching with him in New Jersey this weekend ahead of his Supreme Court nomination, praising his attacks on the special counsel and telling others that his situation has improved because of the former mayor, White House officials said.

After leaving the New York mayor's office following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Rudolph Giuliani built a lucrative career soliciting well-heeled clients for Giuliani Partners. He also worked with two law firms while accepting speaking fees on his own. He has since severed ties with the law firms but retains his security firm while representing Trump.

Giuliani said he is not as involved at the consulting company as he was before taking over as the president's lawyer. The firm did not respond to a request for comment.

Giuliani said he never brings up his other clients with the president. He also said he has turned down some potential clients who have approached him recently, including a Russian business; he declined to identify the company. "I really don't think he does," Giuliani said when asked whether the president knew who his clients were. "He knows I do a lot of security work all over the world."

White House officials say they cannot be sure whether Giuliani's claim about not discussing clients with the president is true. The two men often talk late at night and early in the morning, and the conversations are frequently wide-ranging.

Giuliani also defended his work with Kharkiv Mayor Gennady "Gepa" Kernes, who was close to deposed Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich

before he fled to Russia and who has since sought to align himself with the new government in Kiev. Kernes uses a wheelchair after nearly being killed by an unidentified gunman in 2014. His allies have blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin for the attack, an allegation the Russian government has denied.

“I wasn’t concerned about them, because he just got his legs blown off by Putin,” Giuliani said, referring to alleged links between Moscow and Kernes. “Maybe those ties were before.”

Representatives for TriGlobal Strategic Ventures, a New York consulting firm involved in arranging the meetings between Kharkiv officials and Giuliani, did not respond to requests for comment.

On Giuliani’s MEK relationship, a spokesman for the group, Shahin Gobadi, did not respond to a question about payments to Giuliani for speeches but said his appearances were not the same as working for the group.

“Mayor Giuliani’s advocacy for the human rights and democracy in Iran has been consistent with his long-held views,” Gobadi wrote in an email to The Post. “He has never worked for the MEK in any shape or form. He has never done any lobbying on behalf of the MEK.”

He added later, “Of course, he has relation with the MEK and has publicly said to have worked with them in line with his views but he has not worked for them.”

MEK was formally listed as a terrorist group by the State Department until the Obama administration dropped the designation in 2012 amid a sustained lobbying campaign. Members of the group have been implicated in the deaths of Americans and thousands of Iranians, primarily in the 1980s when the neo-Marxist group was allied with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in the war between Iraq and Iran.


MEK supporters, including many U.S. conservatives, say the group has changed since then and is a valuable bulwark against the theocratic Iranian government. In recent years, a wide range of well-known political figures -

including former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania Ed Rendell, as well as former directors of the FBI and the CIA - received fees to speak publicly on behalf of MEK.

Daniel Benjamin, a State Department counterterrorism coordinator during the Obama administration, criticized Giuliani's advocacy for MEK and suggested that Giuliani and others may have violated the law. Benjamin said the Treasury Department was so concerned about an MEK lobbying and public-relations program featuring Giuliani and other notables in 2012 that it opened a preliminary inquiry into the issue.

"Plenty of us working in counterterrorism found just the appearance of support for a listed organization that had American blood on its hands to be outrageous," said Benjamin, now a scholar at Dartmouth College. "An unfortunate consequence of the decision to delist was that this investigation got shelved."

MEK officials deny any inappropriate lobbying and said the Treasury Department review cited no violations by the group. They also say allegations of terrorism and of responsibility for the death of Americans are unfounded and distributed as part of a propaganda campaign on behalf of the Iranian government.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Strange alliance of Trump hawks and exile group poses threat to Iran

Mahan Abedin

July 11, 2018

**A**lthough the MEK has little verifiable presence inside Iran, authorities fear its organising potential, particularly if the US throws its full weight behind the group

A reported bombing attempt on a Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) rally near Paris earlier this month has once again thrust this odd, cult-like organisation onto the centre stage of Iran's international relations.



Derided by most Iranian activists and analysts as a totalitarian group with little-to-no influence inside the country, the MEK nonetheless has an uncanny ability to dominate the political exile scene, remaining a considerable nuisance for Iranian authorities.

This is principally due to two factors. Foremost the group has an iron-clad organisation, perfected over



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 Although the MEK has little verifiable presence inside Iran, authorities fear its organising potential, particularly if the US throws its full weight behind the group



50 years, since its formation in 1965. Second, it is remarkably good at lobbying western political and media organisations, as evidenced by the impressive speaker lists at its events.

## US hawks

Despite suffering huge setbacks in recent years – notably losing its Iraqi base – the MEK is poised to play a role in the revived Iran regime-change campaign in Washington. The appointment of MEK supporter and notorious Iran hawk John Bolton as US national security adviser has been correctly interpreted in Tehran as an unmistakable sign of American intent.

Whoever was behind the reported bombing attempt in Paris clearly wanted to raise the stakes. The real aim might have been to send a message, rather than to physically harm rally participants.

One reason US hawks and other anti-Iran western politicians have rallied round the MEK is that there is no alternative. For all its faults, the MEK is not only the largest exiled opposition group, but arguably the only one that is truly organised with the exception of ethnic-based groups, such as the Kurds.

The other alternative that has been floated is the son of the late shah, Reza Pahlavi, but he struggles to pass preliminary credibility tests. Not only does he lack a formal organisation, but his brand is forever tainted by association with a fallen monarchy. Moreover, Pahlavi is the object of ridicule whenever he appears on Farsi-language media, as his Farsi is less than perfect, and his grasp of complex political and strategic issues is less than convincing.

The MEK's uncompromising rhetoric on the Islamic Republic aligns with that of US hawks such as Bolton, former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani and Republican Senator Tom Cotton, who appear to believe that the Iranian government can be toppled through severe economic sanctions and other extreme pressures.

## **Public disdain**

Little heed is paid to the fact that the MEK has virtually no influence inside Iran, and its most outstanding political achievement is its ability to unite normally fractious Iranians in their severe dislike of the cult-like group.

The hatred of the MEK is complex and has many causes. At its core, most Iranians regard the group as an anachronism - a throwback to the 1960s and 1970s, when radical leftist ideologies held sway. Moreover, the group's quixotic mix of Shia Islam and elements of Marxism - and above all its cult-like culture and total grip over its members - make it particularly suspect and distasteful.

In addition, the group's alliance with Saddam Hussein during the long-running Iran-Iraq War places it beyond the pale as far as mainstream Iranian public opinion is concerned.

But the Washington hawks and their allies in the British establishment face an uphill struggle in fully legitimising the MEK in western political and strategic discourse. After all, not long ago, the MEK was listed as a terrorist organisation by the western alliance, before it was delisted by the European Union and the US.

The plot to bomb the MEK rally in Paris appears to involve three countries: Belgium, France and Germany. An Austria-based Iranian diplomat was arrested in Germany, reportedly for being in contact with the Belgian couple of Iranian descent who were allegedly at the centre of the plot.

While much remains unknown, a historical review of the Iranian security establishment's struggle against the MEK can illuminate the general context

surrounding the case.

## **The role of Iranian intelligence**

For nearly three decades, the MEK file was the exclusive domain of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), who were tasked with penetrating and subverting the group. In a long period of trial and error, the MOIS developed deep expertise on the MEK, eliminating its presence inside Iran - save for manipulated MEK cells acting under MOIS direction - and thoroughly penetrated its structures in Iraq and the West. It even went so far as organising dissident and former members, in addition to investing considerable resources in mobilising family units against MEK cadres.

The stranglehold over all aspects of the MEK's existence was so complete that it was difficult to know where the MOIS ended and the MEK began. In many ways, the MOIS was a victim of its own success, as some elements of the Iranian establishment grew wary – if not downright suspicious – of the intelligence ministry's increasingly soft attitude towards the group, in particular its extensive sponsorship of former members and supporters.

The tipping point appears to have centred on internal discussions on how to close down the MEK's central base in Iraq, the Ashraf camp. According to former MEK members, the MOIS probably opposed a military raid on the camp, preferring - for unknown reasons - to keep the group in limbo indefinitely.

The end, however, was as swift as it was brutal. In a September 2013 raid on the camp, 52 MEK members, including several senior figures, were killed, and several others captured. The mastermind of the raid was a shadowy paramilitary intelligence unit linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

## **Lobbying governments**

The real importance of that fateful raid was not that it led to the MEK's departure from Iraq, but that it ended the monopoly of the MOIS over the MEK file. Today, several Iranian intelligence agencies track the MEK in Europe and North America, all of which run agents and informants inside the

group. The potential for misunderstanding and working at cross-purposes is considerable.

The MEK may be unpopular, but it cannot be accused of being ineffective. The group remains the biggest public relations threat to Iran in the West, as it consistently lobbies governments, parliamentarians, the media and human rights organisations. These activities are a cause of real concern for Iranian diplomacy, hence justifying the intelligence resources directed at tracking and containing the group.

Although the MEK has little verifiable presence inside Iran, Iranian authorities fear its organising potential, particularly if the US throws its full weight behind the group. This is unlikely, however, at least for the foreseeable future - as the US policy community remains opposed to working with the MEK, in part because of its murder of Americans in the 1970s.

But the connection of so many hawks and staunchly anti-Iranian elements to the Trump administration is sufficiently alarming to Tehran that pressure may be applied on the security establishment to take kinetic measures to deter US cooperation with the MEK. As pressure mounts on Iran, so will the temptation to strike at a relatively easy target like the MEK.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## US Is Helping ‘Bloodthirsty Cult’ – the MEK – to Overthrow Iran’s Government

Lawrence Wilkerson

July 11, 2018

In pursuit of regime change in Iran, the Trump administration and prominent Republicans and Democrats alike are supporting the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), which former top US official Larry Wilkerson says is a “bloodthirsty cult.” Ben Norton reports  
Story Transcript



BEN NORTON: The Donald Trump administration has made regime change in Iran one of its top foreign policy priorities, and some of the extreme warhawks Trump has willingly surrounded himself with are supporting a fanatical cult in hopes of toppling Iran’s government. The president’s personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, has been a keynote speaker at multiple conferences held by the Iranian opposition group the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, known popularly as the MEK. At a summit in Washington, D.C. in May, Giuliani declared that Trump is committed to

regime change. Weeks later in June, Giuliani again spoke as a keynote speaker at the MEK's conference in Paris.

RUDY GIULIANI: We are now, I believe, very realistic in being able to see an end of the regime in Iran. We can see it.

BEN NORTON: The MEK was considered a terrorist organization by the United States government until 2012. Larry Wilkerson, a former top George Bush administration official, told The Real News Network that the MEK is a bloodthirsty cult that is widely considered by Iranians to be full of traitors.

LARRY WILKERSON: I mean, this is a group that, when I was chief of staff of the State Department, Donald Rumsfeld and Colin Powell actually worked together, one of the few times they did, to keep them out of our hair in Iraq. And that was primarily because, number one, they were on the top of our list of terrorist organizations. Number two, they were a bloodthirsty cult, and we knew that. All of us knew that. The intelligence people knew that. The diplomats knew that. Everyone who ever had any dealing with Mujahideen-e-Khalq knew that they were a cult, first and foremost, and a brutal, bloody, ruthless cult all together.

I have never met in all my time and dealing in track two diplomacy and other diplomacy with Iran, and with dealing with the Iranian people in general, and Iranians in this country, for that matter, other than those around the royal group in this country, or in Iran, who thought they were anything other than traitors. Traitors and terrorists. Because they joined Saddam Hussein in what to most Iranians was the most seminal period in their lifetime, and that was the brutal eight years of war between Iraq and Iran, started, of course, by Iraq. So they see these people as traitors.

BEN NORTON: The MEK is one of several terrorist organizations that the U.S. government has allied with on and off, supporting it when it is politically convenient. Trump's hyper-hawkish neoconservative national security adviser John Bolton is a staunch supporter of the MEK, and has previously spoken at its annual conferences. President Trump's lawyer even took credit for helping to lead a global campaign to get the group unlisted as a terrorist organization.

RUDY GIULIANI: We fought a worldwide battle to shed the unfair label of terrorism in the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union. That label is now gone, and you are seen as defenders of human rights.

BEN NORTON: Larry Wilkerson, a retired U.S. Army colonel who previously served as chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, says the MEK has spent large sums of money and carefully undergone a rebranding to portray itself as democratic, secular, and moderate. Wilkerson argues that the U.S. has helped to facilitate this rebranding to push for regime change in Iran.

LARRY WILKERSON: This is the group that has become for the neoconservatives, and for some of those associated with Trump, the Iraqi National Congress. The Ahmad Chalabi/Iraqi National Congress. But it was, for the war with Iraq, fomenting that war, leading the United States to that war. The MEK is now serving as that entity for the coming war with Iran.

And I think what you see, in order to use them, to employ them as a Chalabi-like tool in this march to war with Iran, they have been refurbished. I think Saudi money's been in there. I think U.S. money has been in there. I think big-time money has been spent with largely U.S. European marketing entities that refurbished their name to make them look good. And I've even been told, I assume- this is coming from some of my intelligence community contacts- I've been told that they are keeping what was the more radical leadership in the shadows. They're not letting them be exposed so much, because they realize they still are the same people they were before.

But they've got new people to interface with the public, as it were. And they've got a new image, as you pointed out. And that image is being marketed by these very good marketers who are being paid enormous sums of money in order to do this. So it's not quite as easy as it was with Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress. I mean, we had all kinds of reports about their wasting money and being useless. Secretary Powell even turned them over the Pentagon because he was fed up with them. But I think this group is even worse. But at the same time, they have better marketers. They have people who are really good at advertising them and making them look good.

BEN NORTON: Rudy Giuliani, in fact, bolstered this explanation when he boasted at the MEK's conference in Paris that the U.S.-backed cult is allegedly coordinating the protests that are rocking Iran.

RUDY GIULIANI: Those protests were not happening accidentally. Those protests are happening because they're being coordinated now, unlike in 2009, they're being coordinated by many of our people in Albania, and many of our people here, and all throughout the world.

BEN NORTON: Although the MEK has become largely associated with ultraconservative hawks from the Republican Party, it also has increasing support among corporate Democrats. Nancy Pelosi, the leader of the Democratic Party in the House of Representatives, also issued a statement of warm greetings to the MEK conference, which she described as a gathering of the, quote, friends and supporters of a free Iran.

Wilkerson argues that the growing bipartisan U.S. support for this Iranian opposition called is the result of the dangerous idea that the enemy of the enemy is your friend. And he warns that the Trump administration's belligerent aggression against Iran eerily reminds him of the Bush administration's policy on Iraq.

LARRY WILKERSON: Well, you've got people like Nancy Pelosi and other Democrats, and certainly people like you've named, and others in the Republican Party, who subscribe to the very simplistic proposition that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Even if that enemy has been my enemy for a long time.

And that's the case for the MEK. And as I said before, this is a very very similar situation to Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress in 2002, a situation with which I'm very familiar, because what's been happening is there's been this desperate search by everyone from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracy, which is really the replacement for Doug Feith's Office of Special Plans at the Pentagon, which manufactured the intelligence for the war with Iraq, including connections with Al-Qaida and 9/11, and the weapons of mass destruction, which were nonexistent. This is the group FDD, now, that outside the Pentagon, outside the formal government struc-

tures doing the same thing that Doug Feith's group was doing, manufacturing intelligence.

Now, I think, I've sensed of late that what the administration really wants, and what it would prefer- and this is probably, I have to say this, it's probably because of Donald Trump's influence on this situation, if he has any at all. They're trying to bring so much pressure to bear on the Ayatollah, on Rouhani, and Zarif, and others that the regime collapses of its own weight. And they've interpreted the recent disturbances in Tehran, in particular. And I think this is a misinterpretation of those disturbances. But nonetheless, they've interpret them as an indication that it's working.

So they think tightening the sanctions, making everything effective by November, getting Iran's oil off the market, ceasing that method of their making any money in the world and so forth, is going to topple the regime. So I think Donald Trump thinks he's going to do all this without war, that we're going to wind up with the regime crashing of its own weight. I think that's rather naive. I don't think that's going to happen. And I think in that not happening, John Bolton's going to try others, and we're going to wind up on a war track with Iran.

RUDY GIULIANI: Will it happen? Yes. When will it happen? Now. And I want next year at this time, I want us to have this convention in Tehran.

BEN NORTON: Reporting for The Real News I'm Ben Norton.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Meet the Organization Pushing Regime Change in Iran—and Its Willing American Accomplices

Christopher A. Preble

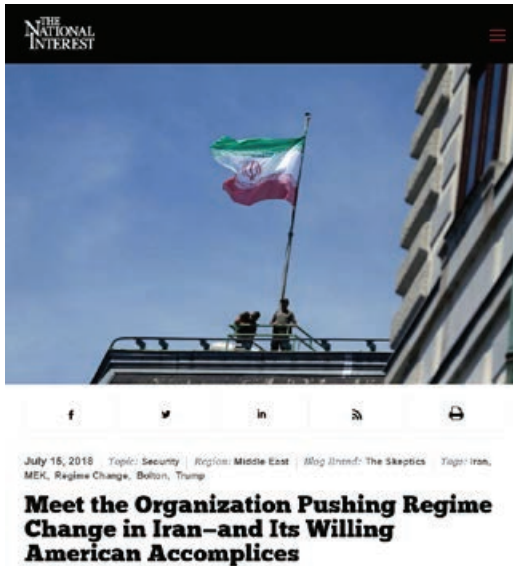
July 15, 2018

It is customary for pundits to lament how partisanship is destroying U.S. policymaking, but one area remains curiously bipartisan: Democrats and Republicans alike are quick to show their support for an organization publicly dedicated to regime change in Iran.

Late last month in Paris, for example, thirty-three senior U.S. officials and military officers, including Rudy Giuliani and former United Nations Ambassador Bill Richardson, attended a meeting convened by the National Council for Resistance in Iran (NCRI), an offshoot of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK).

The MEK was founded in 1965 as a hard-left opponent of the secular Shah of Iran. They gained attention in the early 1970s for several acts of terrorism, including attacks against the Shah's primary patron, the United States. Civilians working for American





companies operating in Iran in the 1970s, including Pepsi, PanAm, General Motors and Rockwell International, were all among the MEK's victims. Unsurprisingly, the MEK was listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department in 1997.

But, in recent years, the MEK has managed to rehabilitate its image. It switched sides after Saddam Hussein's overthrow in Iraq, hoping that the United States would perform a similar service in neighboring Iran. The

MEK also successfully lobbied the Obama administration to be removed from the terrorist list. Today, the organization routinely feeds information to build support for regime change in Tehran.

This state of affairs is eerily reminiscent of a period in the late 1990s when a bipartisan coalition in Congress—responding to a concerted pressure campaign by Bill Kristol and Robert Kagan's Project for a New American Century—passed legislation calling for regime change in Iraq. The Iraq Liberation Act, signed into law by President Bill Clinton on October 31, 1998, also provided Iraqi exile groups direct financial assistance from the U.S. government. One of the leading beneficiaries of U.S. taxpayers' largesse was the Iraqi National Congress (INC). In 2004, the *New Yorker's* Jane Mayer concluded that the U.S. government steered more than \$100 million to the group over a twelve-year period, with the Bush administration responsible for at least \$39 million.

The INC and its leader, Ahmed Chalabi, proved to be one of the leading sources of false information that hawks deployed via a too-credulous media to build support for war with Iraq.

Years later, after U.S. troops had dislodged Saddam Hussein from power, and

Chalabi and his cadre of followers were back in the country he had fled as a teenager, he famously boasted “we are heroes in error...What was said before is not important.”

But Chalabi and the INC were more popular in Washington, DC than in Baghdad—or anywhere else in Iraq, for that matter. When Iraqis went to the polls in December 2005, his party secured only 0.5 percent of the vote.

So, to recap, U.S. taxpayers funded the organization whose primary objective was to feed misleading information about the nature of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. The resulting war claimed over 4,400 American lives and has cost, so far, \$2 trillion, with some estimates of the eventual costs approaching \$6 trillion. And Chalabi and his INC weren’t able to implement the pleasing, pluralist, vision for Iraq, that they promised. Instead, many tens of thousands of Iraqis have been killed, and millions driven from their homes.

That doesn’t seem like a very good return on investment.

The source of the MEK’s funding is murkier, but the organization is flush with cash. MSNBC’s Richard Engel determined that Bolton was paid \$40,000 for one speech in 2017. Others report that speakers at MEK gatherings receive up to \$50,000 per speech.

At last year’s gathering in Paris, Bolton stated categorically “There is a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs, and that opposition is centered in this room today.” “The declared policy of the United States of America,” he continued, “should be the overthrow of the mullahs’ regime in Tehran.”

Bolton skipped the meeting this year, but Giuliani’s work on behalf of the organization has caught people’s attention—and not for the first time. Daniel Benjamin, who coordinated counterterrorism efforts for the Obama administration explained to *The Washington Post*, “Plenty of us...found just the appearance of support for [an] organization that had American blood on its hands to be outrageous.”

There is a tendency to dismiss the MEK as a fringe group. Ervand Abrahamian, a professor of Iranian history and politics at Baruch College, described it



as “a cult organization.” “It’s like the Moonies,” he said to McClatchy.

Except that the Moonies aren’t trying to get the U.S. government to overthrow a foreign government, and John Bolton sits a few doors down from the President of the United States. Ahmed Chalabi would have lusted after the level of access that the MEK’s Maryam Rajavi now has.

That means that Americans might have to rely on the news media to do its job. It could begin by questioning information provided by expatriate advocates of regime change in Iran.

When the New York Times reviewed its coverage of the Iraq War in 2004, the editors called out Chalabi by name as a source for many inaccurate or misleading articles. They noted that “information” in their stories “that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged.” The worst instances “shared a common feature,” the Times editors continued. “They depended at least in part on information from a circle of Iraqi informants, defectors and exiles bent on ‘regime change’ in Iraq.”

Rob Reiner’s feature film, “Shock and Awe,” tells the story of the Knight Ridder DC news bureau, one of the few outfits who, when presented with similar information from Iraqi exiles, and Bush administration officials, had the good sense to ask “Is it true?” Equally important, Knight Ridder reporters and editors dared to stand by their reporting when post-9/11 bloodlust cast full-throated support for the war as synonymous with patriotism—and skepticism as akin to treason.

Americans must wait to see which direction the U.S. news media will go in 2018, but I hope that they will be more like John Walcott, Jonathan Landay, Warren Strobel, and Joe Galloway, and less like Judith Miller.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## ‘Cult-like’ Iranian opposition group in France accused of bomb plot

Jan van der Made

July 21, 2018

Iran has accused an exiled opposition group of orchestrating an alleged plot to bomb one of its own rallies near Paris. Belgium, France and Germany detained six people over the alleged plan to bomb a rally of the People’s Mujahedeen of Iran in the Paris suburb of Villepinte. Tehran has dismissed accusations it was behind the plot.



The People’s Mujahedeen, or Mujaheddin-e-Khalk, or MEK, was founded in 1965 by Massoud Rajavi, as a militant opposition group fighting the Shah and organised around a strict Marxist-Leninist hierarchy.

Initially the group aimed to link up with Ayatollah Khomeini, but the religious leader banned them instead after he successfully overthrew the regime of the Shah in 1979.

The MEK reacted with a massive, nationwide bomb-

ing campaign, which Tehran answered with waves of arrests and executions.

The group then found refuge in Iraq where they were trained by troops of Saddam Hussein who put tanks and military equipment at their disposal.

After Saddam's demise, they eventually moved to a camp in Albania, funded by \$20 million (€17 million) from the US meant to be used to "de-radicalise" the groups' 3,000 members.

## **MEK In France**

Meanwhile, the political wing of the MEK, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) found shelter in Auvers-sur-Oise, a small town outside Paris, where they reside in a walled compound in an uneasy relationship with the French government.

The group's current leader is Maryam Rajavi, wife of the group's founder Massoud Rajavi who disappeared in 2003. It is not known if he is still alive.

In 2010 a court in Iraq accused him and 39 others, including Maryam, of "crimes against humanity," encompassing involvement "with the former Iraqi security forces in suppressing the 1991 (Shi'ite) uprising against the former Iraqi regime and the killing of Iraqi citizens," according to Judge Mohammed Abdul-Sahib, then a spokesperson for the Iraqi High Tribunal, who was quoted by Reuters.

The group also targeted Americans and was on the State Department's list of terrorist organisations from 1997 and on the EU terrorist list.

But things had already started to change in 2002, when the MEK revealed Iran's nuclear program.

The revelations, based on satellite pictures, triggered a massive international response resulting in calls for sanctions that were eventually imposed.

## Political support

During years of intensive lobbying, following the nuclear revelations, the group managed to get itself off EU (2009) and US (2012) terrorist lists, presenting themselves as a democratic alternative to the current regime in Iran.

They also won the support of many influential politicians.

The foreign guest list of the MEK's yearly gatherings is impressive.

Present at this year's meeting in Villepinte were former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, former US Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, former French minister of Foreign Affairs Bernard Kouchner, MEPs and MPs from various European countries, human rights activists and journalists.

However in 2011, the New York Times and the Huffington Post reported that speakers were being offered up to 40,000 US dollars for brief speeches, or merely to be present.

“Speakers, they get paid for speaking,” says Massoud Khodabandeh, a former member of the MEK, who managed to get out of the organisation and lives now in the UK, where he heads Middle East Strategy Consultants.

Khodabandeh, who says he worked for the MEK's security department, describes the group as a “destructive cult,” where members are forced to divorce, sex is not allowed, access to health services is “limited” and members are obliged to work for free “in a modern version of slavery.”

“Disobedience of the leaders is met with harsh punishment,” he says.

He claims much of the money to pay for the group's overheads and massive public relations exercises comes from Saudi Arabia.

## Saudi links?

“Personally, in the 1980s, I went to Riyadh and I brought three lorries full of gold for the Mujaheddin. In those years, the relationship between the Saudis

and the Mujaheddin was clandestine, they wouldn't say it.

The relationship is not secret anymore, given the fact that Saudi Prince Turki-al-Faisal himself came to the yearly MEK gathering in 2016.

Meanwhile, the big names add to the legitimacy of the group.

"I know that in their history there are controversial moments and critical moments," says Marcin Swiecicki, a Polish Member of Parliament who travelled to Paris to attend the MEK meeting.

"But I understand that they have evolved over time and they are accepted by the democratic leaders of Europe, including Kouchner, the former Prime Minister of Canada, [Stephen] Harper, so somehow I trust these people who are supporting them and that is why I joined them."

One of the political heavyweights who support the MEK, US National Security Advisor John Bolton, singled the group out to take over the government in Iran after a possible "regime change."

## **Unpopular MEK**

But their lack of popularity inside Iran may play against them.

"One of my neighbours was killed by these people," says Mohammad Marandi, a scholar with Tehran University who remembers the MEK bombings from the time he was a teenager.

"They exploded a bomb very close to my old house where we used to live as I was getting ready to go to school at 8am, and all the windows in our house were broken and of the neighbours' houses and a family of a father, a mother and two children, they were killed," he said.

"So we have very bad memories of this group that was supported by Saddam Hussein and that exploded bombs across Iran and assassinated people," he says.

As for the alleged bomb plot against the MEK itself at its “Free Iran 2018” meeting in Villepinte last Friday, that was attended by some 25,000 people and that took place just days before Iran’s president Hassan Rouhani was to visit Europe. Investigations are still ongoing.

Israel and the MEK itself are accusing Iran. According to the MEK’s website, a “terrorist diplomat of the clerical regime by the name of Asdollah Assadi,” who is allegedly the “station chief of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) in Vienna” since 2014, is the mastermind behind the alleged attack.

In its turn, Iran says that the plotters were the MEK’s own members, instructed to carry out the attack so Iran would get the blame.

And Iran’s Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, commented in a tweet about the timing of the incident, adding that Iran “unequivocally condemns all violence and terror anywhere, and is ready to work with all concerned to uncover what is a sinister false flag ploy.”

How convenient: Just as we embark on a presidential visit to Europe, an alleged Iranian operation and its “plotters” arrested. Iran unequivocally condemns all violence & terror anywhere, and is ready to work with all concerned to uncover what is a sinister false flag ploy.

Javad Zarif (@JZarif) July 2, 2018

But once again, the controversial fringe group finds itself in the focus of international attention.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump hawks regime change policy would be a disaster for Iranians

Paul Iddon

July 27, 2018

The Trump administration's policy against the Iranian regime, so far as one exists, actually hurts the Iranian people first and foremost, and may actually end up empowering the country's leadership in the long run.

Every Spring, when Iranians celebrate new year at Nowruz, the US president gives a speech directed at the Iranian people that usually seeks to distinguish them from the regime.



This year, President Trump released a statement in which he said, among other things, that: "Twenty-five centuries ago, Darius the Great asked God to protect Iran from three dangers: hostile armies, drought and falsehood. Today, the Iranian regime's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) represents all three."

“Despite the oppression they face, Iranians are fighting to reclaim their rights,” Trump added. “They long for a springtime of hope, and the United States stands with the Iranian people in their aspirations to connect to the wider world and have a responsible and accountable government that truly serves their nation’s interests.”

Espousing sympathy for Iranians, and admiration for their proud heritage is effective diplomatic rhetoric, since it doesn’t demonise ordinary Iranians, just their rulers. However, when accompanied with policies that harm those very people, it rings hollow.

Iran is suffering one of its worst economic crises in years. The Iranian rial has hit a historic low as a result of Trump’s pullout of the Iran deal, coupled with the Iranian regime’s demonstrable inability and ill-preparation to deal with such a crisis.

This is adding to Iran’s already enormous brain drain, among the worst on the planet, that is seeing the brightest and most well-educated Iranians leaving the country, likely for good. The middle-class is being put under immense pressure and its survival is at risk if the current economic crisis persists.

Such a tragic outcome would have the paradoxical effect of strengthening the regime, since any successful grassroots political change needs a viable middle class, and could even increase the likelihood of war in the long-term.

Most Iranians, both inside and outside the country, who disagree strongly with many aspects of the Iranian theocracy, are unlikely to support a policy that will destroy the remnants of the middle-class in the country, and jeopardise what could well become a hugely successful, prosperous and pluralistic post-Islamic Republic future.

Ardeshir Zahedi, a former Iranian diplomat during the reign of the last Shah of Iran who is certainly no supporter of the current government recently lambasted the current US policy toward Iran.

“Bullying rarely succeeds and has never succeeded against the nation of Iran,” he declared, adding that Iran “has never stooped and bowed to foreigners and



has always remained united in the face of adversity.”

Trump’s national security advisor John Bolton is a really striking example of how Trump’s administration is taking an aggressive posture against Iran, not just its leadership.

Bolton is a ardent supporter of the People’s Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), a militant Iranian exile group which sided with Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran in the 1980s and is consequently fiercely despised by most Iranians. Bolton is on record telling an MEK rally that he hopes to celebrate with them in Tehran “by 2019”.

Journalist Jason Rezaian, who was himself imprisoned in Iran for 18 months, pointed out that after seven years of living in Iran he heard Iranians express support for everything from forceful regime change, a restoration of the Pahlavi monarchy, a peaceful transition “from clerical to secular rule” but never “a person who said the MEK presented a viable alternative”.

This is emblematic of the failure of the Trump administration to devise a remotely viable strategy to bring about regime change in Iran.

While Iran’s leadership has proven adept at arresting or even assassinating leaders to nip any serious opposition in the bud, the MEK has no support in the country, as Rezaian so succinctly demonstrated.

The Iraq War showed how little support opposition leaders to Saddam who lived outside the country for decades actually had inside, after that brutal regime was toppled. The MEK has even less in today’s Iran.

Other than the progress made by the previous administration, the US has had no real diplomatic relations with Iran for a staggering four decades now. The Trump administration’s policy is arguably the worst to date by far, and unless fundamentally revised is bound to have disastrous results for the people of that country.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani, Bolton Repeatedly Met with Group Formerly Designated a Cult-Like Terror Organization

Ken Klippenstein

July 27, 2018

**R**udy Giuliani speaks during a memorial in NYC on September 24, 2013, for members of Iranian dissident group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK). MEK says that 52 of its members were killed on September 1, 2013, in Iraq. Current National Security Advisor John Bolton also spoke at the event. Photo by Mario Tama/Getty Images.



Close Trump associates have been quietly meeting with a controversial Iranian opposition group that was only recently removed from the U.S. terror list, TYT has learned.

Rudy Giuliani, President Trump's personal lawyer, and John Bolton, Trump's National Security Advisor, met with the group five separate times since Trump's inauguration, according to Justice Department documents reviewed by TYT. The documents

were submitted to the Justice Department by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)—MEK’s political wing—under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, between July 20, 2017 and June 27, 2018.

That group, the People’s Mujahedin of Iran, or MEK for short, was designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department until 2012, at which point it was removed from the State Department’s terror list after an intense lobbying effort. The group was on the terror list for good reason: MEK has killed several American servicemembers and contractors; attempted to assassinate a top U.S. general; and attempted to kidnap the U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur II.

In 1992, the MEK conducted a terror attack on the Iranian mission to the United Nations in New York, making it one of the few terror groups to have operated on U.S. soil, according to Daniel Benjamin, the former coordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department.

The group has been widely characterized as a cult. As *The Intercept*’s Mehdi Hasan recently noted, a State Department report found that MEK’s leader “fostered a cult of personality around himself” which had “alienated most Iranian expatriates, who assert they do not want to replace one objectionable regime for another.”

A RAND Corporation report also described MEK’s practices as “authoritarian [and] cultic.” The report cites Iranians who “likened the MEK to the Khmer Rouge and the Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas.”

The Justice Department documents reviewed by TYT show that Giuliani attended three meetings with NCRI since Trump’s inauguration. One meeting took place on February 10, 2017, and another on May 10, 2017; both included the same vague description: “to discuss the situation in Iran and the Middle East.”

A third meeting took place on February 27 of this year, “to discuss the protests in Iran.”

As for Bolton, he met with NCRI two times since Trump’s inauguration. One

meeting took place on April 13, 2017, “about the nuclear weapons program of Iran.” The other meeting was on August 2, 2017, and is described in vague terms: “Meeting [with] Mr. Bolton.”

After being shown the documents, Trita Parsi, president of the National Iranian American Council, told TYT, “This shows that it’s very difficult to take the Trump admin. seriously when he says he’s looking for diplomacy and a better deal. If Trump actually, genuinely, wants diplomacy, at the end of the day, he’s going to have a difficult time because his associates are so closely allied with the MEK, who are adamantly opposed.”

Nikki Haley, Trump’s U.N. ambassador, retweeted MEK’s official Twitter account in July.

Although Trump has said he is open to diplomacy with Iran and that he merely ended the Iran Deal in search of a “better deal,” administration officials like Bolton have advocated for regime change in Tehran.

In 2017, Bolton told a crowd of MEK members, “The declared policy of the United States should be the overthrow of the mullahs’ regime in Tehran.”

Bolton concluded the speech by promising regime change before 2019.

Giuliani has expressed similar sentiments. In March, he led a crowd of MEK members in chanting, “regime change.”

These may not be empty words. On Thursday, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that the Trump administration is preparing to bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities “as early as next month,” citing senior figures in the Turnbull government.

Asked about the Trump team’s interest in the group, Parsi told TYT, “MEK are valuable to them because they have training in sabotage, assassination, and terrorism. There’s no other Iranian opposition group that can provide this. It also provides them with a facade of claiming what they’re doing is actually supported by the Iranian people.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Why is MEK Group So Unpopular Among Iranians?

Babak Taghvaei

August 1, 2018

When the U.S. Department of State held a meeting in which Secretary of State Mike Pompeo discussed regime change in Iran with prominent Iranian opposition figures on July 22, the exiled Iranian political-militant organization Mojahedin-e Khalq's (MEK) was not invited. This can be attributed to MEK's unpopularity, not just among ordinary Iranians but rather among Iranian dissidents and opposition figures in the United States.

While MEK seems to be popular among some U.S. politicians after the group was delisted from terrorist lists, MEK remains unpopular among Iranians and in particular with the Kurds.

The assassination of ordinary citizens, playing a key role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, taking part in U.S. embassy hostage crisis, and providing security



services for Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein all contributed to the group being Iran's most hated political organization.

After ayatollahs forced MEK to stop its armed activity and boycotted its leaders from taking part in the 1981 presidential election, the group started carrying out a series of terrorist attacks. These activities finally forced the group into exile and made them the best military asset of Saddam Hussein during the second half of the Iran-Iraq war.

## **Providing Security Services for Saddam Hussein**

During the first half of Iran-Iraq war, MEK established intelligence cooperation with the Iraqi army. MEK's cooperation with Iraq became more intense in 1986 after French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac struck a deal with Tehran over the release of French hostages in exchange for the ceasing of French's technical support for Iraq's nuclear program. Part of the agreement was forcing MEK to leave France, where it has had its headquarters since 1981. Saddam Hussein invited MEK to relocate their headquarters to Iraq, where MEK formed the 7,000-member National Liberation Army (NLA), which acted as a part of the Iraqi army.

Saddam agreed to provide shelter for thousands of MEK members. MEK's leaders, including Massoud Rajavi, had taken part in the 1973 Arab Israeli war during which they gained experience of fighting in classic wars. This experience drew the attention of Saddam Hussein who then utilized MEK in operations against Iran.

## **Joint Operations with Iraqi Army**

Soon MEK took part in joint operations with the Iraqi army against Iran, starting with "Operation Aftab" (Sunshine) near Shoush in southeast Iran on 28 March 1988. According to MEK, the organization killed 3,500 Iranian soldiers and captured a further 417, while MEK only lost 123 of its people. The operation was successful in terms of occupation of parts of Iranian territory but had a negative effect on MEK's reputation. All Iranian opposition groups cut their ties with the group.

“Operation Chelcheragh” was the second major operation in which Iraqis used MEK’s forces against Iran. The operation was launched on June 18, 1988, with the key goal to occupy the Iranian border city Mehran and its oil fields by using Persian language speaking forces to penetrate into Iranian territory and control Kurdish villages in the region. The Iraqi army used 3,000 of MEK’s members during the operation.

Militants of three MEK battalions disguised themselves as Iranian army soldiers, which helped them to break Iran’s defensive line by killing and capturing dozens of their soldiers. Finally, MEK managed to successfully attack Mehran and occupy it in the morning of the next day.

On 20 July 1988, Iran and Iraq both accepted the UN Security Council resolution 598, calling for an immediate ceasefire between the two countries, the repatriation of war prisoners, and the withdrawal of troops. This quickly caused a halt to Iranian military operations with the idea that Iraq would also reduce its forces from the frontlines. However, just days before the official ceasefire, Saddam planned to launch an offensive to occupy as much as possible of Iran’s territory to have the upper hand during any diplomatic negotiations after the truce.

Because using Iraqi army troops to occupy Iran’s territory would breach the resolution, Iraq used militants of MEK for “Operation Forooghe Javidan” (Eternal Light), launched on July 25, 1988. MEK took part with almost 5,000 militants, who were heavily armed by the Iraqi army. During Operation Eternal Light, not a single Iraqi soldier accompanied MEK on the ground. Instead, Iraqi air forces provided significant help on the evening the operation was launched.

To foil any possible resistance of local Kurdish Peshmerga forces, Iraqi air forces dropped chemical bombs on four Kurdish villages in the Gilan-e Gharb county, killing hundreds of civilians and forcing the local Kurdish Peshmerga to leave the region precisely five days before the launch of Operation Eternal Light.

Five days later, the Iraqi army launched a deceptive offensive from the Khuzestan frontlines to draw the attention of Iranian armed forces away from

the western fronts. Although these helped MEK to successfully occupy Eslamabad-e Gharb in western Iran on the first day of the operation, they were slowed down by the Kurdish Peshmerga a day later. Kurdish forces managed to entrap MEK armored column behind Chahar-Zabar strait, miles before they reached Kermanshah. Hours later, Iranian armed forces launched the counter-offensive “Operation Mersad” on 26 July 1988.

As a result of this operation, almost 2,000 of MEK’s militants were killed, the Eslamabad-e Gharb was recaptured by Iran, and the remaining MEK militants were pushed back into Iraq.

MEK’s 1988 Eternal Light operation gave Iran’s Islamic regime and its dictator Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini an opportunity to justify the execution of almost 5,000 Iranian political prisoners. Only 1,400 of them were MEK members. The execution started as the retaliation of MEK’s failed military operation but also took the lives of people who did not support MEK or had opposite beliefs.

## **No Longer on Terror Lists but Still Unpopular**

In the course of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” in 2003, air forces of the U.S. and the U.K. bombed military camps of MEK and forced the group to surrender and hand over their arms.

After Operation Iraqi Freedom, MEK members and its leaders were on the edge of prosecution due to the crimes against humanity. Thanks to the generous financial support of Saudi Arabia, the group managed to pay for advocacy of the U.S., U.K., Canada, and other countries to be taken off terrorist lists.

MEK spends millions to hold annual rallies in Paris during which they pay Western politicians to give speeches and rent crowds of refugees and foreign students to play the role of Iranians. MEK also pays western journalists and news agencies to publish articles in support of the group to raise its popularity in the west. Despite these efforts, the Trump administration refuses to take MEK seriously and consider them a popular opposition group.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Meet MEK: The Terrorist Cult Supported by Trump Administration

Kaveh Mousavi

August 5, 2018

**B**ack in 2016 I wrote a piece on this weblog entitled US Politicians Should Stop Embracing the Authoritarian Terrorist Group, MEK, in which I attempted to warn US politicians of being close to People's Mujahedin of Iran, an extremist Islamist-Marxist group. Since then, two developments have moved to revisit this subject: (1) The US government has gotten much closer to this group and (2) I've read a book which has made me realize that they were far worse than what I imagined in my worst nightmares.

patheos

**In my 2016 piece, I first briefly introduced the group:**

What do Americans hate the most? It seems to be Islamic terror group and armed Marxists. The Islamists are the focus of the war on terror now and generally considered the greatest threat to US's in-

terests, and communists were the big enemy during the Cold War. Also, Saddam Hussein seems to be a great enemy of the US, considering how they went to two wars against him. Then why, one really needs to ask, US politicians who frequently warn against the dangers of Islamic and leftist extremism, endorse an authoritarian terrorist group that are Islamist and leftist militants at the same time, and fought loyally for Saddam Hussein? [...] I'm talking about MEK of course. Their name means People's Mujahedin of Iran. This group has an ideology which mixes radical Islamism and radical leftism. [...] This group is worse than the Islamic Republic. It's worse than radical extremist and conservative elements of the regime, let alone reformists and moderates. They're much more authoritarian, theocratic, and repressive than any regime in our entire history.

I think they are as bad North Korea's regime or Pol Pot's, as bad as Taliban and IS. The reason that my assessment of them has soured this much is a book called Masoud's Organization, written by Mohsen Zaal, a liberal belonging to the moderate Muslim movement, revealing the repugnant nature of this group. This book is only available in Persian, and it's entirely based on memos and observations by the former members who have fled it.

### **In my previous blogpost about the books, I mentioned the things that are bad about this group:**

They torture and kidnap their own members to force them to remain and not leave the group. They work in absolute secrecy and have zero transparency. They engage in a Stalinist-level cult of personality for their leaders. They have engaged in many political assassinations and terrorist bombings, one of which killed a group of American citizens. Their media is complete lies, propaganda which rivals the Nazi's. Not only it's cult of the personality, it spreads completely fabricated lies. [...] When Iran-Iraq War was happening, they defected Iran, joined forces with Saddam Hussein, and even helped him oppress the Kurdish people.

All of this is true, but what I missed was the terrifying proportion of how actually evil this group was. Let us take a look at things mentioned by Zaal in his book about the atrocities committed by them: All individuality is killed among members.

All value is given to following the leader, and not anything else. You should be completely and thoroughly committed to the leader. Your value is not determined based on your rank in the previous iterations of the group or your history of revolutionary struggles, but merely based on how loyal and close to the leaders you are.

No criticism or disagreement with the leadership is allowed, only absolute obedience. If you criticize the leadership, other members will curse at you or beat you up. As you have no individuality outside the leadership, no personal attribute is tolerated. One member, for examples, disfigures his face with a utility knife because his handsomeness is considered an obstacle to true devotion to the leader. Children receive no education except being indoctrinated to the cult's ideology. Members were completely cut off from the outside world with no phones, internet, or TV, and even reading books is frowned upon.

The members have absolutely no privacy. They're constantly monitored, even in showers and toilets, and their lockers have no locks. If you don't have a picture of the leader in your locker, the cult will be suspicious of you. Everything one writes is monitored. Upon joining the cult, all your personal documents (e.g. passport) are confiscated. Members avoid talking to each other, because every word can be used against you later.

Martyrdom is encouraged, and all martyrs are valued because they gave up their lives for the leaders (not the cause). All members are encouraged to commit suicide, whether if they are arrested by the police (Iranian, Iraqi, or European police), or as a part of protests (self-immolation to protest the arrest of Maryam Rajavi). All of these show that they don't consider human life valuable in the slightest.

All sexuality is oppressed. Uniforms are mandatory, and women's uniforms include hijab. All cosmetics and accessories are banned. Actions such as combing your hair, removing facial hair for women, wearing loose shoes, rolling your sleeves for women, and having a hand in the pockets of one's pants are considered "indecent" and "immodest" and punished. Even when it comes to uniforms, wearing new uniforms instead of old tattered ones is considered "bourgeois" and is frowned upon.

Men and women are not allowed to shake hands. They are also not allowed to have eye contact when speaking to each other. Men are not allowed to ever sit next to a woman, especially in a car. MEK's paranoia regarding sexuality goes to ridiculous extremes: If a woman is sitting on a chair, no man is allowed to sit on the same chair after her unless some time passes and her body's warmth leaves the chair.

Of course, these limits are not enforced upon Masoud Rajavi, the leader. All MEK women are "his wives", and he has sex with many of them. These acts are called "salvation dance" and they are defined not as sexual but spiritual and religious acts.

One way to enforce this culture is "confession", sessions where people gather and lament their own lack of commitment to the leadership and the idea of revolution. In these sessions people humiliate themselves and others, crying and stating that they deserve to be executed. If you don't come up with an adequate thing to confess, you will be verbally and at times physically attacked by others, who think you are hiding your sins.

Being a religious cult, prayers and fasting are mandatory, and men are required to have mustaches. More importantly, gradually the leaders are elevated to the level of holy figures in the Shia religion. It seems that in recent years he has gone a step further and has called himself the 12th imam, the Islamic messiah, and that is why he has disappeared from the public since 2003 (if the real is not that he's dead, at least).

Not even the slightest of infractions are tolerated. Even an anti-Rajavi graffiti on the toilet wall is investigated by comparing it to the handwriting of people and imprisonment and torture.

This culture results in an event where all married couples are forced to divorce, because the love of a spouse lessens from the love of their leader and they should have only one love, the leader, no other. The next logical step is also taken: all children are taken away from their parents because parental love dilutes the love of the leader. When a woman cries as her infant child is being taken away, she is punished for her lack of obedience and exhibiting sadness at the order of the leader.

Likewise, having friends is frowned upon and people are discouraged from befriending each other. People are used to spy on one another and this leads to an atmosphere where everyone is suspicious of every body else. Even having pictures of loved ones is considered bad, and members are encouraged to trade in the pictures of their family for pictures of the Rajavis.

Disobedient members are punished in the most gruesome ways. Imprisonment and torture is rampant, members are tortured by being beaten down or whipped. Some people are kicked on the head with boots. Sleep deprivation, mock executions, and rape threats are also another torture method. One woman was forced, under torture, to confess in public that she was raped by the Iranian police, and then to confess that she wants to have sex with men. When Masoud Rajavi was consolidating his leadership position, he tortured one of the other leaders by cutting off one of his fingers, and then killed him.

If you are accused of a crime, denying it is fruitless because you are just assumed to be guilty, and you will be tortured and put under solitary confinement under metal shelter buildings. You will not be freed unless you confess. Some people were kept there for eight years. There are information of about three people who were killed under torture. Some prisoners were handed to Saddam's regime. Sometimes people were taken to the border with Iran and were told they can return to Iran, but once they began leaving they were shot in the back and killed.

I hope that you can now understand why the idea of MEK being propped up by the US regime to destabilize Iran is so scary to me as an Iranian, and I hope you can see why I'd never even consider supporting them, because they are worse than even the worst elements of the Islamic Republic, let alone its moderates and reformists.

MEK has always been supported by the US, but it has never been so close to an administration as it is now close to the Trump's regime. Among people who were very close to the MEK, one, John Bolton, is now Trump's National Security Advisor, one, Mike Pompeo, is Secretary of State, and one, Rudy Giuliani, is the president's personal lawyer. These officials have not been shy about flaunting their alliance with the MEK, as Pompeo addressed them, and

Giuliani spat on a copy of the Iran Deal in their conference.

Trita Parsi summarizes the closeness of the MEK and US administrations:

Given the MEK's long record of terrorism, human rights abuses, and murder of US citizens, one would think that senior American officials like Giuliani, Pompeo, and Bolton wouldn't go near the MEK, let alone fraternize with its members or take its fees. But when it comes to Iran, the usual rules don't apply.

Even when the MEK was on the terrorist list, the group operated freely in Washington. Its office was in the National Press Club building, its Norooz receptions on Capitol Hill were well attended by lawmakers and Hill staff alike, and plenty of congressmen and women from both parties spoke up regularly in the MEK's favor. In the early 2000s, in a move that defied both logic and irony, Fox News even hired a senior MEK lobbyist as an on-air terrorism commentator.

Al-Qaeda may treat its members better, but rest assured, neither al-Qaeda nor ISIS has ever rented office space in Washington, held fundraisers with lawmakers, or offered US officials speaking fees to appear at their gatherings. [...] At the heart of this improbable-seeming affinity lies a sense of common interest between these anti-Iran fundamentalist, pro-war elements in Washington and Rajavi's terrorist militia. The US hawks have no problem with the MEK's terrorist capacities because the group's utility is beyond dispute—after all, NBC reported that Israel's spy agency, the Mossad, relied on MEK operatives to assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists during Iran and Israel's secret dirty war between 2010 and 2012.

It's time for US liberals, progressives, and anyone who supports the idea of human rights to demand action against this terrorist group. The real reason that the Trump regime has been able to freely paternalize with MEK is the fact that there is radio silence in western media regarding them. It's time to protest and demand the US to stop sponsoring this dangerous cult.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Democratic senators ask DOJ to examine Giuliani's foreign work

Marianne Levine

August 6, 2018

Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico and six fellow Democratic senators asked the Justice Department on Wednesday to review whether President Donald Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani is complying with federal foreign lobbying laws.

POLITICO

"We request that the Department of Justice review whether he is in compliance with [the Foreign Agents Registration Act], including whether he has an obligation to register any undisclosed political activities, has any delinquent filings, or has any deficiencies or abnormalities in his registration statements," the senators wrote in the letter, addressed to Assistant Attorney General John C. Demers.

In addition to Udall, the letter was signed by Sens. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Sheldon



Rudy Giuliani has worked on behalf of clients in Brazil and Colombia, and has represented Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, an Iranian resistance group, according to reports. (Charles Krupa/AP Photo)

## Democratic senators ask DOJ to examine Giuliani's foreign work

By MARIANNE LEVINE | 01/06/2019 07:47 AM EST

Whitehouse (D-R.I.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and Dick Durbin (D-Ill.).

In response to the letter, Giuliani told POLITICO in a text “nothing done to influence U.S. government ever. Do they think I’m a fool like them. All of it security and law enforcement.” Giuliani added that none of his work “implicates FARA.”

The letter comes after POLITICO and other news outlets reported last week that Giuliani

received a fee from Freeh Group International Solutions, run by Clinton FBI Director Louis Freeh, for a letter he sent to the president of Romania in August that criticized the country’s anti-corruption measures. Giuliani’s position in his letter contradicted that of the State Department.

“This activity raises both the question of whether Mr. Giuliani may have attempted to influence U.S. policy and what the U.S. government’s true position is, given his role as the President’s personal attorney and public spokesman,” the senators wrote, in reference to the letter to the Romanian president.

Giuliani said his work for Freeh was “clearly outside of FARA” because the firm is an American entity and was the one that paid him. It’s unclear who the Freeh Group is working for.

In addition to his work for the Freeh Group, Giuliani has also worked on behalf of clients in Brazil and Colombia, and has represented Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or MEK, an Iranian resistance group, according to The Washington Post. In Wednesday’s letter, the senators write that Giuliani is mentioned “in nearly every article” describing MEK’s lobbying effort to be removed from the State



Department's Foreign Terrorist Organization list.

“Given Mr. Giuliani’s receipt of significant payment from the MEK and simultaneous advocacy on behalf of that group and its objectives, his actions may require registration under FARA,” the senators wrote.

The letter comes at a time when there is substantial scrutiny around foreign lobbying, as former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort goes to trial this month for allegedly failing to register as a foreign agent for lobbying work he did on behalf of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and his political allies, among other allegations.

Members of Congress have also recently introduced legislation to crack down on foreign lobbying. Warren introduced a bill in August that would stop Americans from lobbying on behalf of foreign governments and companies. In addition, Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) and Rep. Mike Johnson (R-La.) introduced legislation last year intended to toughen up requirements for foreign lobbying.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## It's Not Just Bolton and Giuliani: Trump Team's Links to Iran 'Cult' Run Deep

Ken Klippenstein

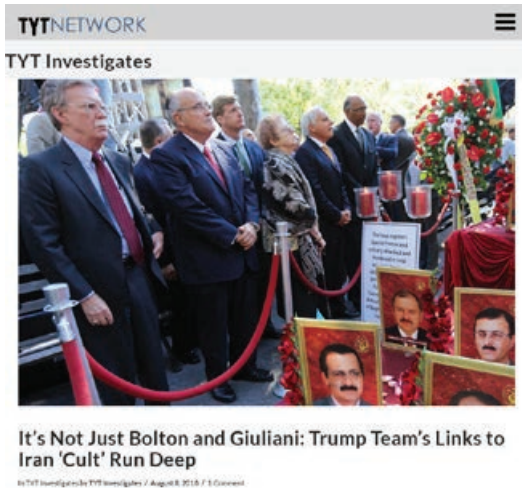
August 8, 2018

Federal documents show MEK met with top Trump officials in addition to National Security Adviser John Bolton and Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, seen here honoring slain MEK members at a 2013 UN rally.

President Trump is known for his tough talk on terrorism, having gone as far as threatening family members of suspected terrorists. But his administration has numerous ties to a group that was until recently on the State Department terror list, federal documents show.

TYT previously reported that the group, People's Mujahedin of Iran, also known as the MEK, the acronym for its Persian name, conducted a combined total of at least five meetings in 2017 and 2018 with John Bolton prior to his appointment as Trump's national security adviser and with Rudy Giuliani,





Trump’s personal lawyer. Bolton was a vocal advocate for resuming sanctions against Iran, which Trump did shortly after Bolton’s arrival.

The MEK is an Iranian exile group that fled Iran following the 1979 revolution and has since opposed Tehran, at times violently, and at times with backing from American politicians of both parties. Until 2012, it was designated by the US State

Department as a terrorist organization.

Disclosure forms filed by the MEK with the Justice Department show that its connections to Trump’s circle go well beyond Bolton and Giuliani. The group has had previously unreported dealings in the last two years with at least four high-profile foreign-policy figures whose connections to Trump include a lead role in his transition and advising him on Iran policy.

(MEK payments to Giuliani and Trump Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, among other Republicans, have been previously reported.)

Perhaps the most controversial of Trump’s associates to have met with the MEK is Walid Phares, who served as Trump’s adviser on counterterrorism and the Middle East during his presidential campaign. This was hardly a symbolic post; Phares was compensated \$13,000 per month by the campaign. Phares has come under criticism for Islamophobic remarks. For example, Phares has said that Muslims in the U.S. intend to take over American institutions and “are here to spread Sharia.”

Phares has also claimed that the Obama administration and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton were in league with the Muslim Brotherhood. In October of 2016, Phares tweeted, “The triangle Clintonmachine-Iranregime-MuslimBrotherhood has unleashed a coordinated propaganda offensive against

@realDonaldTrump worldwide.”

Phares’s fiery rhetoric about Islamism doesn’t appear to apply to the MEK, itself an overtly Islamist group.

The Justice Department documents show that Phares met with the MEK on two separate occasions after Trump’s electoral victory in November 2016. Like many of the filings international advocacy groups are required to submit about their activities in the US, MEK filings tend to be broad and vague. One document reports a January 12, 2017, meeting, little more than a week before Trump’s inauguration, “to discuss the situation in Iran and the Middle East.” Another filing describes an October 10, 2017, meeting “to discuss human rights situation in Iran.”

Though the documents do not make clear what exactly was discussed, Phares, like the MEK, has called for US-backed regime change in Iran.

Kenneth Blackwell, who oversaw domestic issues for the Trump transition team and later served on Trump’s voter fraud committee, met with the MEK on October 3, 2017, one document shows, “to discuss the United Nations resolution censuring human rights abuses in Iran.” At the time of the meeting, Blackwell was still on Trump’s voter fraud committee, which was active between May 11, 2017, and January 3, 2018.

Another Justice Department filing shows Blackwell served as a panelist on a discussion organized by the MEK on December 1, 2017, at the National Press Club in Washington. The panel discussion was titled, “Iran: Where Mass Murderers Rule.”

Another person who met with the MEK is former Bush Attorney General Michael Mukasey, a longtime law partner of Giuliani. Mukasey’s son, Marc Mukasey, was reportedly on Trump’s shortlist to replace Manhattan US Attorney Preet Bharara. Both Marc and Michael Mukasey served on Giuliani’s campaign advisory committees.

The documents show that Michael Mukasey met with the MEK at least twice after Trump’s inauguration. One meeting, on May 10, 2017, involved both

Michael Mukasey and Giuliani, “to discuss the situation in Iran and the Middle East.” The other meeting took place on January 23, 2018, and is described only as “to discuss Iran.”

Then there’s Michael Ledeen, a scandal-plagued figure who co-wrote a book about radical Islam with Michael Flynn just prior to Flynn’s brief stint as Trump’s national security adviser. Ledeen has figured in some of the most notorious foreign-policy incidents in modern American history, including the Iran-Contra scandal under Reagan and false intelligence about yellowcake uranium in the run-up to the Iraq War.

In the debate prior to the Iraq invasion, Ledeen wrote, “One can only hope that we turn the [Mid-East] region into a cauldron, and faster, please. If ever there were a region that richly deserved being cauldronized, it is the Middle East today.” More recently, Ledeen has said that Iran supports Al-Qaeda.

The documents show Ledeen met with the MEK at least twice since Trump’s inauguration: Once on January 30, 2017, and again on April 19, 2018; both times “to discuss the situation in Iran and the Middle East.”

The documents were filed officially by a France-based group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, widely understood as a MEK front organization.

Despite its support among both Republicans and Democrats, the MEK remains controversial. In the 40-plus years since its creation, the MEK allegedly has killed several American servicemembers and contractors, attempted to assassinate a top U.S. general, and tried to kidnap the U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur II.

The Clinton State Department removed the group from its terror list in 2012 following an intense lobbying push, including by Giuliani. In recent years, Iran hawks have warmed to the MEK, which has long called for regime change in Iran.

Notwithstanding the group’s support in Washington, human rights groups remain skeptical.

Human Rights Watch’s Sarah Leah Whitson, director of its Middle East and North Africa division, told TYT, “We have documented very serious abuses by the MEK against its own members, including the forced detainment and torture of dissident voices at MEK camps in Iraq.”

“In most of these cases, the MEK sought to punish with physical and psychological abuse individuals who wanted to leave the organization,” Whitson said.

Unsurprisingly, MEK has been described by many, including the Rand Corporation, as a “cult.”

Asked about the Trump team’s links to the group, Whitson told TYT, “We have repeatedly raised our concerns with American officials who have received funds from the MEK, including for example Mr. Giuliani.”

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■ Access the article from [here](#).



## False Flag Op In Albania Would Drive A Wedge Between The EU And Iran

Anne and Massoud Khodabandeh

August 30, 2018

Lobe  
Log

President Trump's floundering Iran policy was firmed up earlier this month when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced a new 'Iran Action Group'. According to Pompeo, "The Iran Action Group will be responsible [for] directing, reviewing, and coordinating all aspects of the State Department's Iran-related activity, and will report directly to me."

As the name indicates, action rather than diplomacy now tops the State Department's agenda toward Iran. Action that will surely include increased sanctions, economic warfare, cyber warfare, inciting protest, and very possibly support for terrorist groups. Not a new repertoire. But Iran has proven remarkably vigilant and resilient in withstanding all these pressures, fending off various terrorist groups on its borders, some cities, and even an attack on the Majlis (parliament). More recently, attempts to sub-

vert economic protests in the country have come to nothing. Other means are called for.

As America pressures the European Union to line up behind its sanctions regime and end trade with Iran, there are indications that this could open another front for confronting Iran. The question for America's anti-Iran pundits currently is how to engineer distance between Europe and Iran. One way would be if it could be demonstrated that Iranian terrorism has reached Europe itself, a theme that Pompeo himself addresses at virtually every Iran-related opportunity.

While rational observers recognise that any such activity would be political suicide for Iran, we are clearly not living in rational times. There are signs that the groundwork for a covert false-flag operation have been in place for some time that would blame Iran for an atrocity conducted outside its borders.

Such a possibility was hinted at in June when an Iranian diplomat was arrested in Germany over an alleged bomb plot on the eve of President Rouhani's visit. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted "how convenient." Iran claimed that the Belgian couple found to be behind the fake plot were Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) activists. The target for the bombing was the MEK rally in Paris which would then presumably be blamed on Iran. How convenient indeed.

That the MEK is named in this way is no surprise. While other terrorist groups have been contained by Iran, MEK has proven tenacious, due in main to the support it receives from Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the U.S. This is also due to its cult conditions which enslave and brainwash its members. But the fact that MEK is now based in Albania, far away from Iran's border, might have doomed the group to obscurity if MEK's violent regime change agenda didn't so closely coincide with the desires of hawks in the Trump administration.

Trump, deliberately or unwittingly, has surrounded himself with MEK supporters. John Bolton, National Security Advisor, is a long-time MEK advocate and Rudy Giuliani, currently tackling Trump's legal problems, has regularly spoken at MEK rallies. Now with former CIA man Pompeo as Secretary



of State and taking a hard-line regime-change stance in all but words, all that all that remains is for an action plan to be put in place.

It could be that this is already taking shape in Albania where the MEK has deliberately curated a false narrative through its own websites that Iran is sending agents to attack and kill its members. This narrative is then repeated as established fact by political supporters and paid advocates.

In July, Pompeo repeated ‘news’ of the alleged bomb plot and also referenced the MEK-manufactured allegation that two retired Iranian journalists had been sent by Iran to conduct terrorism against them in Albania. It was MEK itself that falsely tipped off police to arrest the two innocent men. Building on this, Raymond Tanter, part of a cabal of mostly ex-CIA and former military officials who advocate for MEK, inserted this false information into a long article promoting the group MEK as bringers of peace and democracy to Iran. Nothing could be further from the truth.

MEK has a long history of covert as well as overt activities aimed at regime change against Iran. Over the years, when events were blamed on Iran, MEK often insinuated itself in various ways—as it did, for instance, in the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. After extensive investigation, the primary testimony implicating Iran’s leadership came from four high-ranking intelligence officers from MEK—specifically, Hadi Roshan Ravan, the chief witness who not coincidentally also served as the head of MEK intelligence. In 2013, Israel arrested a Swedish Iranian man, Ali Mansouri, who “confessed” to be spying for Iran in Tel Aviv. He turned out to be an MEK member. MEK’s role in publicizing intelligence on Iran’s nuclear program and alleged complicity with Israel in the murder of Iranian nuclear scientists is widely known. Whether or not MEK was directly involved in many of such activities or not, its propagandizing role is indisputable.

Since arriving in Albania between 2013 and 2016, MEK has already shown itself to be aggressive, criminal, and dangerous. Recently a scandal erupted after a British Channel 4 film crew, headed by prominent journalist Lindsey Hilsum, was assaulted by MEK operatives while filming outside the MEK’s closed camp in Manez, Albania. A few days later, Aaron Merat, a journalist with The Guardian, was also subjected to an assault by MEK operatives

during his investigations. MEK accused them of being “agents of the Iranian regime.”

This news, shocking as it is, did not find an audience outside Albania. So far, so local. But it demonstrated the ease and impunity with which MEK uses violence when the outside world encroaches on its secrecy. Albanians were even more shocked that their security services tried to hide these events.

Interestingly the group’s self-portrayal of victimhood largely serves its own internal dynamics. MEK moved 2000+ members to a closed camp in Manez to prevent more members leaving the group. MEK leaders claim that Iran has sent various intelligence agents to Albania plot against them and kill them and the camp is their only protection. While this serves to frighten its own members and stiffen their thirty-year resolve to continue their struggle, it also fits the kind of false narrative that leads to the kind of false-flag operations that could be blamed on Iran.

Former CIA Director Pompeo’s Iran Action Group is a sub-group in the State Department answering only to him. This also favors the kind of covert operation with which the MEK is only too willing and able to engage. Worryingly, the attacks on foreign journalists could serve to escalate and accelerate secret plans already in place for a false-flag operation in Albania which would be blamed on Iran. The first victims would be MEK members. The next targets could be Albanian. And this time, in order to convince Europe that Iran is a dangerous sponsor of terrorism, people would die.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Who are the MEK? How One Iranian Group Lobbied Itself From Terrorist to Freedom Fighter

Ty Joplin

September 13, 2018

A little ways outside the center of Tirana, Albania lies a military-style base surrounded by high walls and tight security.

What makes the compound one of the most unique in the world, is that its walls may be keeping its inhabitants in, rather than keeping any intruders out. Inside are thousands of members of the Mujahideen al-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian organization that was deemed a terror group by much of the world, only to be quietly re-marketed as a peaceful, democratic organization.

Now, it is considered a vital strategic partner by U.S. President Donald Trump and his foreign policy team who hope that the MEK will one day storm Tehran, overthrow the Ayatollah's regime and take the reins of power.

Who are the MEK? How One Iranian Group Lobbied Itself From Terrorist to Freedom Fighter

## Who are the MEK? How One Iranian Group Lobbied Itself From Terrorist to Freedom Fighter

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MEK leader Maryam Rajavi (AFP/FILE)

has shifted its own identity so many times that former members cannot recognize the group as a coherent body anymore. Tightly controlled by its leader, Maryam Rajavi, many who have studied the group call it a cult. Iranians call them hypocrites for becoming a pro-Saddam militia that killed thousands of Iranians in the 1980s. Trump's White House call them the last viable hope of a Free Iran.

To understand the MEK, Al Bawaba spoke with Massoud Khodabandeh, who was one of the groups most senior leaders for decades, before he escaped and renounced what it had become.

### From Students to Guerrilla Fighters

Formed in 1965 by a group of students from Tehran University, the MEK was organized against the rule of the Shah, whose government was installed by the U.K. and U.S. to ensure Iranian oil flowed to the West. Its left-leaning members initially mixed a Marxist understanding of history with Islam, but were targeted by the Shah's secret intelligence, the SAVAK.

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“There is a viable opposition to the rule of the Ayatollahs,” Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton proudly announced to a conference hall full of MEK members bussed in to the annual gathering from their compound. “And that opposition is centered in this room today.”

But who are the MEK? No one seems to know.

That question is nearly impossible to answer, not least because the MEK

Many of its members were jailed and executed, and the group underwent a series of internal rifts. Eventually, Massoud Rajavi rose to lead the group, and the MEK allied itself with the revolutionary cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini, who was quickly positioning himself as the top contender for the Shah’s job as ruler of Iran.

Khomeini, a far-right Islamist, graciously accepted the help of the MEK, but had no plans to share power with them. When he did seize power in the 1979 Revolution, he disavowed the MEK and its leadership, driving them out of the political scene. They quickly transformed into guerrilla fighters battling the Ayatollah regime inside Iran.

In June 1981, the MEK killed 70 high-ranking members of the Ayatollah’s Islamic Republican Party. The bombing also reportedly injured Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who is now the current ruler of Iran, permanently affecting his right arm.

Then two months later, they bombed the offices of Mohammad-Javad Bahonar, who was Prime Minister, and Mohammad-Ali Rajai, who was the president at the time, killing both.

Khomeini then set his sights on expelling the MEK from Iran; most of the members fled to Iraq while its leadership went to Paris.

In Iraq, Saddam Hussein immediately found a use for the MEK, and took them under his wing. He allowed them to build a new base for themselves called Camp Ashraf just north of Baghdad in 1986, and began funding the group. Saddam was fighting a brutal war with Iran at the time, and deployed the MEK as a militia against Iran’s army and its Revolutionary Guards.

Under the command of Saddam and Massoud Rajavi, the MEK killed thousands of Iranians and then was used to violently suppress Iraqi Kurds, something Khodabandeh thought utterly contrary to the original ideals of the group, which he thought to be emancipatory.

“I had joined MEK with idealistic aims and revolutionary ideas,” Khodaban-

deh told Al Bawaba in an interview. “I was a teenager then.”

“After years, especially after seeing the situation in Iraq and the role of MEK in Saddam’s army, it was obvious that not only had that aim gone out of the window, but the force was now a force for suppression.”

As one of its senior members who helped create international branches in Europe and lead its security, Khodabandeh thought he could convince the rest of the leadership to stick to its founding principles.

“I tried for years to somehow influence the direction with no success whatsoever,” he said.

By the late 1980s, the group was universally reviled in Iran for its role in the Iran-Iraq war, and was firmly part of Saddam’s network of militias he controlled. Its goal of revolution in Tehran seemed distant and abstract compared to the funds and arms it was getting for killing Iranians and Kurds.

Because of its loyalty to Saddam, and its assassination of six American citizens, including three members of the military, the U.S. designated the MEK a Foreign Terror Organization (FTO) in 1997, and much of the world followed suit shortly thereafter.

## **How the MEK Got Off the Terror List**

For most organizations, to be deemed a terrorist group spells doom for its ability to network and function internationally. They are either treated as pariahs, or actively targeted by states to be eliminated.

The MEK stands as one of only groups who successfully lobbied itself off the list, paying out millions of dollars in a tri-pronged campaign that included donating to influential U.S. politicians, saturating U.S. magazines with pro-MEK advertisements and convincing the U.S. military and political establishment that it was an asset rather than a security threat.

Its removal from the terror list began in 2003, when the U.S. invaded and occupied Iraq, ousting Saddam Hussein and battling against his militias. The

MEK was perceived as just another pro-Saddam militant organization, and were targeted as such by the U.S.

But then something strange happened.

After a brief period of conflict, the MEK called for a ceasefire and began discussions with U.S. officials about its status. According to a RAND report, the MEK's negotiators convinced their U.S. counterparts that they had actually offered to help fight on the U.S.' behalf before the invasion and that its members were U.S.-educated.

Both were false. They also told the U.S. officials that they hadn't killed any U.S. forces, even though the MEK had killed at least one member of the special forces. With limited knowledge of the group, the U.S. officials were convinced and accepted the MEK's terms of the ceasefire, which included the group keeping its weapons.

The MEK then quickly built trust with the U.S., and was treated less like a terror organization and more like a oppressed minority. For their part, the MEK quickly ditched its friendship with Saddam and replaced him with the U.S., who was busy fighting an insurgency and struggling to establish a new government in Iraq.

Despite being listed still as a terror group, then-Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld moved to grant the MEK the status of "protected persons" under the Fourth Geneva Convention in June 2004, effectively placing it under the protective custody of the U.S. The U.N., International Red Cross and Rumsfeld's own department disagreed with the decision, but it was final. Rather than prisoners of war to be prosecuted, the MEK had been granted special privileges.

The U.S. also provided the MEK with its own office space in a forward operating base near Camp Ashraf; a move that further signaled the U.S.' comfort with the MEK. They also openly prosthelytized to U.S. troops and formal requests to stop them were denied.

The MEK then set about the task of convincing U.S. policy makers that they

could be a valuable asset in the ongoing geopolitical struggle against Iran, who was considered one of the key players in the so-called ‘Axis of Evil.’

## **A Remarkable Lobbying Effort**

In Washington D.C., the MEK went about becoming a permanent fixture in the social and political spheres. According to Trita Parsi, the founder and current president of the National Iranian American Council, the MEK gained the favor of many policy makers.

“Even when the MEK was on the terrorist list, the group operated freely in Washington. Its office was in the National Press Club building, its Norooz receptions on Capitol Hill were well attended by lawmakers and Hill staff alike, and plenty of congressmen and women from both parties spoke up regularly in the MEK’s favor. In the early 2000s, in a move that defied both logic and irony, Fox News even hired a senior MEK lobbyist as an on-air terrorism commentator,” Parsi writes.

At a time when anti-terror rhetoric was reaching fever levels, and the U.S. was passing highly controversial laws that put the U.S. in a kind of secure, lock-down mode, with warrantless wiretapping, systematic searches, surveillance programs and clandestine torture sites becoming the norm, the MEK was in good standing with the U.S., as terrorist groups go. Although some in the Department of State wanted them shipped back to Iran, and recognized that many of their members were responsible for war crimes, officials in the Department of Defense sheltered them and began using them as a tool against Iran.

The MEK also wanted to win over the hearts and minds of everyday Americans, who likely had not heard of the small, nascent group but may have been concerned about peace and democracy, which the MEK now claimed were their guiding principles.

The group spent hundreds of thousands of dollars from 2005-2012 taking out ads in major newspapers, including The New York Times and the Washington Post. Their ads were designed to look more like petitions or news stories, and they blended into everyday reading.



“35,000 Iranians Rally in Brussels,” one advertisement headline read, seeking to show that the group had popular support. “250 Parliamentarians, 50 Jurists Condemn . . . Conspiracies against Iranian Mojahedin in Iraq, Call for Removal of ‘Terror’ Tag from PMOI,” read another.

One full-page ad in *The New York Times* called for the group to be returned to Camp Ashraf after many had been forcibly transferred to the less-secure Camp Liberty.

### **(MEK’s ad in *The New York Times*)**

To be sure, the group was under attack by Iraqi forces during the mid-2000s; tens of them died and hundreds were wounded in a series of strikes against Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty.

The MEK paid for a vast array of U.S. bipartisan support. Among its public allies, even when it was a terror group, was R. James Woolsey and Porter J. Goss, both former CIA heads, former president George W. Bush’s homeland security chief Tom Ridge, Obama’s first national security advisor, James Jones, former New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani, popular Vermont Democrat Howard Dean. Its other allies included Democrat Congressman John Lewis, former FBI Director Louis Freeh, former Representative Patrick Kennedy and retired General Wesley Clark among others.

### **The ad campaigns and tireless lobbying efforts worked.**

In Sept 2012, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the group was coming off the terror list. A Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher praised the decision, saying “The lives of hundreds of the M.E.K. misplaced persons could well be saved as result.” He also insisted that the group seeks “a secular, peaceful, and democratic government,” in Iran.

The MEK had convinced enough powerful people that they were a genuinely potent opposition force that could offset the power of the Ayatollah’s regime in Iran.

The de-listing also open the way for them to expand their lobbying efforts in

the U.S., which they have done. Rudy Giuliani regularly attends their annual gatherings, getting paid tens of thousands of dollars to do so, as does current National Security Advisor John Bolton, who was reportedly paid at least \$180,000 by the group in 2017. Other politicians donated to include Barack Obama and John McCain.

With U.S. help, the MEK were lifted out of Iraq and into a new base in Tirana, Albania where they reside now.

Now that the average age of the MEK's members is around 55 or 60, "it is fair to say the members have nowhere to go but to stay," and watch the organization slowly fade away, Khodabandeh said.

"The only alternative for them is suicide. Especially the ones who have joined following an idea."

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Iranians respond to MEK troll farm: #YouAreBots

Al-Monitor

September 17, 2018

The exiled Iranian opposition group Mujahdeen-e-Khalq is allegedly pumping out tweets in support of overthrowing the Islamic Republic and amplifying them with bots, while legitimate Iranian accounts are suspended.

Anyone who has been active on Twitter and tweeted about Iran in the past year can attest that the online debate over events in the country has taken a dramatic turn for the hostile.

Many Iran observers are perplexed by the sharp increase in vitriol spewed at journalists and analysts. Some speculate that regime-change advocates were encouraged by US President Donald Trump's electoral victory and are seizing their chance to influence the online debate about Iran while there is a sympathetic ear in the White House. Others felt that the nationwide protests in January were a turning

AL-MONITOR 

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point in the Islamic Republic and that the public discourse had moved on from Reformism and into much starker choices. However, an investigative report by Al Jazeera has shed light on a third reason for the spike in Twitter activity: what many Iran observers had suspected from the outset, a Twitter troll factory meant to influence the already contentious debate over Iran.

According to the Al Jazeera report, the exiled Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) has set up a center at its headquarters in Albania, where 1,000-1,500 “online soldiers” are instructed to promote hashtags in support of overthrowing the Islamic Republic. Two former MEK members told Al Jazeera that they would receive specific daily orders on what to highlight regarding Iran and also which specific Iran analysts to attack on social media, often sharing the White House’s critical messages against Iran and amplifying their tweets via bots.

In response to the report, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif tweeted to Twitter co-founder and CEO Jack Dorsey, “Hello @Jack. Twitter

has shuttered accounts of real Iranians, incl TV presenters & students, for supposedly being part of an ‘influence op’. How about looking at actual bots in Tirana used to prop up ‘regime change’ propaganda spewed out of DC? #YouAreBots”

In August, Twitter claimed to have closed 284 accounts originating in Iran for “engaging in coordinated manipulation.” One popular account from inside Iran that was shut down then belonged to SeyedMousavi7, who shortly afterward released a video through friends saying that he is a university student and had only sought to present a different narrative of Iran. Another belonged to Iran’s English-language news channel Press TV journalist Waqar Rizvi. A Sept. 17 special Etemaad report described the apparent discrepancy in Twitter’s actions as “strictness with Iran, silence in the face of fake anti-Iranian accounts.”

Iranian lawmaker Amirhossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi also tweeted to Dorshey, “You suspended my official account as MP of Iran for my violation of not determined twitter rules, but why you have not blocked bots of MEK in Tirana, a group that killed 17000 Iranian people, used to prop up ‘regime change’ propaganda? #YouAreBots” The figure is a reference to a bombing campaign by the MEK after losing a power struggle with members of the Islamic Republican Party after the 1979 revolution.

Meanwhile, there has been some criticism of Zarif’s call for Twitter to shut down the reported MEK accounts. Britain-based Manoto, an outlet broadly viewed as sympathetic to the monarchist camp, told its viewers that the foreign minister “described [all] opponents of the Islamic Republic as bots.”

Other social media users also brought up one irony of the Twitter battle: that the microblogging platform, with which the foreign minister, the president and the supreme leader all have either verified accounts or unofficial accounts that are run through their offices, is still officially blocked in Iran.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## As Twitter Purges Real Iranians, US-Backed MEK Cult Revealed to Run Anti-Iran Troll Farm

Elliott Gabriel

September 19, 2018

While “actual” Iranians face social media bans, countless bots and anti-government accounts belonging to the US-backed former terror group, MEK, have been permitted to run rampant across Twitter and other platforms.



**TIRANA, ALBANIA** – Iran is once again being subject to double standards as part of an ongoing effort to deprive it of access to media platforms where it can influence audiences overseas – in this case, on Twitter.

The effort has seen hundreds of Iranian accounts allegedly tied to Iranian pro-government “propaganda” efforts subject to a massive cull across platforms owned by Twitter Inc., Facebook Inc., and Google parent company Alphabet Inc.

Those purged from the platforms include profiles, channels, and accounts belonging to Iranian nationals who have been accused of involvement in alleged “coordinated manipulation” of information related to Middle Eastern events and “divisive social commentary.”

On YouTube, this has included accounts belonging to media entities owned by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, the state media corporation that operates such channels as the English-language PressTV and Spanish-language HispanTV.

Yet while “actual” Iranians face bans from social media, countless bots and anti-government accounts belonging to U.S.-backed opposition groups posing as the “Iranian people resistance” have been permitted to run rampant across the web.

**#YouAreBots**

Last month, nearly 800 accounts based in Iran were suspended by Twitter for allegedly violating the network’s policies, per an investigation alongside “industry peers” that allowed the social media giants a better “understanding of these [Iranian] networks.” Twitter hasn’t been forthcoming about the methods it used to investigate the networks tied to such alleged “Iranian interference,” but users including patriotic university student SeyedMousavi7 and Press TV journalist Waqar Rizvi were among those suspended.

<https://twitter.com/irmilitaryvlog/status/1032691364398555137>

On Sunday, Foreign Minister Zarif directly addressed Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey in a tweet aiming to highlight the contradiction:

Hello @Jack. Twitter has shuttered accounts of real Iranians, incl TV presenters & students, for supposedly being part of an ‘influence op’. How about looking at actual bots in Tirana used to prop up ‘regime change’ propaganda spewed out of DC? #YouAreBots”

Another tweet by Iranian legislator Amirhossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi addressed to the Twitter chief said:

You suspended my official account as MP of Iran for my violation of not determined twitter rules, but why you have not blocked bots of MEK in Tirana, a group that killed 17000 Iranian people, used to prop up ‘regime change’ propaganda? #YouAreBots”

The tweet followed a report by Al Jazeera English which detailed how monitors and researchers were able to pinpoint a sharp uptick in a trend of actual social media manipulation.

## **The Wizard Behind the “Resistance” Curtain – Maryam Rajavi and the MEK Cult**

The report connected the growing phenomenon to the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) or People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), a cultish group of Iranian exiles that was listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. until 2012 and have been based in a camp outside the Albanian capital, Tirana, since the U.S. began openly backing it in 2013.

The group has long enjoyed the backing of the Iranian government’s enemies, ranging from toppled dictator Saddam Hussein to Israel and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Hiding behind various front groups like the France-based “parliament-in-exile,” The National Council of Resistance of Iran, the MEK has sought to depict itself as a representative, democratic coalition that speaks for all of Iran’s religious, ethnic, and political groups proportionately” and is committed to a secular, pro-market, and free Iran.

The group has paid a number of top Trump administration officials to speak at its functions and echo its calls to enact a “regime change” in Tehran, including former New York City Mayor and top White House lawyer Rudy Giuliani, Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, and National Security Advisor John Bolton, among a long list of U.S. lawmakers and officials.

Yet the group, which have also been described as “skilled manipulators of public opinion,” are said by ex-members to tolerate little internal dissent and are seen by many as little more than a well-funded, mafia-style cult commanded by self-styled “Iranian President-in-Exile” Maryam Rajavi and backed by her friends across Western and Gulf capitals.



Some who escaped the MEK and remain stranded in Tirana spoke to Al Jazeera and described the manner in which the cult orchestrated what appeared to be a trending wave of support for the group and its anti-regime message toward the end of last year, when Iranians took to the streets to protest adverse economic conditions largely caused by a mixture of domestic legislation and intense pressure by Washington.

Much of this trend was clearly fueled by bots – accounts that are often fraudulent and behave in an automated fashion, amplifying messages through swarm-like behavior such as retweeting, liking, and republishing videos and articles posted alongside hashtags such as #FreeIran and #IranRegimeChange. In many cases these trends – which sought to focus, variously, on the plight of Iran’s national or religious minority groups ranging from Kurds to Christians, women’s rights groups, and dissidents –grew as a direct result of work by MEK members toiling away in an Albanian troll farm to boost their group’s online propaganda.

Former MEK militant Hassan Heyrani told the outlet:  
Overall I would say that several thousand accounts are managed by about 1,000-1,500 MEK members ... It was all very well organized and there were clear instructions about what needed to be done.”

Another former “keyboard warrior,” Hassan Shahbaz, added:  
Our orders would tell us the hashtags to use in our tweets in order to make them more active ... It was our job to provide coverage of these protests by seeking out, tweeting and re-tweeting videos while adding our own comments.”

## Useful Tools in the Age of Trump

Journalist, writer and scholar Azadeh Moaveni told Al Jazeera that the 2016 election of former real estate mogul Donald Trump, who surrounded himself during his campaign with a range of zealous anti-Iran and pro-Israel hawks, was a turning point in such anti-IRI media operations.

“Once it became clear that there would be heightened hostility with Iran, there was a profusion of new accounts, anonymous accounts who were sin-

gle-mindedly and purposefully going after people who wrote about, talked about Iran with nuance,” she noted.

Whether the report, or Iran’s demands, will have any impact on the continued backing of MEK by Iran’s opponents remains yet to be seen. In the last year alone, a bevy of U.S. figures including late Senator John McCain, former FBI Director Louis J. Freeh, and various senators have visited the Rajavi cult’s compound in Albania as U.S. rhetoric against Iran’s “regime” has escalated and the U.S. has unilaterally withdrawn from the six-party Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or nuclear accord.

In the meantime, social media networks like Twitter and Facebook have squirmed as the same U.S. lawmakers have sought to crack down on alleged Russian and Iranian “interference” online.

Without a doubt, the troll farms of the MEK will remain an important weapon in the arsenal of those seeking to manufacture the illusion of widespread anti-government fervor in an Iran under the gun of economic sanctions, media terrorism, and the low-intensity warfare of sustained “regime change” efforts.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani to Speak Beside Leader of Accused Iranian ‘Cult’

Spencer Ackerman

September 19, 2018

The ex-New York mayor and Trump attorney has long been a supporter of the MEK. But the State Department cautions that Giuliani ‘does not speak for the U.S. government.’

President Trump’s personal lawyer on Saturday will speak alongside the leader of an Iranian opposition group that was designated as a terrorist organization and has often been described as cult-like. It’s the latest signal of the Trump administration’s coalescing hard-line stance against Iran.

DAILY BEAST

Rudy Giuliani is scheduled to speak at the Sheraton in Times Square on Saturday to a gathering convened by the Organization of Iranian-American Communities, an anti-regime group he’s addressed before. Also slated to speak is the co-leader of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), Maryam Rajavi, who will address the attendees remotely, according to a



NATIONAL SECURITY

# Giuliani to Speak Beside Leader of Accused Iranian 'Cult'

SO FAR AWAY

The ex-New York mayor and Trump attorney has long been a supporter of the MEK. But the State Department cautions that Giuliani 'does not speak for the U.S. government.'

Spencer Ackerman Updated Sep. 16, 2018 6:56AM ET  
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Photo Illustration by The Daily Beast

representative for the event.

But the Trump administration is already disavowing any implication that Giuliani's appearance has anything to do with its Iran policies. "Rudy Giuliani does not speak for the U.S. government on foreign policy," a State Department spokesperson told The Daily Beast.

"Rudy Giuliani has been shilling for the MEK for so long that he is clearly banking on everyone forgetting that the group was listed as a Foreign Terrorist Or-

ganization, has American blood on its hands and has never owned up to its deeds," said Daniel Benjamin, the State Department's counter-terrorism coordinator in the Obama administration who now directs Dartmouth College's John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding. "Giuliani's buckraking has been scandalous all along, but it is worse when he does this while acting as the president's lawyer."

Giuliani confirmed to The Daily Beast that his "firm" will be paid for the speech, but declined to reveal how much, saying it was "confidential, unless they want to disclose the details." Majid Sadeghpour, a spokesman for the Organization of Iranian-American Communities, said "it is not our policy to discuss any kind of arrangements regarding the speakers. (He also said the group has no "formal relationship" with the MEK or a related group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran.)

"Our relationship goes back approximately 10 years," Giuliani said, adding that he was invited to speak by "a client of my firm." Giuliani did not directly respond when asked if he ran his speech by the administration, saying in a text message: "[T]hey are my thoughts as were the over 1,000 speeches I've given in the last 17 years and of course before."

Sadeghpour said the group had invited Rajavi “to provide a video speech about the developments in Iran, as her movement has been the main target of terror plots by the Iranian regime, including here in the U.S., as well as arrests and attacks by the Iranian regime inside the country.”

The OIAC conference is pegged to a forthcoming United Nations Security Council session, chaired by Trump and scheduled for September 26, ostensibly about nonproliferation but also about Iran. Trump will discuss “Iran’s violations of international law and the general instability Iran sows throughout the entire Middle East region,” U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said earlier this month.

And on its agenda is the prospect for overthrowing the Tehran regime. “The summit will focus on the organized opposition as the alternative to Iran’s ruling theocracy,” an invitation reads, “as well as the need for a decisive Iran policy to deal with the regime’s suppression of its own citizens and its export of terrorism.”

From 1997 to 2012, the MEK was on the State Department’s list of terrorist groups. The exile organization, implacably opposed to the Iranian theocracy after supporting the 1979 revolution, was a terrorist organization before the mullahs’ takeover. The MEK even killed American military personnel in Iran. It became a catspaw of Saddam Hussein’s during the 1980s, when it attacked regime targets, killed Iranian civilians. And the group has a history of behaving like an abusive cult in its treatment of its members, according to observers like Benjamin.

A 2003 New York Times Magazine story by Elizabeth Rubin, “The Cult of Rajavi,” quoted a former MEK member alleging: “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 2009 Rand Corporation monograph described the MEK’s “near-religious devotion to the Rajavis (Massoud and his wife, Maryam), public self-deprecation sessions, mandatory divorce, celibacy, enforced separation from family and friends, and gender segregation.”

Yet the U.S. occupation of Iraq treated MEK members there as protected persons beginning in 2003, “which has left the United States open to charges of hypocrisy in the war on terrorism,” Rand observed. Rand’s monograph, penned in 2009, raised alarm about what was then a U.S.-protected MEK site called Camp Ashraf. It said that residents of the camp included “a substantial number of these MEK members [who] 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.”

None of that has hobbled the MEK’s outsized political influence in the United States, where it leverages its hatred of the Iranian regime for an enemy-of-my-enemy strategy. Rand called the group “skilled manipulators of public opinion” who are “adept at crafting and promoting its image as a democratic organization that seeks to bring down Iranian tyrants, both secular and religious.”

In 2012, an MEK lobbying effort prevailed on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to remove the group from the State Department’s list of terrorist groups. The MEK has long seen the wisdom of cultivating American political figures across the spectrum, including Democratic ex-governors Howard Dean and Ed Rendell; #resistance hero Michael Hayden, who used to direct the CIA and the NSA; Barack Obama’s former National Security Advisor Jim Jones; and ex-Joint Chiefs of Staff chairmen Hugh Shelton and Pete Pace. On Saturday, Jones will join Giuliani at the forum.

Giuliani has for years backed the MEK, appeared with Maryam Rajavi and taken her group’s money. And he’s spoken to the Organization of Iranian-American Communities before while serving as Trump’s attorney. The last time, in May, Giuliani claimed that Trump is “as committed to regime change as we are,” and pantomimed ripping up the Iran nuclear deal that the Trump administration has abandoned. He also spoke to an MEK gathering in Paris, where Rajavi is headquartered, in June.

Neither Giuliani nor his old law firm, Greenberg Traurig, appear in Justice Department records for foreign lobbying on behalf of the MEK or its known associates. But Giuliani has acknowledged that he took money for his

May speech to the Organization of Iranian-American Communities, though he told the Washington Post that he doesn't discuss his foreign clients with Trump.

Giuliani's Saturday speech comes amidst rising hostility to Iran and frequent speculation about a confrontation. In July, Trump tweeted at his Iranian counterpart: "NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE." Last week, the administration showed signs of putting that threat into practice. It threatened reprisal for any Iranian-aligned forces that kill or injure U.S. personnel in Iraq. Shortly afterward, the secretaries of State and Defense stuck by its Saudi and Emirati allies over their brutal, U.S.-backed war in Yemen, a proxy fight against an Iranian-tied group. And James Jeffrey, the State Department special envoy for Syria, said the U.S. military mission in Syria has expanded into ensuring what the Post called an "Iranian departure."

Giuliani's "support for the MEK, as well as John Bolton's longtime backing of the group, is strengthening the impression here and in Iran that the administration supports a policy of regime change," Benjamin warned. "The risks and costs of such a policy would be enormous, and it's a pretty good way to guarantee that Tehran will see building nuclear weapon as being in its interest."

—with additional reporting by Lachlan Markay

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Iran's Chameleon Splinter Group: The MEK's Will to Power

Ty Joplin

September 19, 2018

The Mujahideen al-Khalq (MEK) is a group that defies conventional understandings of non-state actors.

Its revolutionary beliefs were once seated in a Marxist understanding of history mixed with Islamism. Now, they are willing to sell their ideology to the highest bidder; there is evidence to suggest the MEK mirrors the stated beliefs of the state that gives them the most support. As of now, its stated goal is to establish a secular, democratic state in Iran.

However, the only thing it seems genuinely invested in is its leader, Maryam Rajavi, who controls its members so tightly that it has been described as a cult centered around her.

Sitting in a military-style compound in Tirana, Albania the roughly 3,500 members of the MEK are said



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## Iran's Chameleon Splinter Group: The MEK's Will to Power

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MEK at Camp Ashraf (AFP/FILE)



to be waiting for some unspecified event to become relevant again. That moment may be coming soon.

It is now backed by the U.S. as a tool intended to destabilize the Ayatollah regime in Iran, which both the U.S. and MEK view as a threat.

But what does the group actually believe?

## The MEK's Ever-Shifting Ideologies

Tracing the beginnings of its ideology is easy enough: started in 1965 by a group of radical students at Tehran University, the MEK advocated for a Marxist reading of history mixed with Shia Islam. Iran, controlled by the U.S. and U.K.-installed Shah, emphasized the MEK's Marxist leanings to alienate it from the political discourse of Iran at the time, and targeted the group and its founders.

After suffering a split from the more secular, left-leaning members and the execution of its founders, the MEK steadily aligned itself with the hyper-conservative religious cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini.

However grateful Khomeini may have been for the help of the MEK and other leftist revolutionaries in ousting the Western-backed Shah, he did not plan to include them in his theocratic government.

Their exclusion from Iranian politics and governance pushed the MEK into the fringe, where their first real ideological shift happened: going from idealistic pro-Ayatollah activist group to embattled guerrilla fighters.

The political aims for which they campaigned and fought began to fall by the wayside as the group emphasized militant insurgency and its leader, Massoud

Rajavi, began to exert more control over its members.

By killing high-level officials of the ruling party in Iran, the MEK showed its willingness to go after those it saw as obstacles to its own plan to take power, even if those in the way were Iranians.

Thousands of members of the MEK were killed by regime intelligence and security forces, but Saddam Hussein promised to support the group, which likely saved it from being eliminated entirely. The group moved from Iran to a base in Iraq, called Camp Ashraf.

Saddam's move however, led to an about-face for the MEK's guiding principles, and represents the moment it began to be reviled by Iran. By the time Saddam began funding and housing the MEK, he was already steeped into a stalling invasion of Iran. He began to use the MEK as an auxiliary military force against Iran. The MEK, now refocused on destabilizing the Iranian regime as much as it could, obliged and took part of several operations that killed thousands of Iranians.

Supported by Saddam's air force, the MEK managed to capture and briefly occupy the Iranian town of Mehran on the Iranian border with Iraq. The MEK reportedly stayed in the town even after official Iraqi army forces had left, and though they were eventually pushed back into Iraq, the battle left three to five thousand Iranians dead.

Their most ambitious plan however, hatched by Massoud Rajavi was Operation Mersad. Rajavi ordered an all-out invasion into Iran by MEK forces.

The operation took place at the end of the Iran-Iraq War. Rajavi hoped that his MEK forces, numbering close to 7,000, would be met with a warm welcome by Iranians while he stormed into Tehran to overthrowing the Ayatollah's regime. He thought the task would be simple and that the MEK could easily do it. He was mistaken.

## **The MEK's Descent into Being a Cult**

Although he initially made headway with little resistance, the MEK ventured

too far deep into Iran, and Iranian helicopters and war planes bombed them, killing thousands. Many others were captured and eventually executed. The plan backfired as the MEK became encircled by Iranian forces.

The group lost nearly half of its fighters, and it limped back to Iraq without a clear vision of where it could go next.

The move to invade Iran cemented the MEK's domestic reputation as a group of rogue militants in the pocket of whomever would fund them, and forever doomed their ability to generate popular support inside the country.

After this incident, Massoud Rajavi began to mold and shape the MEK into a more insular group, one that could be controlled by just a few people, namely, him and his wife, Maryam Rajavi. Throughout the 1980s, Massoud orchestrated what he called an 'ideological revolution,' within the MEK, which forced its members to obey his orders.

But these tools of control became more sinister after Operation Mersad.

"After the failed military operation of 'Forough Javidan' [Operation Mersad]..." Massoud Rajavi ordered all those who lost a spouse to immediately re-marry, Khodabandeh said. On top of that, "within a few months he started a new phase of [the so-called] ideological revolution in which his demand was that everyone has to divorce forever and all the women are now his."

This order reorganized the MEK from being a militant group with some remnants of ideological beliefs, to one where its members were primarily subservient to a person, who dictated every aspect of their lives. Children of MEK members were forcibly taken from their parents and flown out of Iraq, where they were raised in the U.S. and U.K. by sympathizers.

Khodabandeh said he knew of at least one child who was flown out: "I know one of them who changed hands in Canada and U.S. five times. They would register the children for benefits and then would leave them in the street."

"Every time they faced a major defeat like this, in order to retain control of the organization, the leadership became more and more repressive internally

and cultish,” Trita Parsi, the founder and former president of the National Iranian American Council, said to Al Bawaba in an interview.

Massoud Rajavi also introduced other methods of control, some years before the failed invasion of Iran ever happen. Many of them were intended to prevent further divisions in the group from forming.

One ‘session’ was called The Cross, where some MEK members were forced to bear a cross on them. Another, called ‘Individuality,’ forced members to describe their loyalty to Massoud and prove that they were working towards his goals. Of course, members were forced to confess deviant thoughts or actions to MEK leadership as well.

Those who had transgressed Massoud would be punished, sometimes through solitary confinement and public shaming.

Human Rights Watch began looking into the group’s treatment of its members, and found members who had been held in solitary confinement for years at a time, and of dissident members being tortured to death in front of others as a way of showing the danger of going against the group.

The ‘Social Division’ of the MEK released a statement urging its members to accept this internal, ‘ideological revolution,’ that was really a kind of ongoing purge of the group.

“To understand this great revolution...is to understand and gain a deep insight into the greatness of our new leadership, meaning the leadership of Massoud and Maryam. It is to believe in them as well as to show ideological and revolutionary obedience of them...By correcting your old work habits and by criticizing your individual as well as collective shortcomings, we shall gain much awareness in confronting our enemies...Report to your commanders and superiors in a comprehensive manner your progress, its results and outcomes that you gain from promoting and strengthening this ideological revolution.”

After Massoud Rajavi disappeared in 2003, Maryam took over and continued enforcing cult-like practices on the MEK.

The group's moved to Tirana, Albania has reportedly done nothing to loosen the hold Maryam has on its members. Trita Parsi views this as a tragic mistake, since the U.S. had the ability to separate its members and give them more freedom; something the U.S. declined to do. Parsi thinks many would have defected if they were given such a chance.

Meanwhile, Tara Sepehri Far, an Iran researcher with the Human Rights Watch told Al Bawaba that there are no signs the MEK's abusive practices against its membership has ended.

“We haven't updated our research after that but we're not aware of remedy that has been paid to victims since then,” Far stated. “My understanding is the group still keeps the camp isolated in Albania and doesn't allow independent monitors and journalist to freely report from there.”

Former MEK members have told journalists that the group's leadership forces individuals in the Tirana camp to write down their sexual thoughts every day and then read them out loud to others, using shame as a method of control. A leaked Albanian police report assess the MEK as a dangerous group and that there are “reasonable suspicions” that it may be torturing and even killing members trapped inside the Tirana compound today.

“It's not really proper to called them MEK ‘members,’ they're more or less MEK hostages. They want to leave but they're not allowed to,” said Parsi, who has spoken to several families of MEK members in the U.S. who have been fighting for years to reconnect with loved ones stuck in the compound in Albania.

The MEK's public face is that it is a force for democracy and secular pluralism, though it has little to show for its claim.

The group's official website says, “The PMOI/MEK seeks to replace Iran's religious dictatorship with a secular, pluralistic, democratic government that respects individual freedoms and gender equality.”

However, the website also can't help but remind everyone that it is fundamentally a one-person show by naming Maryam Rajavi as “the future Presi-

dent of Iran,” having apparently decided the results of a hypothetical election in Iran to be in her favor.

“[Massoud] Rajavi always would say that if it was not because of the Internal Revolution the organisation would not exist,” Khodabandeh said.

“I think he was right but the organisation which existed after these changes is not the first one anymore.”

The revolutionary beliefs of the MEK were slowly weeded out of its membership and replaced with forced obedience to one person: Maryam Rajavi.

According to Khodabandeh, the MEK “has since become the tool for the ones who paid to keep it going and became a closed dictatorial organisation.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Former MEK Official Exposes Saudi Arabia's Covert Funding of Iranian Terror Group

Whitney Webb

September 20, 2018

**A**MAN, JORDAN — Though it had been suspected for years, testimony from a former high-ranking official from the Iranian militant opposition group Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK) has confirmed that the group had been covertly financed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For decades, the Gulf Kingdom — known for its general hostility towards Shi'ite Muslims — contributed hundreds of millions of dollars in gold and other valuables to help finance the Iranian Marxist militant group — namely the group's ultimate goal of instigating violent regime change in Iran and subsequently taking power.

In an interview with Jordan-based news outlet Albawaba News, former MEK head of security Massoud Khodabandeh detailed the covert means through which the Saudis helped fund the group, including regional smuggling networks and black market transactions.



According to Khodabandeh, gold and other valuable commodities, such as Rolex watches, were shipped from Saudi Arabia to Baghdad and then sold on black markets in the Jordanian capital of Amman by Saudi-linked businessmen. The proceeds from those transactions were then placed in offshore accounts tied to the MEK and subsequently used to fund their operations.

Khodabandeh also recounted how the Saudis had even given the group a *kiswa* – a large drape that adorns the Kaaba shrine in the Islamic holy city of Mecca. Manufactured at a cost of approximately \$5 million, *kiswas* are often worth significantly more than their cost of production given their religious significance.

The former MEK official also told Albawaba that he had personally overseen the transfer of valuables from Saudi Arabia to Baghdad that were then sold in order to fund the group. In one instance, Khodabandeh had smuggled three trucks filled with gold bars from Saudi Arabia to Baghdad along with two Iraqi and two Saudi accomplices. He estimated that the gold contained in the trucks was worth nearly \$200 million, all of which eventually found its way into MEK coffers.

Khodabandeh also asserted that Prince Turki bin Faisal al Saud, former head of Saudi intelligence, was intimately involved in the smuggling rings used to covertly fund the MEK. Unsurprisingly, bin Faisal has since become a vocal advocate for the group and has spoken at several of the group’s annual conferences hosted in Paris. At the 2017 MEK conference, bin Faisal stated:

Your efforts to confront this regime are legitimate, and your struggle to rescue all sectors of the Iranian society... from the oppression of the Velayat-e Faqih rule, as was said by Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, is legitimate and an imperative. Therefore, advance with God’s blessing.”

Khodabandeh went on to state that, while former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had once been the main patron of the MEK, bin Faisal who had taken over as the main backer of the group in recent years, asserting that the group had become an “organization run by Maryam [Rajavi, current MEK leader] under the patronage of Prince Turki bin Faisal al Saud.” The former MEK official concluded the interview by stating that the MEK had “changed



from a terrorist military organization to an intelligence-based propaganda machine.”

## **Past Saudi Funding An Inconvenient Truth for MEK’s “Moderate” Makeover**

Despite their past as a militant organization responsible for the mass murder of Iranian and American citizens, the MEK has sought to change their image in recent years and reinvent itself as a “moderate” Iranian opposition group and government-in-exile. These efforts have grown in recent years despite the fact that the group has next to no support within Iran and has consistently been characterized as both “cultish” and “authoritarian.”

The MEK’s facelift from terror group to propaganda machine began in the 2000s, kicking into high gear after former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had them removed from the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations in 2012. The MEK’s propaganda efforts have since kicked into overdrive under the Trump administration, given that President Trump has sought to place “maximum pressure” on Iran with the ultimate goal of regime change. Currently, the Trump administration is stocked with known MEK supporters, including Rudy Giuliani, John Bolton and Elaine Chao, who have received thousands of dollars from the group over the years.

Despite its record of killing innocent civilians, Western media cited MEK spokespeople and members in its reporting on the Iran protests earlier this year as “proof” that the Iranian people support regime change and the MEK, ignoring the massive pro-government rallies that coincided with the protests. Little mention was made of the fact that MEK fighters have been trained by the U.S. military in the past and share connections with Israeli Mossad. The recent revelations of the group’s connections to Saudi Arabia have also unsurprisingly slipped under the media’s radar.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani calls for new Iranian ‘revolution’ at anti-government rally

James Reini

September 23, 2018

**R**udy Giuliani’s speech at rally hosted by MEK leadership raises questions about upcoming US policy towards Iran

US President Donald Trump’s close ally and lawyer Rudy Giuliani spoke of “revolution” and the “overthrow” of Iran’s ruling clerics at a rally of anti-government Iranian Americans on Saturday as the administration continues its offensive against Tehran.

Giuliani spoke at the so-called 2018 Iran Uprising Summit in midtown Manhattan, hosted by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) - an umbrella bloc of opposition groups in exile that seeks an end to clerical rule in Iran – and the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an anti-government Iranian religious group that used to be on the US terror list.

“I don’t know when we’re going to overthrow them.



It could be in a few days, months, a couple of years, but it's going to happen. They're going to be overthrown, the people of Iran have obviously had enough," Giuliani told a cheering crowd.

"The sanctions are working. The currency is going to nothing ... These are the conditions that lead to successful revolution, and, God willing, non-violent revolution."

The end of Iran's 39-year-old clerical establishment would not echo the chaos that followed the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, thanks to the NCRI and Iran's multi-skilled diaspora, Giuliani said in a 15-minute address.

The rally came after the Trump administration pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran in May and is ratcheting up sanctions which, officials say, are aimed at deterring Tehran's military expansionism rather than topple its government.

### **'Time for the mullahs ending'?**

But some Iranian Americans see parallels to the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, and say that links between the Trump administration and the NCRI, which presents itself as an Iranian government-in-waiting, are worrying.

That is not least because of NCRI's president-elect Maryam Rajavi, who also heads the highly controversial MEK, which has a background in leftist, Islamist-style violence and fosters cult-like devotion among its followers.

"Iran is in a critical moment, with the continued protests in Iran. The time for the mullahs is ending. It is also time for the world to recognise the legitimate demands of the Iranian people for a free republic based on the separation of religion and state," Rajavi said.

In a recorded video message, she urged the US and the UN to sanction and pressure Iran, while laying out plans to tackle poverty, improve human rights and hold free elections in Iran within six months of the mullahs being toppled.

Rajavi and Giuliani addressed and roused the crowd at the New York Sheraton, backed by Iranian rock and classical music and other speeches from former US Gen James Jones and France's former foreign minister Bernard Kouchner.

They made no mention of an attack on a military parade of Revolutionary Guard troops and officials in the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz on Saturday, in which at least 25 people were killed. Iranian leaders said US-backed Gulf states were behind the killings.

Trump supporters have spoken at NCRI events in the past, including National Security Adviser John Bolton, who, before taking his post, told the group's members they would be ruling Iran before 2019 and their goal should be regime change.

This week, Trump is expected to heap more pressure on Iran in his speech before the UN General Assembly on Tuesday and at a Security Council meeting focused on Iran and illegal weapons flow on Thursday.

Iran has seen its rial plunge, economic turmoil and a wave of protests that has spread to 80 cities since December as US sanctions bite and additional curbs are expected to shrink Iran's oil exports when they are imposed in November.

Ali Safavi, a card-carrying member of NCRI, said his group usually only holds a street rally during the UN's annual meet of world leaders but had raised its profile this year as US pressure is seeing the clerics' grip on power weaken.

"The mullahs are on their last legs," Safavi told Middle East Eye. Echoing Rajavi, he called for action by the UN and emphasised the secular, democratic credentials of the MEK, also known as the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI).

## **MEK: A controversial group**

The MEK has an odd backstory. Its members joined the 1979 Islamic revolution but later broke from the ruling clerics. Based in Iraq since the early

1980s, their fighters clashed with US forces during the 2003 Iraq war, but have since renounced violence.

Many of its members remain stranded in Iraq as the group fell out of Baghdad's favour after Saddam Hussein's downfall. The European Union had the MEK on its list of banned "terrorist" organisations from 2002-09. The US classified the MEK as terrorists until 2012.

Rajavi and her husband, Massoud, run the group though the latter's whereabouts are unknown. A 2009 report by the RAND Corporation noted how MEK members had to swear "an oath of devotion to the Rajavis".

Researchers also described the MEK's "authoritarian, cultic practices," including "mandatory divorce and celibacy" for the group's members and how devotion to the Rajavis replaced "love for spouses and family".

Speaking with MEE outside the Sheraton, Sam Garshasp, an Iranian-American student who travelled from Michigan to attend the rally, referred to the strict membership rules he was ordered to follow.

"You have to be so straight, no play around, no joking. There are special rules, I'm not allowed to say it," said Garshasp, who asked for his surname to be changed so other members would not be able to identify him.

The 21-year-old has lived in the US for five years. He wishes to see an end to clerical rule and backs Trump's sanctions despite the hardship faced by relatives back home. He only backs the MEK with reservations.

"Are they going to make it better? And will they have our back? They have to start doing something so people can trust them and support them," Garshasp told MEE.

The group has faced other criticisms. In 2011, a Christian Science Monitor investigation into the big hitters from across the political spectrum who speak at MEK events revealed some were paid tens of thousands of dollars to stump for the group.

The most recent public opinion survey commissioned by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA), a research and lobby group, showed how 402 Iranian-American respondents held less-favourable views of Rajavi than other Iranian political figures.

Only 7 percent of respondents had favourable views of Rajavi. That was similar to the 6 percent who felt positive about supreme leader Ali Khamenei, but much lower than the 55 percent who backed President Hassan Rouhani.

Only 1 percent of respondents backed Iran's cleric-run system, while 8 percent wanted it reformed. Most Iranian Americans (55 percent) favoured a secular democratic government and 11 percent sought the return of a Shah-like monarch.

“The people of Iran despise the MEK,” Roxana Ganji, a California-based Iranian-American pro-democracy activist who has long called for the downfall of the mullahs but questions the MEK's democratic and ethical credentials.

“By Giuliani and Bolton going there for speaking engagements and getting paid for it and being part of Mr Trump's administration ... gives people the idea that we're going to replace a terrorist government with one that's even worse,” Ganji told MEE.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani Has Been Told to Stop Advocating for Foreign Interests but Just Did It Anyway

Dan Friedman

September 23, 2018

**Mother Jones**

Earlier this month, seven Senate Democrats asked the Justice Department to investigate whether President Trump’s lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani, is breaking the law by lobbying for foreign interests without registering as a foreign agent. One of Giuliani’s foreign clients that the senators cited is Mujahedin-e-Khalq, or MEK, an Iranian opposition group that the State Department once included on a list of organizations that support terrorism. Giuliani has spoken at the group’s gatherings and the organization routinely cites its ties to the former mayor to boost its credibility. “Giuliani regularly advocates for regime change in Iran, which is one of MEK’s top objectives,” the senators wrote.

Giuliani showed how seriously he takes such criticism on Saturday. The former New York mayor spoke at a Manhattan event whose organizers include the National Council of Resistance of Iran,

POLITICS SEPTEMBER 23, 2018

## Giuliani Has Been Told to Stop Advocating for Foreign Interests but Just Did It Anyway

*This time Trump's lawyer suggested there will be a regime change in Iran*



**DAN FRIEDMAN**  
Reporter  
[Bio](#)



Rudy Giuliani delivering a speech critical of Iran on July 1. /Sipa via AP Images

which is closely linked to MEK. During his remarks he suggested that the United States supports regime change in Iran.

“I don’t know when we’re going to overthrow them,” Giuliani told the audience. “It could be in a few days, months, a couple of years. But it’s going to happen.”

Giuliani also said that sanctions imposed by the Trump Administration after the United States pulled out of

a deal in which Iran agreed not to develop nuclear weapons “are working” by damaging Iran’s economy. “These are the conditions that lead to successful revolution,” he said.

This statement conflicts with official US policy. The State Department says the United States does not support regime change in Iran and announced last week that Giuliani “does not speak for the U.S. government on foreign policy.” During an appearance on CNN Sunday, UN Ambassador Nikki Haley also responded to the suggestion by the president’s lawyer. “The United States is not looking to do a regime change in Iran,” Haley said.

Giuliani was paid through his “firm” to deliver the speech, he told *The Daily Beast* last week. He declined to disclose his fee. Giuliani does not reveal all his clients, but he has recently worked for foreign entities including the government of Qatar, a member of Ukrainian political party that former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort admitted he illegally lobbied for, and Turkish officials prosecuted in the United States for circumventing prior US sanctions on Iran.

Giuliani has previously admitted that he advises Trump on matters other than



legal issues. And Giuliani’s critics have expressed skepticism that he steers clear of concerns that are the priorities of his clients in his conversations with Trump or White House aides. “Without further review, it is impossible to know whether Mr. Giuliani is lobbying U.S. government officials on behalf of his foreign clients,” the Democratic senators wrote this month.

Giuliani has insisted he does not believe he is required to register with the Justice Department as a foreign agent because he does not directly lobby Trump or the US government. But the Foreign Agents Registration Act has no such limitation. The law says that anyone in the United States working to influence policy on behalf of foreign governments or political parties must register their activities with the Department of Justice. On Saturday, Giuliani appears to have received payment to advocate in the United States for an aggressive US policy towards Iran.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## US Anti-Iran Summit Coincided with Foreign-Based Terror Attack in Iran Killing 25

Randi Nord

September 24, 2018

A group known as al-Ahvaziya claimed responsibility for the attack on a military parade in Khuzestan Province.

Terrorists in Iran launched an attack on a parade on Saturday killing 25 — including a four-year-old girl. Unsurprisingly, the group claiming responsibility for the massacre has links to foreign entities in Saudi Arabia and their allies.



Also on Saturday, Donald Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, spoke at an "Iran Uprising Summit" in New York City's Time Square supporting efforts to overthrow Iran's revolutionary government. The summit included supporters of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and other groups that share Washington's goal of overthrowing Tehran.

"The people of Iran obviously have now had enough,"

Giuliani said on Saturday. “The sanctions are working. The currency is going to nothing ... these are the kinds of conditions that lead to successful revolution.”

Giuliani spoke to members of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK, a group Washington only recently removed from their foreign terrorist list — likely in efforts to plot so-called “regime change” in Tehran in broad daylight rather than behind closed doors. John Bolton, Donald Trump’s National Security Advisor, has strong links to the MEK, which has killed over 17,000 civilians terror attacks over the group’s tenure.

The MEK along with similar takfiri groups and their political fronts frequently meet for anti-Iran conferences with high-ranking US and Western diplomats and officials in places like Paris and New York.

### **Foreign-based Group Claims Responsibility for the Attack**

A group known as al-Ahvaziya claimed responsibility for the attack on a military parade in Khuzestan Province which killed at least 25 and injured roughly 60 others. Four terrorists opened fire on crowds. Iranian security forces killed three of the attackers but managed to apprehend one.

Based in London, al-Ahvaziya also has branches in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. The group held their annual conference in Cairo, Egypt last year. Masquerading as a national liberation movement, al-Ahvaziya aims to destroy Iran’s territorial integrity by advocating the secession of Khuzestan Province from the rest of Iran.

Ironically enough, Khuzestan Province contains one of the richest oil fields in the world — producing 750,000 barrels per day with an estimated 65.5 billion in reserves. This falls in line with Washington’s general goal of sanctions to cripple Iran’s economy and foment discontent as well as their broader regional goals of death by Balkanization through splitting up sovereign nations like Syria and Iran to exploit natural resources and acquire capital.

Since 1999, al-Ahvaziya has frequently targeted oil reserves, pipelines, and civilians with bombs. One of their most deadly attacks prior to Saturday’s took place in 2006 when they detonated a bomb in an office building killing 11 and wounding 87.

Al-Ahvaziya has a safe haven in Denmark where the group's leader provided an interview nearly immediately following the attack.

## Silence and Snark from World Leaders

The world remained relatively silent following the terror attack in Iran on Saturday.

US Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, advised Tehran to “look in the mirror.” Washington claims Iran is the world's biggest sponsor of terror despite the fact that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and their affiliated groups being the most successful ground force for eliminating terror groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda.

Iran's UAE envoy, Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, justified the terror attack on Twitter claiming more attacks would soon follow. Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qassemi condemned Abdulla's remarks as “irresponsible and thoughtless” and demanded Abu Dhabi be held accountable.

On the other end of the spectrum, Russian president, Vladimir Putin, phoned his Iranian counterpart, Hasan Rouhani shortly following the attack to express support. Putin offered condolences and support for further cooperation to combat terrorism.

Iranian president, Hasan Rouhani, offered sympathy to the families of those killed during the attack. Rouhani, along with Tehran's Top General, IRGC, and Intelligence Minister, all pledged a swift and strong response to those who carried out the attack along with their sponsors.

The CIA launched a coup against the democratically elected government in Tehran 1953. In 1979, Iranians overthrew the CIA-backed regime in a popular revolution which Washington has remained hell-bent on destroying for the past 40 years.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## America's history of covert action in Iran: is Tehran right to be paranoid?

Connor Dilleen

September 26, 2018



The Iranian government was quick to blame the 22 September attack targeting an Iranian Revolutionary Guard parade on the US and unnamed countries in the region. While this attribution fits with the paranoid world view of Iran's leadership, there is potentially a degree of truth to its claims, given the current proxy war between Iran and the US and its Middle Eastern allies, and the US history of support for separatist minority groups in Iran.

Two groups have claimed responsibility for the attack: Ahwazi separatists—an Arab ethnic group based in southwestern Iran—and Islamic State. Ahwazi Arabs have been responsible for a number of attacks in Iran over several decades and they have recently tended to target critical economic infrastructure such as oil pipelines. If an Ahwazi group was, in fact, behind the attack on the Revolutionary Guard



parade, then it's the most audacious and significant operation yet undertaken by Ahwazi separatists.

Islamic State also clearly has the capabilities and intent to undertake an attack of this nature. But the group's only previous attack on Iranian soil was in 2017, when four of its fighters launched simultaneous attacks against the

Iranian Parliament and the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran. And while IS has a history of falsely claiming credit for terrorist attacks, Ahwazi separatists do not, and therefore it is more likely that the latter group was responsible for this attack. The release of a video on 25 September by IS purporting to show the attackers muddies the waters slightly, but it is curious that the attackers do not declare membership of or support for IS, and this video is still not clear proof of IS involvement.

The Ahwazi Arabs are just one of a number of ethnic minorities in Iran that have spawned either nationalist separatist groups—which include the Ahwazi Arabs, Kurds and Azeris—or militant fundamentalist Sunni groups such as the Baluchis of eastern Iran. The main militant Baluchi group, Jundullah, has been linked to Al Qaeda.

There are also Persian groups-in-exile that are committed to the overthrow of the Iranian regime and have undertaken armed attacks in Iran and against Iranian interests, the most prominent of which is the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK). MEK has been linked to a number of high profile attacks in Iran, including the murder of Iranian nuclear scientists orchestrated by Israel.

Separatist groups such as these have long featured on the radar of US policy makers as potential proxies in its cold war against Iran. Ahwazi Arabs are particularly attractive as candidates to act as US proxies, because their home

in Khuzestan province produces 80% of Iran's crude oil revenue. By fomenting instability in this region, the US could dramatically impact Iran's overall economic situation. In 2008, when tensions surrounding the Iranian nuclear program were approaching their peak, claims emerged that the George W. Bush administration had obtained Congressional approval for several hundred million dollars in funding for covert operations in Iran that included support for Ahwazi and Baluchi separatist groups. As noted by the source of the claims, Seymour Hersh, 'the strategic thinking behind this covert operation is to provoke enough trouble and chaos so that the Iranian government makes the mistake of taking aggressive action which will give the impression of a country in acute turmoil. Then you have what the White House calls the 'casus belli', a reason to attack the country'.

While it's likely that US covert operations supporting these groups were suspended under Barack Obama following the signing of the Iran nuclear agreement, it's equally possible that Donald Trump has dusted off Bush's playbook and has resumed covert support for these groups.

A number of key Trump administration officials are on the record supporting Iranian opposition groups as a means for realising change in Iran. Prior to being appointed as National Security Advisor, John Bolton spoke at a rally in a Paris organised by MEK, which was only delisted as a terrorist organisation in 2012. During the rally, Bolton said 'the outcome of the president's policy review should be to determine that Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 revolution will not last until its 40th birthday...the declared policy of the United States should be the overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran'.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has been equally hawkish in his stance on Iran. Although Pompeo maintains that he is seeking to change the Iranian regime's behaviour, not change Iran's regime, the demands that he has levied on Iran since becoming secretary of state have been characterised as designed to either break the regime or push it towards a resumption of its nuclear program, thus giving the United States and Israel an excuse for military action.

In view of the above, Iran's leadership could be excused for thinking that the US or one of its allies was behind the recent attack in Ahwaz. Not only does the US have a history of supporting groups such as the one that claimed

credit for the attack, but the renewed use of proxy groups to destabilise the Iranian government would also be consistent with the apparent objectives of the Trump administration. The US and Iran are already engaged in a proxy war in Syria, and only the day before the Ahwaz attack, Pompeo threatened Iran with retaliation following a rocket attack against US bases in Iraq by Iranian proxies.

Despite the economic hardships facing Iran and growing dissatisfaction with the government, it's likely that the Iranian theocracy, backstopped by the Revolutionary Guard, will prove remarkably resilient. At a minimum, any covert US programs will merely harden the resolve of Iran's leaders and embolden them to strike back at US interests via their own proxies. But should the US strategy succeed in undermining the Islamic Republic of Iran, then the chaos that would follow would likely not only tear apart Iran itself, but also draw all of its neighbours into conflict.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## The Many Faces of the MEK, Explained By Its Former Top Spy Massoud Khodabandeh

Ty Joplin

October 11, 2018

**B**efore Massoud Khodabandeh settled into his life as a consultant living quietly in the middle of England, he was directing the intelligence operations of a group that's been labelled as a terrorist cult.

The group is called the Mujahideen al-Khalq (MEK), and Khodabandeh had, for decades, witnessed its changing of faces: from radical student group opposed to the rule of the Shah in Iran, to anti-Ayatollah guerrilla group, to pro-Saddam militia, to what it is now, an inward-looking and reclusive group with no clear identity beyond its obedience to its leader, Maryam Rajavi.

Massoud Khodabandeh left the group and granted Al Bawaba an exclusive interview, where he documents his smuggling of radio equipment into Iran, his spying on Iranian leaders and MEK defectors

البوابة **alBawaba**  
THE VOICE OF THE MARGINALIZED

and his eventual departure from the group.

Khodabandeh details to Al Bawaba his founding of an MEK cell in London and his imprisonment for participating in a sit-in of the Iranian embassy during the 1979 Iran revolution. After that, he began operating covertly in Europe, traversing the continent with secret funding and passports, looking over all of the MEK's cells working in Europe at the time, slowly becoming one of its most senior and trusted members.

After the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and the MEK's falling out with the Iranian regime, Khodabandeh began smuggling radio equipment into Iran via Baghdad, taking powerful radio technology into a secluded station in the mountains of Iranian Kurdistan and surviving attacks by Iranian forces in the process.

As well as helping the MEK cement an international presence, Khodabandeh also remembers helping the MEK's former leader, Massoud Rajavi, with a particular request. Rajavi asked Khodabandeh to send him dozens of books on cults and psychological manipulation; a request Khodabandeh did not hesitate to fulfill. Decades later, he learned that each book he was smuggling to Massoud was being translated into Farsi and used as a guide on how to transform the MEK into a personalist cult dedicated to serving the will of its leader, Massoud.

After leaving the group, Khodabandeh admits that he had a difficult time reintegrating into society, as he struggled to rid himself of the constraints the MEK forces upon its members.

He forbade himself from watching television, and did not know the extent of Iraq's crimes against Iranians during the Iran-Iraq War. But Khodabandeh considers himself lucky; he was able to leave the group while thousands are still trapped inside its confines, doomed to be associated with an opposition group many consider a terrorist cult.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK in Albania—Potential Implications and Security Concerns for Albania

Ebi Spahiu

October 12, 2018



Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the Mujahedeen El-Khalq (MEK) was the subject of frequent attacks from Iranian-backed proxies, which overwhelmed their members residing in camps Ashraf and Liberty in Iraq. Before this, MEK, an Iranian dissident group, began living in Iraq in the early 1980s under the protection of Saddam Hussein. As a group in exile, MEK sought refuge in Iraq under the protection of Hussein, who utilized their military capacities and ties to Iran to undermine the Iranian regime. Until 2012, the MEK was identified as a terrorist organization due to its activities inside Iran and against other regional and international powers, including attacks against U.S. diplomatic personnel and businesses operating in Iran in the 1970s.

Following a series of lobbying efforts by MEK leadership and supporters, the group pledged to give up

their weapons and violent tactics as a means to be delisted as a designated terrorist organization. As a consequence, in 2013, the U.S. government pleaded to a number of governments to provide refuge to the MEK members, including Romania, which was the preferred destination at the time. Albania—grateful to the United States for its support during the war in Kosovo and advocating for its bid to join NATO and the EU—was the only country that responded positively to the request. Albania initially admitted some 200 members between 2013 and 2014. The United States and Albanian governments have extended the agreement since 2013, increasing the number of asylum seekers to somewhere in the range of 500-2,000 MEK members. During the summer of 2016, Tirana received the largest contingent of about 1,900 people, an operation managed by the UNHCR (Shekulli, March 12, 2016). Part of the agreement with Washington was the development of deradicalization and rehabilitation programs to be offered to members of the group.

Now, the group is residing in the outskirts of Tirana's capital in a highly fortified camp located in Manëz. From this camp, the group is allegedly intensifying its political activities aimed at bringing down the Iranian regime (Exit.al, March 14). With emerging threats coming from radicalization and violent extremism, due to the rise of the Islamic State and other political Islamist groups in the region, the Albanian government may not be prepared or equipped to respond to the potential implications the group's presence in Albania may bring.

## **MEK Activities and Support in Albania**

There are a number of opportunities MEK is exploiting in order to restart its political activities against the Iranian regime now that they are residing in Albania. Recent propaganda efforts by the group's leader, Maryam Rajavi, the widow of the founder of MEK, Massoud Rajavi, suggest that she sees herself as a key actor in fostering the opposition in Iran and subsequently bringing down the Khomeini regime (Exit.al, March 14). Much of the group's propaganda material available online is translated in Albanian and seeks to also reach out to a local audience in their host country (Iran-interlink.org).

Moreover, the group has gathered significant support from important U.S. leaders who do not shy away from expressing their support for MEK's po-

tential rise as Iran's future "democratic government" (Exit.al, June 26). This sentiment is frequently expressed on a number of occasions when important figures of the U.S. political landscape have personally visited Albania and spoken at rallies organized by MEK in Tirana (KlanTV, March 21). The most recent gatherings saw figures such as John Bolton (now U.S. National Security Advisor), Rudy Giuliani, one of President Trump's most trusted advisors and personal lawyer, and late U.S. Senator John McCain, among others. The three seemingly demonstrated their support for MEK to be at the center of regime change in Iran (Exit.al, June 26).

The reasons why the Trump administration is supporting the group's political objectives are unclear. It is also unclear the level of support MEK still has among the population in Iran, but it is becoming increasingly obvious that MEK is also making some powerful friends in Tirana as well. Over the years, key leaders from the Albanian government and civil society organizations have similarly provided their support during rallies and conferences organized by MEK in Paris as well as in Albania, where its new headquarters are located. In May 2015, Albania's former Prime Minister during the war in Kosovo and current Minister of Diaspora, Pandeli Majko attended the National Council of Resistance of Iran rally in Paris with a large delegation of parliament representatives, journalists, lawyers and some civil society representatives, reiterating Albania's support for Iran's resistance and promising his personal support for regime change.

In an impassioned speech over a cheering crowd, Majko said "whether you want it or not, you have involved us in your story, in your drama, in your tragedies and we understand you very well...some years ago, an American President was in Berlin and from Berlin, this politician, this great man declared 'Ich bin a Berliner'. And in the name of my friends and in Albania, I've come here to say 'Men mujahed astam'. I have a dream to come soon to Tehran. Invited by you." At the time, Majko's attendance in the Paris rally was not covered by local media.

Despite the group's increasing political support, recent media reports and several incidents between MEK members and local communities in Albania expose their continuing secretive activities and ongoing struggles to receive legitimacy as a democratic organization. Over the years, several media agen-

cies have been interested in documenting the lives of MEK members in Albania and their political struggles in Iran. Channel 4, a well-known British news agency, recently traveled to Albania to do the same. The film crew was met by hostile private security who were guarding the highly fortified Manëz camp. Camp members physically attacked Channel 4's camera crew (Shqiptarja.com, August 19). This was an unprecedented event that raised several questions over the camp's activities (Lapsi.al, August 19). The event was widely reported by local media, which was also able to obtain a threat assessment on the group by Albania's Intelligence Agency. According to the report initially made available to Channel 4 and then to other Iranian and local media, the group remains "deeply indoctrinated" and some of their activities, including murders of their members, are similar to the ones in Iraq (The Iranian, August 2018).

Testimonies from dissidents who left the group in recent months speak of similar military trainings, indoctrination and pressure to follow the group's ideology (Top Channel, February 13). Although in the early years some of their members who relocated to Albania sought opportunities to travel abroad and join family members in the West, some 200 members have fled the group and continue to live in Albania (Top Channel, February 13). There is no clarity of their legal status or the employment opportunities available in a country suffering from high unemployment rates. However, some advocacy initiatives—often seemingly pro-Russian and pro-Iranian—are already fostering opposition against the group. Some of this opposition is often portrayed by the MEK leadership as an operation conducted by Iran's security agencies (Lapsi.al, August 19; Media e Lire, April 17; Nejat NGO, September 29) Moreover, integrating the rest of the members still in Manëz into Albania's society does not seem to be in the immediate interest for the MEK.

## Implications

The MEK's presence and activities may have serious repercussions for Albania and Albanian policy-makers. Leaders in Tirana may not foresee the long-term consequences of expanding their role on foreign policy issues beyond the small Balkan nation's traditional reach. The group remains an existential threat to the Iranian regime. Over the years, Tehran has supported significant raids via Hezbollah and other proxy organizations in Iraq to destroy

the group and kill key MEK leaders. As a result, Albanian authorities should expect more involvement from Iran in its internal and regional affairs. At the moment, there are no clear signs that Iran's presence is significant in the region. Authorities in both Kosovo and Macedonia, however, have raised alarm bells over Iranian-linked NGOs having ties to terrorism-related activities in the past (Balkan Insight, June 25, 2015). If no effective responses are undertaken, MEK's presence and Iran's attention towards the Western Balkans may inflame sectarian divides in smaller communities and amplify regional rifts. Sectarian division is a latent phenomenon among Albanian Muslims, but they also remain under the pressure of other forms of Islamist radicalization. This is due to the emergence of Islamic State and Turkey's instrumentalization of political Islam, among others.

Albania continues to struggle with endemic corruption and organized crime and the emergence of religious radicalization as a regional security threat and potential sectarian rifts may add to the list of challenges facing Albania's political landscape. As a result, the country may not be prepared to inherit a long-standing struggle between a major regional Middle Eastern power and a former terrorist organization. Especially since both may utilize Albania's internal vulnerabilities for their own political gains.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK)

Militarist Monitor

October 23, 2018

The People's Mujahedin of Iran (Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran, or MEK) is an Islamic- and Marxist-inspired militant organization that advocates the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The group was founded in 1963 as an armed guerrilla group after the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi violently suppressed opposition to his regime. In recent years, the MEK has tried to reshape its image to conform to American ideals, although its cult-like structure has remained largely the same.



The MEK has a history of using force and violence against the government in Tehran—against both the Shah and the subsequent Islamic Republic—as well as against countries perceived to be supporting them, like the United States. For years, the group was designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department. But after an aggressive and well-funded lobbying campaign supported by a bipartisan cast



of high-profile former public officials, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced in September 2012 that the group would be removed from the State Department’s list of foreign terrorist organizations.[1]

The group has become a permanent fixture in Washington, particularly among Iran hawks. Its increasing clout “has coincided with a flow of money from the group to American politicians.”[2] From 2009 to 2015, the MEK reportedly spent more than \$330,000 on political contributions. Since being removed from the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations, the MEK’s influence on Capitol Hill has apparently “spread from the fringes of Congress to include more mainstream and respected Republicans and Democrats.”[3]

## **Ties to the Trump administration**

The MEK’s close ties to high-profile figures were clear after the election of Donald Trump in November 2016. Observers noted that several of the people under consideration for posts in the Trump administration had tracks records supporting the MEK, including Rudy Giuliani, John Bolton, Clare Lopez, and Newt Gingrich.[4] As one writer put it, should any of these people serve in the Trump administration, “the MEK will have the highest level access it’s 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.”[5]

The MEK saw Trump’s election as an opportunity to significantly influence U.S. policy toward Iran. On January 9, 2017, just days before Trump took office, a bipartisan group of 20 former U.S. officials published a letter to Trump urging him to open a strategic dialogue with the MEK. They reprinted a letter they published in 2015, calling much more firmly for a U.S.-MEK strategic relationship. That letter stated, “Today we call for an end to the misguided position of those in Washington who seek to isolate, exclude or otherwise ignore Iran’s largest, most established and best organized political opposition, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), led by Mrs. Maryam Rajavi. In recent years we have come to know Mrs. Rajavi and the NCRI, and we know the resistance far better than many in Washington who believe that the NCRI should be kept at arm’s length for one reason or another.”[6]

This characterization of NCRI—a front group for the MEK—is contradicted by numerous reports. For instance, journalist Mehdi Hassan points out that the MEK “lacks support inside of the Islamic Republic, where it has been disowned by the opposition Green Movement and is loathed by ordinary Iranians for having fought on Saddam Hussein’s side during the Iran-Iraq war.”

Hassan adds that the MEK “has all the trappings of a totalitarian cult...A 2009 report by the RAND Corporation noted how MEK rank-and-file had to swear ‘an oath of devotion to the Rajavis on the Koran’ and highlighted the MEK’s ‘authoritarian, cultic practices’ including ‘mandatory divorce and celibacy for the group’s members (the Rajavis excepted, of course). ‘Love for the Rajavis was to replace love for spouses and family,’[7]explained the RAND report.”[8]

Barbara Slavin of the Atlantic Council also disputed the idea that the MEK represents any kind of legitimate Iranian opposition. “They’re not the leading edge of any kind of regime change movement,” she said. “Many Iranians are eager for change, but they don’t want to go from the frying pan of an Islamic government to the fire of the MEK.”[9]

Journalist Jason Rezaian—who was held in captivity in Iran for a year and a half—wrote that John Bolton’s appointment as Donald Trump’s national security adviser significantly advances the MEK’s agenda. “The MEK is the type of fringe group that sets up camp across the street from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and hands out fliers filled with unsubstantiated claims,” Rezaian wrote. “This is America—we let crazy people talk. That’s their right, and I would never suggest that they be prohibited from doing that. But giving the MEK a voice in the White House is a terrible idea. In John Bolton they have someone who will do it for them. John Bolton wants regime change in Iran, and so does the cult that paid him.”[10]

Bolton is perhaps the most influential figure to have close ties to the MEK, but he is not the only one. Signatories to the letter sent to Trump in 2017 included former Senators Joe Lieberman (an independent who had been a Democratic senator), former democratic Senator Robert Torricelli, Barack Obama’s former national security adviser Gen. James Jones as well as Re-

publican figures such as Rudy Giuliani and Tom Ridge.[11]Former Democratic National Committee chief, Howard Dean and civil rights leader and Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) as well as leading Republican figure, Newt Gingrich have also been prominent public supporters of the MEK, demonstrating the breadth of the organization's connections.[12]

## Questions of Credibility

According to the U.S. State Department, “The group participated in the 1979 Islamic Revolution that replaced the Shah with a Shiite Islamist regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini. However, the MEK’s ideology—a blend of Marxism, feminism, and Islamism—was at odds with the post-revolutionary government, and its original leadership was soon executed by the Khomeini regime. In 1981, the group was driven from its bases on the Iran-Iraq border and resettled in Paris, where it began supporting Iraq in its eight-year war against Khomeini’s Iran. In 1986, after France recognized the Iranian regime, the MEK moved its headquarters to Iraq, which facilitated its terrorist activities in Iran. Since 2003, roughly 3,400 MEK members have been encamped at Camp Ashraf in Iraq.”[13]

By 2012, most of the residents of Camp Ashraf had been relocated to another facility in Iraq—Camp Liberty—to await resettlement in third countries. The MEK’s cooperation in the relocation—which had previously sparked concerns of a planned mass suicide by group members resistant to the move[14]—was reportedly a key factor in Clinton’s decision to delist the group.[15]

Because of the MEK’s cult-like organization under leader Maryam Rajavi, its support for Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War, and its participation in Saddam Hussein’s crackdowns on Iraqi Shiites and Kurds, the group has been described by the New York Times as “a repressive cult despised by most Iranians and Iraqis.”[16]

U.S. officials have recognized this reputation. “While they present themselves as a legitimate democratic group worthy of support, there is universal belief in the administration that they are a cult,” one official told CNN after the decision was made to delist the group. “A de-listing is a sign of support or

amnesia on our part as to what they have done and it does not mean we have suddenly changed our mind about their current behavior. We don't forget who they were and we don't think they are now who they claim to be, which is alternative to the current regime.”[17]

Despite its murky reputation, MEK has presented itself to western backers as a popular and democratic Iranian opposition group that could lead the Islamic Republic to democracy—often even referring to Rajavi, who lives in exile in Paris and has never run for office in Iran, as the country's “president-elect.”[18]

In April 2015, Rajavi was invited to provide testimony at a congressional hearing on ISIS, spurring widespread criticism. Two former officials who were also scheduled to speak at the hearing, former U.S. ambassador to Syria Robert Ford and former State Department official Daniel Benjamin, refused to testify alongside Rajavi. Benjamin decried the invitation to Rajavi as “disgraceful” while Ford agitatedly told *Al Monitor*: “What the fuck do the MEK know about the Islamic State?”[19]

In the face of this backlash, Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX)—who had invited Rajavi—defended her presence as relevant given the threat to MEK members at Camp Liberty in Baghdad from ISIS.[20] According to Eli Clifton, MEK's significant campaign contributions to Poe “may offer at least part of the answer” for the unusual invitation.[21] During her testimony, Rajavi argued that the “ultimate solution” to extremism such as ISIS, is “regime change” in Iran. *The Nation's* Ali Gharib responded: “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.”[22]

There have been reports that the United States has directly aided the MEK, providing assistance that would have been illegal given the group's terrorist designation. In April 2012 journalist Seymour Hersh reported that U.S. special forces had provided communications and weapons training to MEK members in the Nevada desert sometime from 2005 to 2007, considerably improving the group's capabilities inside Iran. “The MEK was a total joke,” a Pentagon consultant told Hersh, “and now it's a real network inside Iran.

How did the MEK get so much more efficient? Part of it is the training in Nevada. Part of it is logistical support in Kurdistan, and part of it is inside Iran. MEK now has a capacity for efficient operations that it never had before.”[23]

## Impact on U.S. Politics

The MEK has had a divisive impact in the United States. While it has garnered supporters from across the U.S. political landscape, it has also spurred negative reactions from representatives of nearly all political factions.

Neoconservatives are a case in point. Several high-profile neocon outlets have praised the group, arguing that it could serve to spearhead regime change efforts in Iran. After news agencies reported in early 2012 that the MEK—with support from Israel—was involved in the assassination of Iranian scientists, a number of neoconservative mouthpieces hailed the group. The Rupert Murdoch-owned New York Post ran an editorial stating: “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.”[24]

Similarly minded ideologues—like Raymond Tanter, a member of the Committee on the President Danger—have called the MEK “the best source for intelligence on Iran’s potential violations of the nonproliferation regime,” arguing that delisting the group “would allow regime change to be on the table in Tehran.”[25] At a rally for the group in Paris, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani proclaimed, “Appeasement of dictators leads to war, destruction and the loss of human lives. For your organization to be described as a terrorist organization is just really a disgrace.”[26]

But other neoconservatives view the group with antipathy, largely because they think that an alliance with it is short-sighted with respect to the goal of achieving regime change in Iran. An example is Michael Rubin, who has been sharply critical of MEK supporters. Responding to the news about the MEK’s alleged role in assassinating Iranian scientists, Rubin wrote: “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 Israe-

lis 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.”[27]

## Lobbying Campaign

Organizations sympathetic to the MEK garnered an impressive array of establishment supporters inside Washington to speak in favor of delisting the group. The effort, according to the New York Times, “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.”[28] Mitchell Reiss, a top foreign policy advisor to the Mitt Romney/Paul Ryan-presidential campaign, also spoke on behalf of the group.[29]

A potential explanation for this diverse list of supporters is the large speaking fees the MEK network has offered to big-name public figures. “Your speech agent calls, and says you get \$20,000 to speak for 20 minutes,” said a State Department official quoted by the Christian Science Monitor. “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.”[30] Pro-MEK individuals and organizations also reportedly donated thousands of dollars to the campaigns of several sitting members of Congress, including Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Bob Filner, Ted Poe, Mike Rogers, and Dana Rohrabacher.[31]

Underlying the MEK's more mainstream backing has been a bedrock of support from foreign policy hawks. In addition to Woolsey and other former Bush administration officials, the group has enjoyed the avid backing of Iran hawks like former ambassador John Bolton and groups like the Iran Policy Committee (IPC), a right-wing U.S.-based outfit whose putative goal is “empowering Iranians for regime change.”

In a 2005 policy paper, IPC placed the delisting of the MEK at the forefront of its proposals for U.S. policy toward Iran. The “continued designation since 1997 of the main Iranian opposition group, Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK), as a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department assures Tehran that regime change is off the table,” wrote the report’s authors. “Removing the MEK’s terrorist designation would be a tangible signal to Tehran and to the Iranian people that a new option is implicitly on the table—regime change.”[32]

The MEK’s critics have likened the organization’s advocacy campaign to that of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an Iraqi exile group led by Ahmed Chalabithat worked to drum up U.S. support for an invasion of Iraq in the 1990s and early 2000s. By presenting itself to Western supporters as an Iraqi government-in-waiting, INC enabled Iraq hawks in the United States to claim that there was Iraqi support for the U.S. action. For Iran hawks, write Ali Fatemi and Karim Pakravan of the National Iranian American Council, “Maryam Rajavi, the MEK leader and self-proclaimed president of Iran, is their new Chalabi.”[33]

IPC has embodied the link between pro-MEK groups and pro-INC groups. A 2010 investigation by the U.S. foreign policy blog LobeLog found that “through 2006, IPC shared an address, accountants, and some staff with multiple organizations that either fronted for or had direct ties to the INC, even sharing staff members with those groups. Some of those ties have continued through today.”[34]

## History

Founded in 1963, MEK was one of a number of Iranian factions that supported the overthrow of the shah in 1979. It used violence against Americans in the run-up to the revolution, launching a string of assassinations and attacks against American military and diplomatic officers in Iran in the 1970s.

The group was expelled from Iran in 1981 when it fell out of favor with Ayatollah Khomeini in a post-revolutionary power struggle. Since then, it has launched thousands of attacks against Iranians it has deemed “agents of the regime,” peaking at a rate of three assassinations per day in the 1980s, and

staged high-profile raids on Iranian diplomatic offices all over the world—including an orchestrated set of attacks on 12 diplomatic facilities in 10 countries on a single day in 1992.

In the mid-1980s, MEK settled in Iraq as a guest of Saddam Hussein, who offered the group use of Camp Ashraf, an encampment and army base north of Baghdad. There, not only did MEK fight on the Iraqi side of the Iran-Iraq war, but it also helped Saddam crush the CIA-instigated Iraqi Kurdish and Shiite uprisings that came on the tail of the 1991 Gulf War, leading to the precipitous erosion of its support in Iran and Iraq alike.

MEK's fighters at Ashraf were disarmed by the United States following the fall of Saddam's government in 2003. In the following years, the camp was subject to occasionally violent raids by the new Iraqi government, which sparked concerns about further violence or a humanitarian crisis when it ordered the camp closed by the end of 2011. Although the Ashraf issue is separate from the issue of MEK's status as a terrorist organization, MEK's backers in the West used the conditions at the camp to garner sympathy for the group's broader agenda in Washington and to argue that its continued listing as a terrorist group is the cause of its mistreatment.

MEK's lobbying efforts were foreshadowed in a 1994 report by the U.S. State Department, which concluded that the group was unlikely to be serious about its democratic overtures. According to the Christian Science Monitor: "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 group formally renounced the use of violence in 2001, but an FBI investigation found MEK members to be "actively involved in planning and executing acts of terrorism" as recently as 2004. In February 2012, NBC News



reported that the Israeli government had coordinated with MEK to launch a series of assassinations against Iranian nuclear scientists. The group's delisting may open the door to future cooperation with the United States as well.

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## The Fanaticism of the MEK's Cheerleaders

Daniel Larison

October 29, 2018

**R**udy Giuliani shills for the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) again:

We strongly support the largest and most organized Iranian opposition, known as the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK).

*The American  
Conservative*

The MEK has no support inside Iran, and it has scant support among Iranians in the diaspora. They cannot be the “largest” opposition group when they have virtually no supporters outside the ranks of their own totalitarian cult, and it doesn’t mean anything to say that a cult is organized. Giuliani’s lame argument that the MEK must be powerful and influential because the Iranian government hates them doesn’t pass the laugh test. The Iranian government perceives the MEK as their enemy for obvious reasons, but it doesn’t follow that Iranians want to have anything to do with them. Legitimate opponents



### The Fanaticism Of The MEK's Cheerleaders



Randy Mitromontez / Shutterstock.com

of the Iranian government hold this group and its Western fans in contempt, and most Iranians don't desire the regime change that Western Iran hawks and the MEK seek.

Giuliani is just one of many former American officials and retired officers to embarrass and discredit themselves by advocating for the MEK, but he is also one of the most vocal. As the president's lawyer, he has access to Trump and may be able to influence him on matters relating to Iran, and

his fellow MEK booster John Bolton would have no problem with that. It is a measure of how ideological and fanatical many Iran hawks are that they have cultivated a relationship with such an appalling organization.

No matter what one thinks our Iran policy should be, the MEK is not a credible alternative to the current government. Seeking regime change in Iran is folly, but to promote an obnoxious cult as the answer to Iran's problems is simply insanity. In addition to being a nasty cult, the group is responsible for killing Americans in the 1970s and aligned itself with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war. Iranians understandably view them as traitors. Anyone who is cheerleading for the MEK is advertising both his ignorance of Iran and his hostility to the Iranian people.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Albanian Government Turns Blind Eye to Human Rights Abuse in MEK Camp

Exit News

November 9, 2018

A recent report from The Guardian has uncovered systematic human rights abuse in the Albanian camp of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), a former Iranian terrorist organization exiled from Iraq to Albania. As Exit has reported over the last years, multiple high-ranking US politicians have visited the MEK in Albania, as US administration's interest in overturning the Iranian regime have grown.

**exit**  
news

The article in The Guardian reveals that members of the MEK have started to defect, many of whom end up in Tirana on their way to emigrate to EU countries or the US. These defectors have reported continuous human rights abuses within the Albanian MEK camp:

[T]he move from Iraq to the relative safety of Albania has precipitated a wave of defections. Those with means have fled the country to the EU and the

US, but around 120 recent MEK escapees remain in Tirana with no right to work or emigrate. I spoke to about a dozen defectors, half of whom are still in Albania, who said that MEK commanders systematically abused members to silence dissent and prevent defections – using torture, solitary confinement, the confiscation of assets and the segregation of families to maintain control over members. [...]

The testimony of these recent defectors follows earlier reports from groups such as Human Rights Watch, which reported former members witnessed “beatings, verbal and psychological abuse, coerced confessions, threats of execution and torture that in two cases led to death.”

The MEK camp appears to fall “beyond the jurisdiction of the Albanian police”:

Ylli Zyla, who served as head of Albanian military intelligence from 2008 to 2012, accused the MEK of violating Albanian law. “Members of this organisation live in Albania as hostages,” he told me. Its camp, he said, was beyond the jurisdiction of Albanian police and “extraordinary psychological violence and threats of murder” took place inside.

The Albanian government, meanwhile, turns a blind eye to the human rights abuses on its territory, hoping that hosting the MEK will give them leverage over the US government:

Olsi Jazexhi, a professor of history at the University of Durres critical of the government’s decision to accept the MEK fighters, says that Albanian politicians hoped the deal would lead the US to turn a blind eye to their own corruption. “The MEK is a card which gives them leverage with the United States,” he said. “They think that by taking the MEK, the Americans will leave their business alone.”

Full protection of human rights is one of the five key conditions for opening EU accession negotiations. It seems that, once again, the Albanian government fails to honor its obligations in that regard.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Terrorists, cultists – or champions of Iranian democracy? The wild wild story of the MEK

Arron Merat

November 9, 2018

They fought for the Iranian revolution – and then for Saddam Hussein. The US and UK once condemned them. But now their opposition to Tehran has made them favourites of Trump White House hardliners.

Mostafa and Robabe Mohammadi came to Albania to rescue their daughter. But in Tirana, the capital, the middle-aged couple have been followed everywhere by two Albanian intelligence agents. Men in sunglasses trailed them from their hotel on George W Bush Road to their lawyer's office; from the lawyer's office to the ministry of internal affairs; and from the ministry back to the hotel.

The Mohammadis say their daughter, Somayeh, is being held against her will by a fringe Iranian revolutionary group that has been exiled to Albania, known as the People's Mujahedin of Iran, or MEK

The  
Guardian



(Mujahedin-e Khalq). Widely regarded as a cult, the MEK was once designated as a terrorist organisation by the US and UK, but its opposition to the Iranian government has now earned it the support of powerful hawks in the Trump administration, including national security adviser John Bolton and the secretary of state, Mike Pompeo.

Somayeh Mohammadi is one of about 2,300 members of the MEK living inside a heavily fortified base that has been built on 34 hectares of farmland in north-west Albania. Her parents, who were once supporters of the group, say that 21 years ago, Somayeh flew to Iraq to attend a summer camp and to visit her maternal aunt's grave. She never came back.

The couple have spent the past two decades trying to get their daughter out of the MEK, travelling from their home in Canada to Paris, Jordan, Iraq and now Albania. "We are not against any group or any country," Mostafa said, sitting outside a meatball restaurant in central Tirana. "We just want to see our daughter outside the camp and without her commanders. She can choose to stay or she can choose to come home with us." The MEK insists Somayeh does not wish to leave the camp, and has released a letter in which she accuses her father of working for Iranian intelligence.

"Somayeh is a shy girl," her mother said. "They threaten people like her. She wants to leave but she is scared that they will kill her."

Since its exile from Iran in the early 1980s, the MEK has been committed to the overthrow of the Islamic republic. But it began in the 1960s as an Islamist-Marxist student militia, which played a decisive role in helping to topple the Shah during the 1979 Iranian revolution.

Anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-American, MEK fighters killed scores of the Shah's police in often suicidal street battles during the 1970s. The group targeted US-owned hotels, airlines and oil companies, and was responsible for the deaths of six Americans in Iran. "Death to America by blood and bonfire on the lips of every Muslim is the cry of the Iranian people," went one of its most famous songs. "May America be annihilated."

Such attacks helped pave the way for the return of the exiled Ayatollah Ruhol-

lah Khomeini, who quickly identified the MEK as a serious threat to his plan to turn Iran into an Islamic republic under the control of the clergy. The well-armed middle-class guerrillas, although popular among religious students and intellectuals, would prove to be no match for Khomeini's organisation and ruthlessness.

Following the revolution, Khomeini used the security services, the courts and the media to choke off the MEK's political support and then crush it entirely. After it fought back, killing more than 70 senior leaders of the Islamic republic – including the president and Iran's chief justice – in audacious bomb attacks, Khomeini ordered a violent crackdown on MEK members and sympathisers. The survivors fled the country.

Saddam Hussein, who was fighting a bloody war against Iran with the backing of the UK and the US, saw an opportunity to deploy the exiled MEK fighters against the Islamic republic. In 1986, he offered the group weapons, cash and a vast military base named Camp Ashraf, only 50 miles from the border with Iran.

For almost two decades, under their embittered leader Massoud Rajavi, the MEK staged attacks against civilian and military targets across the border in Iran and helped Saddam suppress his own domestic enemies. But after siding with Saddam – who indiscriminately bombed Iranian cities and routinely used chemical weapons in a war that cost a million lives – the MEK lost nearly all the support it had retained inside Iran. Members were now widely regarded as traitors.

Isolated inside its Iraqi base, under Rajavi's tightening grip, the MEK became cult-like. A report commissioned by the US government, based on interviews within Camp Ashraf, later concluded that the MEK had “many of the typical characteristics of a cult, such as authoritarian control, confiscation of assets, sexual control (including mandatory divorce and celibacy), emotional isolation, forced labour, sleep deprivation, physical abuse and limited exit options”.

After the US invasion of Iraq, the MEK launched a lavish lobbying campaign to reverse its designation as a terrorist organisation – despite reports impli-

cating the group in assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists as recently as 2012. Rajavi has not been seen since 2003 – most analysts assume he is dead – but under the leadership of his wife, Maryam Rajavi, the MEK has won considerable support from sections of the US and European right, eager for allies in the fight against Tehran.

In 2009, the UK delisted the MEK as a terror group. The Obama administration removed the group from the US terror list in 2012, and later helped negotiate its relocation to Albania.

At the annual “Free Iran” conference that the group stages in Paris each summer, dozens of elected US and UK representatives – along with retired politicians and military officials – openly call for the overthrow of the Islamic republic and the installation of Maryam Rajavi as the leader of Iran. At last year’s Paris rally, the Conservative MP David Amess announced that “regime change ... is at long last within our grasp”. At the same event, Bolton – who championed war with Iran long before he joined the Trump administration – announced that he expected the MEK to be in power in Tehran before 2019. “The behaviour and the objectives of the regime are not going to change and, therefore, the only solution is to change the regime itself,” he declared.

The main attraction at this year’s Paris conference was another longtime MEK supporter, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, now Donald Trump’s lawyer. “The mullahs must go. The ayatollah must go,” he told the crowd. “And they must be replaced by a democratic government which Madam Rajavi represents.” Giuliani also praised the work of MEK “resistance units” inside Iran, that he credited with stoking a recent wave of protests over the struggling economy. “These protests are not happening by accident,” he said. “They’re being coordinated by many of our people in Albania.” (Giuliani, Bolton and the late John McCain are among the US politicians who have travelled to Albania to show support for the MEK.)

Meanwhile, back in Albania, the MEK is struggling to hold on to its own members, who have begun to defect. The group is also facing increased scrutiny from local media and opposition parties, who question the terms of the deal that brought the MEK fighters to Tirana.

It would be hard to find a serious observer who believes the MEK has the capacity or support within Iran to overthrow the Islamic republic. But the US and UK politicians loudly supporting a tiny revolutionary group stranded in Albania are playing a simpler game: backing the MEK is the easiest way to irritate Tehran. And the MEK, in turn, is only one small part of a wider Trump administration strategy for the Middle East, which aims to isolate and economically strangle Iran.

Before the MEK could become a darling of the American and European right, it had to reinvent itself. Democracy, human rights and secularism would become the group's new mantra – as its leader, Maryam Rajavi, renounced violence and successfully repositioned an anti-western sect as a pro-American democratic government-in-waiting.

The long march to respectability began with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The war toppled Saddam Hussein, the MEK's patron and protector, but it brought the group into direct contact with US officials – who would soon be looking for additional ammunition against Iran.

The US had designated the MEK as a terrorist group in the late 1990s, as a goodwill gesture toward a new reformist government in Tehran. When George W Bush accused Saddam Hussein of “harbouring terrorists” in a 2002 speech that made the case for invading Iraq, he was actually referring to the MEK. But in the early days of the US occupation of Iraq, a row erupted inside the White House over what to do with the 5,000 MEK fighters inside their base at Camp Ashraf.

Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state, argued that the MEK was on the list of terrorist organisations and should be treated as such. But Iran hawks, including then secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld, and vice-president Dick Cheney, argued that the MEK should be used as a weapon against the Islamic republic – the next target in the neoconservative roadmap for remaking the Middle East. (“Boys go to Baghdad, but real men go to Tehran,” was their half-joking refrain.)

Rumsfeld's faction won out. Although the group was still listed as a terrorist organisation, the Pentagon unilaterally designated MEK fighters inside Camp

Ashraf as “protected persons” under the Geneva conventions – officially disarmed, but with their security effectively guaranteed by US forces in Iraq. The US was protecting a group it also designated as terrorists.

There is no doubt that US hawks regarded the MEK as a weapon in the fight against Iran: as early as May 2003, the same month that Bush famously declared “mission accomplished” in Iraq, the New York Times reported that “Pentagon hardliners” were moving to protect the MEK, “and perhaps reconstitute it later as a future opposition organisation in Iran, somewhat along the lines of the US-supported Iraqi opposition under Ahmed Chalabi that preceded the war in Iraq”. In 2003, the Bush administration refused an offer, signed off by Iran’s supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, to hand over MEK leaders in Iraq in exchange for members of the military council of al-Qaida and relatives of Osama bin Laden, who had been captured by Iran as they fled Afghanistan after September 11.

As the US occupation of Iraq collapsed into a nightmarish civil war, the American right increasingly blamed Iran for the country’s disintegration. Senior politicians openly called for bombing the Islamic republic, amid growing panic over Iran’s nuclear programme – the existence of which had first been exposed by the MEK in what the BBC called a “propaganda coup” for the group. (Several experts on Israeli intelligence have reported that Mossad passed these documents to the MEK.) By 2007, US news outlets were reporting that Bush had signed a classified directive authorising “covert action” inside Iran.

Between 2007 and 2012, seven Iranian nuclear scientists were attacked with poison or magnetic bombs affixed to moving cars by passing motorcyclists; five were killed. In 2012, NBC news, citing two unnamed US officials, reported that the attacks were planned by Israel’s foreign intelligence agency and executed by MEK agents inside Iran. An MEK spokesperson called this a “false claim ... whose main source is the mullahs’ regime”.

It was around this time that the MEK began working to remake its image in the west. Groups associated with the MEK donated to political campaigns, blanketed Washington with advertisements and paid western political influencers fees to pen op-eds and give speeches – and to lobby for its removal

from the list of designated terrorist organisations.

A stupendously long list of American politicians from both parties were paid hefty fees to speak at events in favour of the MEK, including Giuliani, John McCain, Newt Gingrich and former Democratic party chairs Edward Rendell and Howard Dean – along with multiple former heads of the FBI and CIA. John Bolton, who has made multiple appearances at events supporting the MEK, is estimated to have received upwards of \$180,000. According to financial disclosure forms, Bolton was paid \$40,000 for a single appearance at the Free Iran rally in Paris in 2017.

A handful of UK politicians have attended two or more of the MEK’s Paris events in the past three years, including the Conservatives Bob Blackman and Matthew Offord, and the Labour MPs Roger Godsiff and Toby Perkins. The Conservative MP and former minister Theresa Villiers has attended the past two annual Paris events. So has David Amess, the Conservative MP for Southend West – the MEK’s loudest champion in the UK parliament, who has also travelled to the US to speak at a rally in support of the group. (All of the MPs declined to reply to questions about their attendance.)

The other British attendees at this year’s Paris rally included three peers and five former MPs, including Mike Hancock, who resigned from the Liberal Democrats after admitting inappropriate behaviour with a constituent, and Michelle Thomson, who was forced to resign the SNP whip in 2015 in a controversy over property deals. The former Bishop of Oxford, John Pritchard, was also there, carrying a petition in support of the MEK signed by 75 bishops, including the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams.

At this year’s event, flanked by union jacks and “#RegimeChange” signs, Villiers spoke of the importance of women’s rights, “paid tribute” to Maryam Rajavi – who is barred from entering the UK – and pledged support for her “just cause” in seeking to create “an Iran which is free from the brutal repression of the mullahs”. In a carefully stage-managed performance, Rajavi laid flowers and wrote a tribute in an enormous yearbook of MEK martyrs. “The time has come for the regime’s overthrow,” she said. “Victory is certain, and Iran will be free.”

One day after the conference, the MEK accused Tehran of plotting a bomb attack against the event, following the arrest of four suspects – including an unnamed Iranian diplomat – in Belgium, Germany and France. Iran’s foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, rejected claims of Iran’s involvement and described the accusations as a “sinister false flag ploy”.

Even as the MEK successfully amassed political allies in the west, its security in Iraq eroded as US troops departed. Between 2009 and 2013, Iraqi security forces raided the MEK base at least twice, killing about 100 people. Nouri al-Maliki, then the prime minister of Iraq – whose ambassador to the US called the group “nothing more than a cult” – insisted it leave the country.

Daniel Benjamin, who was then the head of counter-terrorism at the state department, told me that the US decided to remove the MEK from the list of foreign terrorist organisations not because it believed it had abandoned violence, but to “avoid them all getting killed” if it remained in Iraq. After the MEK was no longer designated a terrorist group, the US was able to convince Albania to accept the 2,700 remaining members – who were brought to Tirana on a series of charter flights between 2014 and 2016.

The group bought up land in Albania and built a new base. But the move from Iraq to the relative safety of Albania has precipitated a wave of defections. Those with means have fled the country to the EU and the US, but around 120 recent MEK escapees remain in Tirana with no right to work or emigrate. I spoke to about a dozen defectors, half of whom are still in Albania, who said that MEK commanders systematically abused members to silence dissent and prevent defections – using torture, solitary confinement, the confiscation of assets and the segregation of families to maintain control over members. In response to these allegations, an MEK spokesperson said: “The individuals who are described as ‘former members’ were being used as part of a demonisation campaign against the MEK.”

The testimony of these recent defectors follows earlier reports from groups such as Human Rights Watch, which reported former members witnessed “beatings, verbal and psychological abuse, coerced confessions, threats of execution and torture that in two cases led to death”.

The MEK grew out of Iran's Liberation Movement, an Islamic-democratic "loyal opposition" established in 1961 by the supporters of Mohammad Mossadegh, the prime minister ousted in a 1953 coup orchestrated by Britain and the US. The movement called for national sovereignty, freedom of political activity and the separation of mosque and state. The MEK cleaved to these traditions, but responded to the growing repression of the Shah throughout the 1960s and 70s by rejecting nonviolence.

At the time, the MEK, whose members were largely idealistic middle-class students, combined Islamism with Marxist doctrine. They reinterpreted the Qur'anic passages that undergirded their Shia faith as injunctions to socialise the means of production, eliminate the class system and promote the struggles of Iran's ethnic minorities. Steeped in thinkers such as Frantz Fanon and Régis Debray, they expressed solidarity with national liberation movements in Algeria, Cuba, Palestine and Vietnam. Quoting Lenin's famous pamphlet, the MEK posed the question: "What Is to Be Done?" "Our answer is straightforward," the MEK wrote: "Armed struggle."

Rajavi was among 69 members of the MEK tried in 1972 by a military tribunal for plotting acts of terrorism. "The ruling class is on its deathbed," he told the tribunal. When the prosecutor interrupted him to ask why he had acquired weapons, Rajavi replied: "To deal with the likes of you."

Of the 11 members of the MEK central committee tried in 1972, nine were immediately executed and one remained in jail. When Rajavi emerged from prison in 1979, three weeks before the Iranian revolution, he was the undisputed leader of Iran's most deadly underground rebel group.

The MEK played an important role in the 1979 revolution, seizing the imperial palace and doing much of the fighting to neutralise the police and the army. Two days after the revolution, Massoud Rajavi, who was 30, met the 77-year-old supreme leader. The two did not hit it off. "I met Khomeini," Rajavi told a journalist in 1981. "He held out his hand for me to kiss, and I refused. Since then, we've been enemies."

Khomeini saw the MEK as a threat to his power, barring Rajavi from running for president and casting his organisation as an enemy of Islam. Armed



members of the newly created Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) disrupted MEK events, burned its literature and beat up its members. Without political power, the MEK relied on street protests. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians attended its rallies, which the courts soon banned.

In response, the MEK and the president, Abolhassan Banisadr, who was also antagonistic to Khomeini, organised two days of protests across 30 cities – forcing Khomeini to go on television to reiterate the ban. The MEK, he said, were “waging war on God”. Other clerics warned that demonstrators would be shot on sight. On 20 June 1981, the MEK organised a mass protest of half a million people in Tehran, with the aim of triggering a second revolution. The clerics were true to their word: 50 demonstrators were killed, with 200 wounded. Banisadr was removed from office and a wave of executions followed.

Over the following months and years, the violence escalated. Khomeini rounded up thousands of MEK supporters – while his loyalists launched waves of mob violence against MEK members and sympathisers.

By December, the regime had executed 2,500 members of the MEK. The group counter-attacked with a spate of assassinations and suicide bombings against Friday-prayer leaders, revolutionary court judges and members of the IRGC. “I am willing to die to help hasten the coming of the classless society; to keep alive our revolutionary tradition; and to avenge our colleagues murdered by this bloodthirsty, reactionary regime,” wrote one MEK fighter, Ebrahimzadeh, who killed 13 IRGC and Ayatollah Sadduqi, a close advisor to Khomeini, by detonating a hand grenade in a suicide attack in July 1982.

By the mid-1980s, thousands of people labelled as MEK had been executed or killed in street battles by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This was the time when Rajavi accepted Saddam’s offer to fight Iran from the safety of Iraq. Over the next few years, Rajavi launched an “ideological revolution”, banning marriage and enforcing mandatory “eternal” divorce on all members, who were required to separate from their husbands or wives. He married one of the new divorcees, Maryam Azodanlu, who became, in effect, his chief lieutenant and took his name.

For Saddam, the MEK was a useful, but disposable, tool in his war against Iran. The MEK, however, was totally dependent on the Iraqi leader. In addition to cash and arms, he sent Iranian prisoners of war to Rajavi as new recruits. “The whole world was Camp Ashraf,” said Edward Tramado, one of these prisoners, remembering his indoctrination. “Nothing else had any meaning for me,” recalled Tramado, who now lives in Germany. “I was living in a delusional world. Even though I knew I had a mother who was waiting for me, my entire world had become what they had constructed for me.”

In July 1988, six days after the ceasefire that officially ended the Iran-Iraq war, the MEK launched a suicidal mission deep into Iranian territory, dubbed Operation Eternal Light. Once again, Rajavi predicted his actions would spark another revolution. “It will be like an avalanche,” Rajavi told the fighters he was about to send to their deaths. “You don’t need to take anything with you. We will be like fish swimming in a sea of people. They will give you whatever you need.”

The mission would end in a massacre: hapless MEK fighters were lured into an ambush by the Iranian army, which crushed them with minimal effort. One Iranian soldier who took part in the operation recently described it to me. Mehrad, who volunteered in 1987 at the age of 15, recalled that his division, which had fought against Iraqi soldiers on the southern front, was redeployed to the north in July 1988 to repel a new assault from Iraq. His division was sent to a location near the city of Kermanshah, about 111 miles (180km) from the border with Iraq. Mehrad and his fellow soldiers were surprised to hear that enemy soldiers had managed to make such a deep incursion into Iran. “We thought our army had given up,” he said.

When he arrived, Mehrad discovered that the enemy was the MEK – which had been led into a trap. “Their military strategy was very stupid,” he told me. “They just drove down the Tehran highway. It was like if the French army wanted to invade England and they just drove down the motorway from Dover to London.”

“We very quickly killed thousands of them,” Mehrad said. “There were piles of bodies on either side of the road. What was interesting to us was that many of them were women.” Some MEK took cyanide rather than be cap-

tured alive. The MEK subsequently claimed that 1,304 of its members were martyred, and another 1,100 returned to Iraq injured.

The survivors were tried on the spot and quickly executed; Mehrad watched as hundreds were hanged at gallows erected in the nearby town of Eslamabad. Khomeini then used the failed invasion as a pretext for the mass execution of thousands of MEK and other leftists in Iranian jails. Amnesty estimates that more than 4,500 people were put to death, and some sources say the numbers were even higher.

Eternal Light marked a major turning point for the MEK. Inside the barbed wire of Camp Ashraf, as the reality of indefinite exile sank in, a traumatised and grief-stricken membership turned against itself under the paranoid leadership of Rajavi. Several former members told me that after the bloody defeat, Massoud Rajavi cast himself as the representative of al-Mahdi, the 12th Imam who was “hidden” in the 9th century and who, according to Iranian Shia, will return alongside Jesus to bring peace and justice to the world.

Outside Camp Ashraf, the MEK continued to stage cross-border attacks against Iran, and helped Saddam to crush uprisings against his rule after his defeat by the US in the 1990 Gulf war. In March 1991, Saddam deployed the MEK to help quell the armed Kurdish independence movement in the north. According to the New York Times, Maryam Rajavi told her fighters: “Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian revolutionary guards.” The MEK vehemently denies it participated in Saddam’s campaigns to put down the Shia and Kurdish rebellions, but an Iraqi human rights tribunal has indicted MEK leaders for their role in suppressing the uprisings.

Karwan Jamal Tahir, the Kurdistan regional government’s high representative in London, was a fighter for the Kurdish peshmerga in 1991. He told me that he remembers how the MEK arrived in the town of Kalar, about 93 miles (150km) south-east of Kirkuk, just after Saddam had lost control of the north of Iraq after the first Gulf war. “They came in Saddam’s tanks,” he said. “We thought they were returning peshmerga because the tanks were covered with portraits of Kurdish leaders ... but they opened fire on the town ... It was a big atrocity.”

Maryam Rajavi and Rudy Giuliani at a ceremony in Tirana in March marking the Iranian new year. Photograph: Alamy

In the next decade, the MEK continued to fight against Iran. In 1992, the group launched concurrent attacks on Iranian diplomatic missions in 10 countries, including Iran's permanent mission to the UN in New York, which was invaded by five men with knives. The MEK also settled more personal scores. In 1998, an assassin killed Asadollah Lajevardi, the former warden of Evin prison who had personally overseen the executions of thousands of MEK members.

Back at Camp Ashraf, commanders would tell wavering members that if they escaped, they would face certain death at the hands of either Saddam or the Iranian authorities. "We were far away from the world," one member, who only escaped the MEK after the move to Albania, told me. "We had no information. No television, no radio." Instead, within the camp, they had "Mojahedin television", which consisted of looped speeches by Maryam and Massoud Rajavi, played "all day long".

Rajavi told his followers that the failure of Eternal Light was not a military blunder, but was instead rooted in the members' thoughts for their spouses; their love had sapped their will to fight. In 1990, all couples inside the camp were ordered to divorce – and women had their wedding rings replaced by pendants engraved with Massoud's face. Spouses were separated, and their children were sent to be "adopted" by MEK supporters in Europe.

MEK commanders demanded that all members publicly reveal any errant sexual thoughts. Manouchelur Abdi, a 55-year-old who also left the MEK in Albania, told me that the confession sessions used to take place every morning. Even feelings of love and friendship were outlawed, he says. "I would have to confess that I missed my daughter," he says. "They would shout at me. They would humiliate me. They would say that my family was the enemy and missing them was strengthening the hand of the mullahs in Tehran."

Another recent defector, Ali (not his real name) showed me scars on his arms and legs from what he described as weeks of torture after he first joined the group in the early 1990s, including cigarette burns on his arms. When it was

over, he said, he was taken to Baghdad to meet the leader. “They took us into a big hall. Massoud Rajavi was sitting there with a group of women,” Ali recalled. “[Rajavi said] ‘If any of you say one word to any one ... One word, if any of this is exposed, reaches anyone else’s ears, or if you talk about leaving, you’ll be delivered to [Saddam’s] intelligence service immediately.’”

Batoul Soltani joined the MEK in 1986 with her husband and infant daughter. At first, her family was able to live together, but in 1990, she says she was forced to divorce and give up her five-year-old daughter and newborn son, who were sent abroad to be raised by MEK sympathisers. Soltani alleges that she was forced to have sex with Massoud Rajavi on multiple occasions, beginning in 1999. She says that the last assault was in 2006, the year that she escaped from Camp Ashraf and a time when Rajavi had not been seen in public for three years. When we spoke recently, Soltani accused Maryam Rajavi of helping Massoud to abuse female MEK members over the years. “[Massoud] Rajavi thought that the only achilles heel [for female fighters] was the opposite sex,” Soltani told me. “He would say that the only reason you women would leave me is a man. So, I want all of your hearts.”

Soltani, who was one of three women to speak about sexual abuse inside the MEK in a 2014 documentary aired on Iranian television, alleged that Rajavi had hundreds of “wives” inside the camp.

Another former female member, Zahra Moini, who served as a bodyguard for Maryam Rajavi, told me that women were threatened with punishment if they did not divorce their husbands and “marry” Massoud. “Maryam was involved in this sexual abuse, she used to read the vows to allow for the marriage to be consummated,” Moini said, in a telephone interview from Germany.

“Those who didn’t accept to marry would be disappeared. I was told that if I didn’t divorce [my husband], I would end up in Ramadi prison and I would have to sleep with the Iraqi generals every night.” (In response to questions about these allegations, an MEK spokesperson said: “The mullahs’ propaganda machine has been churning out sexual libels against the resistance and its leader for the past 40 years.”)

Two other female defectors, Zahra Bagheri and Fereshteh Hedayati, have alleged that they were given hysterectomies without their consent in the Camp Ashraf hospital, under the pretext they were being operated on for minor ailments. In the eccentric ideological language of the group, the women say the procedure was retrospectively justified to victims as representing “the peak” of loyalty to their leader.

Hedayati, who survived the massacres of Operation Eternal Light, joined the MEK as a 22-year-old in 1981 with her husband, who is still inside the group. “They said I had a cyst,” she told me. “But they also took out my womb. They told me that it meant that I had an even stronger connection to our ideological leader.” Hedayati, who left the group in Iraq and now lives in Norway, says she was never sexually abused, but was “brainwashed” by the group into divorcing her husband, and alleges that more than 100 other women were sterilised by MEK doctors. “I always ask myself why they did this to us,” Bagheri said. “Of course, to take away our futures.”

Between an escape attempt in 2001 and her exit from the MEK in 2013, Hedayati says she was subject to extraordinarily harsh treatment by her commanders. “They said I was a lesbian,” she says. “They spat on me, they beat me, they locked me up. I was put in jail, in solitary confinement.”

Albania ostensibly accepted the MEK members for humanitarian reasons – but the country’s leaders may have seen an opportunity to curry favour with the US government, which had seen its offers rejected by various other European states. “They were the only ones who would take them,” the former state department official Daniel Benjamin has said.

Olsi Jazexhi, a professor of history at the University of Durres critical of the government’s decision to accept the MEK fighters, says that Albanian politicians hoped the deal would lead the US to turn a blind eye to their own corruption. “The MEK is a card which gives them leverage with the United States,” he said. “They think that by taking the MEK, the Americans will leave their business alone.” (A secret US state department cable from 2009, published by WikiLeaks, said that the country’s three major parties “all have MPs with links to organised crime ... Conventional wisdom, backed by other reporting, is that the new parliament has quite a few drug traffickers and

money launderers.”)

For the Trump administration, the MEK is a valuable asset in the escalating regional conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This summer, Trump abruptly pulled out of the Iran nuclear agreement and announced new sanctions, triggering a currency collapse and four months of sporadic protests across Iran. The US has reimposed tough sanctions this week, targeting Iranian oil exports and banking. But Trump’s Middle East strategy has come under new scrutiny after the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents in Istanbul – which has sparked a backlash against the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, and his allies in the Trump administration.

For most of its life in exile, the MEK was funded by Saddam. After his downfall, the group says it raised money from Iranian diaspora organisations and individual donors. The MEK has always denied it is financed by Saudi Arabia – but the former Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Turki al-Faisal, made waves when he attended the group’s 2016 rally in Paris and called for the fall of the Iranian regime.

“The money definitely comes from Saudis,” says Ervand Abrahamian, a professor at the City University of New York and author of the definitive academic work on the group’s history, *The Iranian Mojahedin*. “There is no one else who could be subsidising them with this level of finance.”

Analysts agree that the MEK lacks the capacity or support to overthrow the Iranian government – as even Bolton and Pompeo would surely concede. “They are probably smart enough to know that this group is not democratic and anyway has no constituency inside Iran,” said Paul Pillar, who served in the CIA for 28 years, including a period as the agency’s senior counter-terrorism analyst. Trump and his Iran hawks, Pillar said, are not concerned with replacing the current regime so much as causing it to crumble. “They are pursuing anything that would disrupt the political order in Iran so they and the president can cite such an outcome as a supposed victory no matter what comes afterwards.”

According to one recent MEK defector, Hassan Heyrani, the group’s main work in Albania involves fighting online in an escalating information war

between Iran and its rivals. Heyrani, who left the MEK last summer, says that he worked in a “troll farm” of 1,000 people inside the Albanian camp, posting pro-Rajavi and anti-Iran propaganda in English, Farsi and Arabic on Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and newspaper comment sections.

“We worked from morning to night with fake accounts,” he says. “We had orders daily that the commanders would read for us. ‘It is your duty to promote this senator, this politician, or journalist writing against Iran’ and we would say ‘Thank you, the Iranian people support you and Maryam Rajavi is the rightful leader’, but if there was a negative story on the MEK, we would post ‘You are the mercenaries of the Iranian regime, you are not the voice of the Iranian people, you don’t want freedom for Iran’.” An MEK spokesperson called these allegations “another lie” made up to support the Iranian foreign ministry.

According to Marc Owen Jones, an academic who studies political bots on social media, “thousands” of suspicious Twitter accounts emerged in early 2016 with “Iran” as their location and “human rights” in their description or account name, which posted in support of Trump and the MEK. These accounts, says Jones, were created in batches and would promote Trump’s anti-Iran rhetoric using the hashtags #IranRegimeChange, #FreeIran and #IstandwithMaryamRajavi.

Albanian journalists say that the MEK, which has close contacts with senior politicians and the security services, operates with impunity within Albania. Ylli Zyla, who served as head of Albanian military intelligence from 2008 to 2012, accused the MEK of violating Albanian law. “Members of this organisation live in Albania as hostages,” he told me. Its camp, he said, was beyond the jurisdiction of Albanian police and “extraordinary psychological violence and threats of murder” took place inside.

Former members accuse the MEK of responsibility for the death in June of Malek Shara’i, a senior commander who was found drowned by police divers at bottom of a reservoir behind the group’s Albanian base. Shara’i’s sister, Zahra Shara’i, said that his family had received news from former members that Malek was about to escape, and says the MEK was responsible for his



death. “I am their enemy and I will not rest until I get my revenge,” she told the Guardian from Iran. The MEK said that Shara’i drowned while attempting to save another member from drowning. The Albanian police said the death was not suspicious.

While defectors with private means have been smuggled out of the country into the EU, many former members live hand-to-mouth in Tirana. The Albanian state has not granted refugee rights to the MEK or its defectors, and a UN monthly stipend of 30,000 lek (£215) lapsed on 1 September. “They’re stuck,” says Jazexhi, who has worked to support the defectors. “They don’t know the languages, they don’t know the laws, they don’t know what democracy is. They are used to dictators. We tell them that they shouldn’t be afraid.”

Migena Balla, the lawyer representing Mostafa and Robabe Mohammadi, the couple in Tirana fighting for the release of their daughter Somayeh, believes that pressure has been put to bear on both the police and the judiciary to ensure the MEK does not “create political problems”. “Politics is interfering in the judicial system,” she says. “When I went to the police station to register their complaint the police officers actually ran away. They are scared of losing their jobs.”

The MEK has not taken kindly to the presence of the Mohammadis in Albania. They accuse Mostafa – and any former member who has spoken out against the MEK – of being a paid agent of the “mullah regime”. On 27 July, Mostafa was hospitalised following an assault by four senior members of the MEK, which was captured on video by his wife. The attackers, who shouted “Terrorist!” at Mohammadi, were briefly detained by Albanian police. But, after a phalanx of MEK members arrived at the police station, the men were promptly released.

The MEK has published letters, purportedly written by Somayeh, accusing her father of being an Iranian intelligence agent. A nervous-looking Somayeh recently gave a video interview inside the MEK base saying that she wishes to remain a member of the group.

The Mohammadis have responded with open letters to their daughter and to

Albanian politicians, calling for an unsupervised meeting with their daughter. “I am your mother Mahboubeh Robabe Hamza and I want to meet with you,” Robabe wrote to Somayeh. “I am the woman who fed you at my breast, I held you in the crook of my arm. You are my flesh and blood ... I love you more than my life ... I’m getting old, I am getting tired, but life is not worth living without seeing you.”

Arron Merat was a Tehran correspondent for the Economist between 2011 and 2014. He has covered Iran for the Guardian, the Sunday Times and Vice News. He tweets at @a\_merats

Note by readers’ editor, 19 December 2018: After publication, I received several complaints about this article, including from a group of UK parliamentarians. I enquired and concluded that the editorial standards had been met. It is a complex story, and telling it is complicated by secrecy on many sides. I also concluded that readers would benefit from being made aware of three references which demonstrate the tensions that the MEK case can cause among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. The references are: a UK supreme court decision in a case brought by parliamentarians against a decision by Theresa May when she was home secretary; a US court of appeal decision to return for reconsideration a decision by Hillary Clinton when she was secretary of state; and a UK house of commons briefing paper where these and relevant EU cases were contextualised. Paul Chadwick, readers’ editor

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Saudi Intelligence Met with Trump Admin and Mossad To Discuss Iran Sabotage and Assassinations

Whitney Webb

November 13, 2018

A plan to use private intelligence operatives to sabotage Iran was developed by Trump confidant George Nade and Joel Zamel, an Israeli known for his “deep ties” to Israeli intelligence and security agencies.

A new report published in The New York Times has revealed that top Saudi intelligence officials with ties to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), in meetings with figures close to the Trump administration and Israel intelligence, expressed interest in using private contractors to “sabotage the Iranian economy” and to assassinate top Iranian officials.

The plan to use private intelligence operatives to sabotage Iran’s economy had been developed by George Nader, an American-Lebanese businessman close to Trump and the United Arab Emirates and





a convicted sex offender, and Joel Zamel, an Israeli known for his “deep ties” to Israeli intelligence and security agencies. The plan, at the time of the meeting, did not include the assassination component, though the Saudi officials present sought to probe whether such acts could be included in the campaign.

The Times noted that both Nader and Zamel “saw their Iran plan both as a lucrative source of income and as a way to cripple a country that they and the Saudis considered a profound threat.” The plan was said to involve operations like “revealing hidden global assets of the Quds Force; creating fake social media accounts in Farsi to foment unrest in Iran; financing Iranian opposition groups; and publicizing accusations, real or fictitious, against senior Iranian officials to turn them against one another.” The two met with Saudi officials in early January 2017 in order to secure funding for the plan, which they estimated would cost around \$2 billion.

Both Nader and Zamel are now witnesses in the investigation led by Robert Mueller into Trump campaign practices and alleged collusion. It is unclear how Nader and Zamel – who are connected to the United Arab Emirates and Israel, respectively – fit into Mueller’s inquiry, which has been publicized as focusing largely on alleged collusion with the Russian government.

Nader and Zamel had enlisted Erik Prince – the former head of the pri-

vate military company Blackwater (now Academi) and Trump adviser — in their efforts to secure Saudi financing for their plan. In their discussion with Prince, Nader and Zamel were informed of Prince’s “own paramilitary proposals that he planned to try to sell the Saudis,” though the details of Prince’s proposals are unknown.

However, during the meeting, Saudi intelligence officials were apparently more interested in using private companies to assassinate “Iranian enemies of the kingdom [Saudi Arabia]” than in sabotaging Iran’s economy.

During the discussion with Nader and Zamel, Saudi Maj. Gen. Ahmed al-Assiri inquired specifically whether the plan could include the assassination of Qassim Suleimani, the leader of Iran’s elite Quds Force, and other senior Iranian officials. Notably, al-Assiri has been named the man allegedly responsible for the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey in early October. Al-Assiri is also known for being a close confidant of MBS, who was deputy crown prince and defense minister at the time of the meeting.

Al-Assiri’s interest in a privatized assassination scheme was met tepidly by Nader and Zamel, who offered to consult their lawyer on the matter. Although their lawyer promptly rejected the idea, Nader, eager to please the Saudi officials whom they were seeking to win over, nevertheless told al-Assiri and the other Saudi officials present that a London-based company run by former British Special Operations troops might consider the contract for such high-profile assassinations. The Times stated that it was unclear which company Nader had suggested.

Though their ambitions to use private contractors to assassinate top Iranian officials did not receive the response they had hoped, Saudi officials reportedly told Nader and Zamel that — while they were interested in the plan — it was so “provocative and potentially destabilizing” that they wanted the approval of the incoming Trump administration before financing the campaign.

### **Was part of the plan enacted?**

Though it is unclear whether the plan drafted by Nader and Zamel was ever

enacted, there is some evidence suggesting that aspects of their plan as well as al-Assiri's separate, privatized assassination plan were ultimately enacted in some form.

For instance, in early June of last year, the CIA created a "new mission center" in Iran that focused on fomenting domestic dissent and gathering intelligence, as well as on "covert action." That mission center has been headed by CIA officer Michael D'Andrea, a close associate of former CIA Director John Brennan and a convert to Wahhabi Islam. After D'Andrea was appointed to head the center, former CIA case officer Robert Baer told Al Jazeera that "All I can say is that war with Iran is in the cards," given that D'Andrea's aggressive anti-Iran approach was well known within the CIA. Notably, the center's activities fit with aspects of the Nader/Zamel plan aimed at revealing key Iranian government assets through intelligence gathering and covert ops.

Furthermore, the aspect of the Nader/Zamel plan that sought to create fake social media accounts to foment unrest in Iran was ultimately enacted through the creation of an Albania-based "troll farm" of fake anti-Iranian government accounts that was managed by the Iranian terror group MEK. That "troll farm," according to an Al Jazeera report, had been used by the MEK to orchestrate what appeared to be a wave of support for the group and its anti-regime message toward the end of last year, when Iranians took to the streets to protest adverse economic conditions largely caused by a mixture of domestic legislation and intense pressure by Washington.

As MintPress reported at the time, many of those social media trends had been fueled by fake accounts, or bots, that behaved in an automated fashion and amplified messages through swarm-like behavior such as retweeting, liking, and republishing videos and articles posted alongside hashtags such as #FreeIran and #IranRegimeChange. Many top officials in the Trump administration, including John Bolton and Rudy Giuliani, are close to the MEK and its leader Maryam Rajavi. The MEK has also been supported in the past by Saudi Arabia, Israeli intelligence, and the U.S. military.

In addition to the aspects of the Nader/Zamel plan that appeared to have been implemented, Iran has recently accused "foreign regimes" and U.S. allies in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia, of plotting terror attacks within Iran.

For instance, in June of last year, a pair of terror attacks in the Iranian capital of Tehran were blamed on Saudi Arabia by the Iranian government.

In a statement at the time, Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps noted:

This terrorist action, coming one week after the meeting of the president of the United States with the leader of one of the region’s reactionary governments (Saudi Arabia) ... shows they are involved in this savage action.”

Daesh (ISIS), which Saudi Arabia is known to fund, officially claimed responsibility for the attacks.

More recently, a terror attack in late September targeted an Iranian Veteran’s Day parade in the city of Ahvaz, killing 25 – more than half of whom were civilians. After the attack, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stated that “those who give intelligence and propaganda support to these terrorists must answer for it.” Rouhani’s comments were followed by a tweet from Iran’s Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, who asserted that the attackers were “terrorists recruited, trained, armed and paid by a foreign regime,” but did not elaborate. He blamed regional countries and their “U.S. masters” for the attack, adding that Iran would respond “swiftly and decisively.”

## **Outsourcing assassination**

Furthermore, it seems that some Gulf countries have used private military contractors for assassinations since al-Assiri first suggested the idea in the January 2017 meeting with Nader and Zamel. However, instead of targeting Iranian officials, the tactic has been used in Yemen.

A report published last month by BuzzFeed detailed how Green Beret, Navy SEAL, and CIA paramilitary veterans had been hired by the U.S.-based security company Spear Operations Group to serve as the “private murder squad” for Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ), assassinating prominent Yemeni clerics and political figures who had run afoul of the crown prince. At the time MBZ’s “private murder squad” was active, Saudi Arabia’s al-Assiri was overseeing intelligence operations in Yemen in coordi-

nation with the UAE.

Whether these tactics were influenced by the January 2017 meeting of al-As-siri, Nader and Zamel is unclear. However, the details of the meeting and the recent efforts by the U.S. government and its Middle Eastern allies to foment regime change in Iran clearly show that these governments are willing to use the dirtiest of tactics in order to topple Iran's government and clear the way for U.S. hegemony in the Middle East and beyond.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## The MEK and the Bankrupt U.S. Policy on Iran

Paul Pillar

November 13, 2018

Among the many indicators of misdirection in the Trump administration's policy toward Iran, one of the clearest is the fondness for the cult-cum-terrorist group known as the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK). National Security Advisor John Bolton and Donald Trump's attorney, Rudy Giuliani, are among the group's most prominent cheerleaders, having been featured speakers at its rallies. They and other shills for the MEK refer to the group as if it represented what it decidedly is not: a democratic alternative to the current Iranian political system.

Journalist Arron Merat, an experienced Iran-watcher who formerly was the Economist's Tehran correspondent, has just published a 6,600-word article about the MEK in the Guardian. The piece is well worth reading as a richly informed and up-to-date portrait that leaves no doubt about the nature of the group and the ghastly inappropriateness of using

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the MEK in any way as a vehicle for U.S. policy in the region.

The MEK originated as a student movement that opposed the shah of Iran and spouted an ideology that weirdly combined Islamism and Marxism. The group was virulently anti-American from the beginning. Its terrorist operations targeted American-owned businesses, and it killed six American citizens in addition to its far more numerous Iranian victims. The MEK was a major player in toppling the shah in the 1979 revolution but soon had a falling out with the new Khomeini regime—among other things, the group opposed the regime’s release of the American hostages held at the U.S. embassy. The group continued its terrorism, with the only difference being that the Islamic Republic had replaced the shah’s regime as a principal target.

With the eight-year Iran-Iraq War already underway, the MEK threw in its lot with Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi dictator gave the group weapons, cash, and a compound called Camp Ashraf in return for its continuing attacks inside Iran as well as helping Saddam suppress his own domestic opponents. Iranians understandably viewed this phase in the MEK’s history as an unforgivable act of treason, erasing whatever support the group previously had in Iran.

Merat’s article provides details of the cult-like aspects of how the MEK has functioned, earlier at Camp Ashraf and more recently, after the group had to leave Iraq, at a compound in Albania. As cult leaders, the husband-and-wife duo of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi have resembled the likes of Jim Jones and Shoko Asahara. Families have been broken up, married couples told to divorce, and women threatened with punishment if they did not “marry” Massoud and endure his sexual abuse. (Massoud dropped out of sight after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and it is not known whether he is dead or alive. Maryam continues as the public face of the group.) Stomach-turning details continue to emerge from the MEK’s current location in Albania, including stories of forced hysterectomies and would-be escapees subjected to solitary confinement. The former head of Albanian military intelligence says that MEK members live in the group’s current compound as “hostages” amid “extraordinary psychological violence and threats of murder.”

## Buying a Makeover

The MEK's efforts over the past two decades to convey a benign public image completely at odds with this internal reality, and to pose as a force for democracy in Iran, have depended on buying the public endorsements of well-known public figures. This has required money—lots of it. Five-figure speaking fees have flowed freely. Public disclosure forms indicate that Bolton received \$40,000 for a single appearance at an MEK event in Paris last year, and Merat gives an estimate of \$180,000 as the total that Bolton has received for his multiple appearances on behalf of the group.

In addition to the generous big-name fees, lobbying for the MEK has included other well-financed techniques. The crowd at the Paris event, for example, was supplemented by young people bussed in from Eastern Europe who enjoyed a free weekend in Paris. The group used the same rent-a-crowd technique for a demonstration outside the State Department when the MEK was ramping up its lobbying a few years ago to be delisted as a foreign terrorist organization. Some of the participants in that event were recruited at a homeless shelter in New York. They admitted knowing very little about the MEK but appreciated the free meals they were given for attending.

Where the money is coming from is still somewhat of a mystery. But some clues point to governments that are regional rivals of Iran as the most likely source.

Two further observations flow from this surprisingly successful but wholly unjustified remaking of the MEK's image. One concerns how some famous—and perhaps otherwise respectable people—evidently have been willing to prostitute themselves to get in on those fat speaking fees. A wide range of political figures have played the game, from Howard Dean on the left to Bolton and many others on the right. Some of the players may have had little more understanding of the MEK when they got involved than did the guys from the homeless shelter in New York. Ed Rendell, a former Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, freely admitted that he knew little about the group when he accepted an invitation to speak at an event the MEK staged at a downtown Washington hotel. He then told his audience—in a demonstration of the self-sustaining nature of big-name endorsements—that the reputa-

tions of the other speakers at the same event persuaded him that it must be for a worthwhile cause.

Not everyone has succumbed to the monetary temptations. Tip your hat, for example, to Elliott Abrams, a card-carrying neoconservative responsible for more than his fair share of misdirection in Middle East policy, for declining an invitation to speak at an MEK event. Abrams cited the fact that the group was still on the foreign terrorist organization list at the time, but the politically and morally inexcusable nature of advocating for such a group does not depend on such a formal list.

## Disruption, Not Democracy

The other observation is that, although the shills have taken their fees to the bank, the fact that a group as loathsome as the MEK figures so prominently in the administration's policy on Iran demonstrates the bankruptcy of that policy. If the MEK is in the game, the game is not about democracy, human rights, or doing right by ordinary Iranians. Bolton and at least some of the others who have touted the group are smart enough to realize that and to understand the true nature of the group. They are interested not in democracy but in the capability for sabotage, destruction, and assassination in Iran—a capability that the MEK still has despite its claims to have forsaken violence.

Fostering that capability may serve the objectives of regional rivals who do their own sabotage, destruction, and assassination aimed at Iran and welcome the augmentation of their capabilities for mayhem that the MEK offers. It certainly does not serve the interests of the United States. It instead increases instability in and thus around Iran, strengthens the market for hardline views in Iran, and besmirches the reputation of the United States through associating itself with the MEK. If the MEK represents what American leaders mean when they talk about democracy, then the vast majority of Iranians want nothing to do with it.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Memories of Middle East misadventures

Jonathan Manthorpe

November 15, 2018

‘Trump’s use of presidential powers to dictate to other countries with whom they can and can’t do business has entrenched resentment among U.S. allies that will come back to haunt him.’

In this season of remembrance, it’s worth recalling it was only 15 years ago that snorting ideologues in the White House, an incompetent president, and a Middle Eastern confidence trickster took the United States to war in Iraq.

About 400,000 people died as a direct result of that invasion by the U.S., which was justified by the totally fabricated claim that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was producing weapons of mass destruction.

Now, the death stars are aligning again after Washington’s imposition of rigorous sanctions on Iran following the Donald Trump regime’s decision in

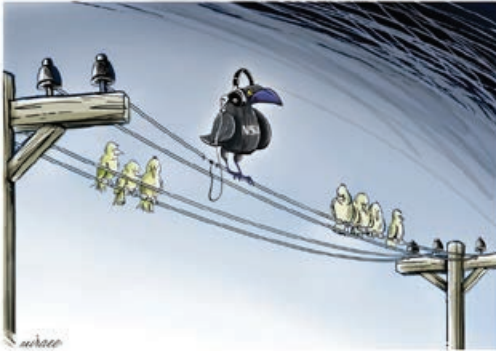
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OPINIONS

Memories of Middle East misadventures

By Jonathan Manthorpe Published on Nov 15, 2018 4:06pm

'Trump's use of presidential powers to dictate to other countries with whom they can and can't do business has entrenched resentment among U.S. allies that will come back to haunt him.'



May to pull the U.S. out of the United Nations' agreement to halt Tehran's nuclear development program.

What the White House wants to happen next is confused.

Trump has talked vaguely of forcing Iran to negotiate a new deal that would: curb Tehran's power politics in the Middle East; halt its support for groups like Hezbollah; and squash its nuclear and missile development programs.

But Trump has not set out a road map for Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, nor the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to follow. This is hardly surprising. Trump is a flim-flam artist for whom the performance is all that counts.

However, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the National Security Advisor John Bolton are clear about what they want. They want regime change in Tehran.

They are under the same delusion that drove the ideologues around President George W. Bush to press for the invasion of Iraq. Bolton and Pompeo think it will take only a little encouragement and pressure for the Iranian people to overthrow the Islamic state and move seamlessly to establish a democracy.

The Bush White House was captivated by a convicted confidence trickster named Ahmed Chalabi. He created an exile group called the Iraqi National Congress, and even managed to get the Bush administration to finance his faux resistance.

Mujahedin-e Khalq Uncoverd 2

Chalabi fed the Bush menagerie false information about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction that was used to justify the invasion.

The Central Intelligence Agency warned that Chalabi was unreliable, but the Bush leaguers were so besotted, they called him "The George Washington of Iraq." Only after the invasion and Chalabi's installation in government did his lying and fakery quickly become apparent, and he was dumped.

Bolton, Pompeo and others in the Trump regime seem to be going down the same quagmire path with a strange Iranian exiled dissident group called the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or MEK.

MEK has a turbulent history. It was founded in the 1960s in opposition to the shah of Iran and was part of the Islamic Revolution that overthrew him in 1979. MEK quickly fell out with the new regime, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and the group went into exile in Iraq.

MEK members fought with Saddam Hussein's forces in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. Most Iranians, even those who oppose the current regime, find that traitorous, and MEK has very little following in Iran.

When American forces came upon MEK after the Iraq invasion, their first move was to join other countries in labelling it a terrorist group. After all, MEK members had killed six Americans in terrorist attacks in Iran in the 1970s.

However, MEK members and surrogates mounted a well-financed lobby in Washington. In 2012, the terrorist designation was removed, largely because of lobbying by Bolton. This was a necessary legal preliminary for the U.S. to be able to move the group to sanctuary in Albania. This is one of the few countries willing to accept what has become a cult that treats its members, believed to number around 10,000, more like prisoners than followers.

The leaders of MEK are the married couple Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, though nothing has been heard of Massoud since the 2003 invasion of Iraq and he is presumed dead. Maryam Rajavi is the effective leader of MEK from her exile in France.

And it's in France that some of the most lavish courting of Washington potentates takes place.

In 2016, a political extravaganza in Paris arranged by MEK drew Bolton, and the man who is now Trump's personal lawyer on the Russian-collusion file, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani, among an array of Washington A-listers.

There are widespread reports that each was paid around US\$25,000, and perhaps as high as US\$50,000 for their presentations. These were arranged through a speakers' bureau to give the money a light laundering. Bolton has disclosed he was paid US\$40,000 to speak at a MEK rally in 2017.

Where MEK's money comes from is unclear. But another Paris gala was held in July this year, after Bolton had been appointed Trump's national security adviser.

Bolton told the crowd of 4,000, many bussed in from their Albanian sanctuary, "There is a viable alternative to the rule of the ayatollahs, and that opposition is centred in this room today. The behaviour and objectives of the regime are not going to change, and therefore the only solution is to change the regime itself."

Bolton's support for regime change was echoed by Giuliani, who was also making a repeat appearance at the function.

Bolton was at it again on Tuesday at a conference in Singapore, when he said it is Washington's intention to "squeeze" Iran "until the pips squeak."

Yet despite the influence of the Bolton-Pompeo-Giuliani axis, it's unlikely either Trump or Tehran will follow their script.

Trump is a bully, and, like all bullies, he is a coward at heart.

Iran presents little direct threat to the U.S. at the moment, and the ayatollahs show every intention of keeping it that way. UN inspections show Tehran continues to follow the requirements of the 2015 agreement limiting its nu-



clear program well short of any potential for making weapons.

But Iran is a threat to American allies Saudi Arabia and Israel. However, the recent behaviour of both those governments makes it difficult for even an amoral regime like Trump's to pursue outrage against Tehran on their behalf.

The murder in Istanbul of journalist Jamal Khashoggi has the fingerprints of Saudi ruler Prince Mohammed bin Salman all over it. And the prince's war in Yemen is a humanitarian disaster with millions of people facing starvation.

Meanwhile in Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lives in an evil-smelling haze of corruption charges, and his top military and intelligence officials don't believe Iran is a nuclear threat.

Trump's withdrawal from the 2015 agreement with Tehran is one of the many reasons for the growing division between the current Oval Office regime, and Europe and the democratic world in general, including Canada. This gulf was on display at the ceremonies in France marking the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War, where Trump was ostracized both by the group and himself.

That chasm will grow if Trump attempts to go beyond sanctions in his attack on Iran.

Europe is attempting to protect its companies against revenge from Washington if they continue to do business with Iran. So are two other major signatories of the 2015 nuclear deal, Russia and China.

Trump's use of presidential powers to dictate to other countries with whom they can and can't do business has entrenched resentment among U.S. allies that will come back to haunt him.

Iran and Iranians, for their part, will suffer greatly from the Trump sanctions that are intended to batter them into submission. There is already some public disquiet about inflation and the shrinking value of the currency.

But they are a resourceful people, well used to living in a tough neighbour-

hood, and surviving and thriving in the face of adversity.

Tehran is concerned that Iranians' resourcefulness will get out of control, and it has introduced draconian penalties for financial crimes, which it calls "spreading corruption on earth." Two men were executed on Wednesday under the financial-crime laws, one for having a hoard of two tons of gold coins.

Yet the history of sanctions and embargoes is that they create wonderfully inventive economies. Iranians will find ways around Trump's sanctions.

There is substantial opposition to Iran's Islamic state, especially in the cities, but all that Trump's cack-handed approach is likely to achieve is greater national unity against a common enemy.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Why is this Iranian regime change cult building a base ... in Albania?

Belen Fernandez

November 16, 2018

**T**he Balkan nation currently hosts the headquarters of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, dedicated to violent regime change in Iran

In early September, Albanian Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati travelled to Israel to participate in a counterterrorism summit and some nauseating photo ops with an Israeli cast of characters, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with whom Bushati joked around a bit before getting down to terror-fighting and other business.



Israel, of course, has already conspicuously advertised the hypocrisy of its self-appointment to the counterterrorist vanguard by, inter alia, regularly terrorising Palestinians. Albania's counterterrorism credentials, while less well-known, are also pretty dubious: the Balkan nation currently hosts the headquarters of the Iranian terrorist cult known as the



Mojahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, dedicated to violent regime change in Iran.

Delisted as a terrorist organisation in 2012 by the United States - another entity well-versed in the art of terror disguised as counterterror - the MEK is almost comprehensively reviled within Iran on account of its history of allying with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, as well as numerous other attacks and assassinations on Iranian soil.

The group's near-total marginalisation notwithstanding, their regime change message is most welcome in Washing-

ton - and indeed was so even before the terror delisting.

Honouring Bush and Trump

Between 2013 and 2016, at the behest of the US, several thousand MEK members were relocated from their former base in Iraq to Albania. Now, the MEK presides over a sprawling, heavily fortified camp not far from the Albanian capital of Tirana.

But why Albania? Simply put, it's not that difficult for the global superpower to twist the arm of a small and often overlooked country that was, until the 1990s, isolated on the world stage, and that is now eager to make up for lost time by ingratiating itself with empire.

For proof of eagerness, one need look no further than Tirana's George W Bush Street (which I myself have had the dubious honour of visiting), the George W Bush statue in the village of Fushe-Kruje, or the Hillary Clinton statue in Sarande.

The city of Kamez boasts a boulevard named after US President Donald Trump, who has also been named an honorary citizen - a totally logical move

in a Muslim-majority country vis-a-vis a Muslim-banning US president.

Late Israeli war criminal Shimon Peres has managed to occupy some urban Albanian space, too, with a memorial unveiled in Tirana this year.

In the past, Albania also contributed to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as to America’s extraordinary rendition schemes, and was described as a “dumping ground” for victims released from the US offshore penal colony known as Guantanamo Bay.

**US-Israeli-Saudi support**

In short, it’s not enormously shocking that Albania has offered itself up as the MEK’s permanent address - particularly given the MEK’s special place in the cold heart of the powerful US-Israeli-Saudi axis, the final component of which is rumoured to be providing the group with copious funds.

And with the advent of the Trump administration, it seems the MEK is getting a new lease on life. In a September report for Channel 4 News, international editor Lindsey Hilsum and her crew paid a visit to the rapidly expanding MEK camp outside Tirana, where they were immediately intercepted by security guards, accused of being Iranian government spies and terrorists, and forcibly prevented from filming.

Hilsum noted that, while various US politicians have long been MEK supporters - unsurprisingly, given the MEK’s penchant for hurling obscene amounts of money at people - “now, for the first time, they can effectively provide a hotline to the Oval Office”.

The video report provides relevant footage of Trump-men at previous MEK rallies - among them John “Bomb Iran” Bolton, who prior to assuming the post of national security adviser, appeared at a pro-MEK function in Albania last year with the wildly applauded opinion that “the declared policy of the United States should be regime change in Iran”.

Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, another famous collector of MEK payments, is also known for extolling the MEK as the “the vision for the future of Iran”

and hollering that “the mullahs must go, the ayatollah must go, and they must be replaced by a democratic government which [MEK leader Maryam] Rajavi represents”.

## Twitter troll factory

Leaving aside the minor issue that no government can be democratic in Iran if the Iranian people don't support it, the group's documented traditions of imprisoning, torturing, and otherwise abusing members who veer from the MEK-dictated path would seem to indicate that democracy is not exactly the name of the game.

The MEK's policy of mandatory celibacy also raises the question of what sort of “vision for the future” is logistically possible when people can't, you know, reproduce. An MEK defector interviewed by Hilsum in Albania told her of a certain routine, according to which members of the organisation were required to write down any remotely sexual thoughts that dared to enter their minds during the day - and to then publicly confess them to colleagues and commanders.

This same man confirmed his service in the camp as a “keyboard warrior”, posting fake content on Twitter to exaggerate Rajavi's and the MEK's popularity and power.

Later in September, the UK's Independent published its own investigation into the MEK - the “darling of Washington” that has “created a state within a state in Albania” - also addressing the group's generally repressive nature and the existence in the camp of what amounts to a Twitter troll factory.

Al Jazeera, meanwhile, took an in-depth look at the expansive “troll farm” facility that has enabled the MEK to engage in “social media manipulation on an industrial scale”. Obviously, the wild proliferation of fake accounts committed to demonising the Iranian government serves not only to warp beyond recognition the reality on the ground in Iran, but also to ultimately justify whatever form of “democracy” the US feels should be violently installed there.

## ‘Mullah-linked journos’

In typically professional fashion, the MEK accused Channel 4 and Al Jazeera of being “mullah-linked journos” operating undercover and conspiring with the Iranian regime to attack the “Iranian resistance group”.

Not everyone, however, has been persona non grata at MEK headquarters; see, for example, a September article in the Washington Times in which one L Todd Wood - a former US military pilot-turned-Wall Street bond trader - gushes over his invitation to meet the “Iranian freedom fighters” at their current residence.

The MEK, he reports, “have given their lives for an idea: a free Iran. Each and every one of them spoke about their people, and how they wanted a better life for the Iranian population”.

Funny, then, that out of all of the Iranians I’ve personally spoken to in Iran proper - even those who vehemently denounce the current government - I’ve never once heard the suggestion that life may somehow be better under a terrorist cult.

As the MEK’s pernicious rhetoric gets endorsed and amplified by thousands of Twitter bots - in addition to US officials - the dissemination of truth has apparently become the jurisdiction of “Iranian agents” and “mullah-linked journos”.

In that case, we’re going to need all the Iranian agents we can get.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## This death cult is Uncle Sam's choice of 'good guys' to replace Iran's clerics

Russia Today

November 20, 2018

Everybody knows Washington wants to get rid of people currently in power in Iran. But who is the better alternative to mullahs? Some top US officials say it's this death cult hated by pretty much everyone in Iran.



Meet People's Mujahedin of Iran, also known as the MEK, whose recent gatherings were graced by the likes of Donald Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton and the US president's lawyer Rudy Giuliani. Quite a guest list for an organization that started as an Iranian Marxist-Leninist armed group trying to oust the US-backed shah along with the Ayatollah.

After falling out with the new government in Iran, the MEK started a campaign of bombing and assassinations of loyalist officials. Then they got kicked out of the country and found refuge in Saddam





Hussein's Iraq. During the war between the two countries, they fought against their own countrymen. More recently, MEK members were helping Israeli intelligence assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists. So, you may guess how big of a supporter base they have in Iran now.

As the MEK's supply of fresh recruits dwindled, it transformed into a bona fide cult centered around its charismatic leader Massoud Raja-

vi and his wife Maryam. Members were forced to observe celibacy, divorce spouses and cut all contacts with family. Would-be troublemakers or potential escapees were subjected to beatings, outright torture and disappearances.

Enter US troops – and the MEK gets revitalized with new combat training, protection and the privilege of not being on the US' terrorists list, thank to Hillary Clinton's State Department. Their past sins against Americans whitewashed, they are now treated by Washington as a legitimate group and pretty much the only viable replacement for the Iranian government.

Across the political aisle, US politicians put more money in their coffers – which conveniently allows MEK fake popularity by hiring crowds of bored spectators to attend their events.

Access the article from [here](#).



## How the US Uses the “Leftist” MEK for Soft Aggression Against Iran

Julia Kassem

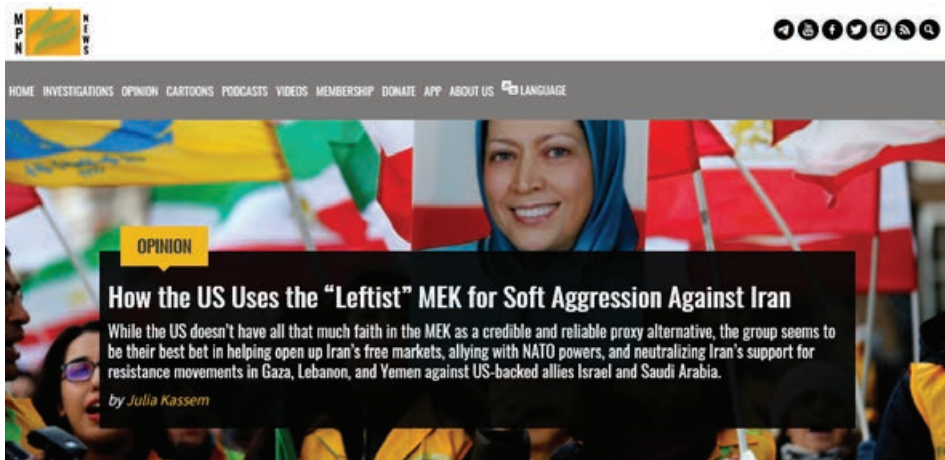
November 27, 2018

While the US doesn't have all that much faith in the MEK as a credible and reliable proxy alternative, the group seems to be their best bet in helping open up Iran's free markets, allying with NATO powers, and neutralizing Iran's support for resistance movements in Gaza, Lebanon, and Yemen against US-backed allies Israel and Saudi Arabia.



Washington's pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal and subsequently renewed sanctions come as US National Security Advisor appointee John Bolton's existential objective to destroy Iran by any means necessary even if it means leveraging the soft power of a cultish death squad.

US President Donald Trump ramped up the threat with a Game of Thrones meme warning Iran, with a November 5 deadline, that “Sanctions are Coming.”



Qasem Soleimani, a Major General in Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, responded with a meme of his own that Friday with the message “I will stand against you.”

More than just rhetoric, the exchange signified the high pomp the mention of sanctions posted to the Islamic Republic following an extensive international campaign by the US and Iranian expat and separatist allies to maximize their impacts.

The United States has slapped around a dozen sanctions on Iran since 1984 including two rounds on its shipping, oil, banking, and ship-building sectors since Trump’s removal from JCPOA earlier this year. These include five UN security council resolutions between July 2006 and 2008.

Despite the language of nuclear non-proliferation, one aim of the sanctions is to facilitate an atmosphere of intense economic frustration in hopes of inciting regime change — or what the State Department insists is just a change in “regime behavior.” This strategy includes supporting separatist groups like the MEK to accomplish this goal — without pulling the United States into another armed conflict.

The MEK originally began as a leftist student group, joining a coalition of forces against the Shah at the onset of the 1979 revolution. Relations with Iranian revolutionary leader Ruhollah Khomeini quickly soured after the Islamic Republic took power. The group carried out sophisticated bombings against

the state, including a 1981 bombing that killed 74 government officials and another two months later that detonated in the Prime Minister's office, killing President Mohammad Ali Rajaei, Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar, and three others. Before the revolution, the MEK was responsible for attacks against American civilians and was later housed, supported, and trained by Saddam Hussein during the Iraqi-led, US-backed 1980-1988 war. A history of waging terror attacks inside Iran and abroad in support of destabilizing the current government has rendered them natural allies with the US.

It was also in exile that the organization rebranded from an "Islam-Marxist" to a pro-free market, Western-allied one to win the support of Europe, the West, and other reactionary powers in the Middle East. A history of waging terror attacks inside Iran and abroad in support of destabilizing the current government have rendered them natural allies with the US.

In addition, various NATO powers have hosted and given the separatist groups coverage in attempts of strengthening support and ties with the United States. They include France, where the MEK and its umbrella organization NCRI is based, Denmark and the Netherlands, housing Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz (ASMLA), and Albania, where a MEK camp, housing a training ground and even Twitter troll-farm, pumping out anti-government tweets and pro-Rajavi propaganda, is based.

Anti-government and "Persian" or "Aryan" nationalist Twitter accounts, exclusively Tweeting anti-regime information, hashtag #IranStrike #FreeIran, and #IranRegimeChange, and circulate pro-Rajavi propaganda photos. Many openly express their support of their right-wing, US spokesperson, retweeting former US ambassador and MEK lobbyist John Bolton.

News of sporadic labor strikes, such as those in the steel industry in Ahvaz, conveniently coincided with each round of sanctions: both in early November and in August. As Iran's industries, including steel, sugar cane, and automotive, become amongst many taking significant hits following US sanctions, coverage of the protests, with sources almost exclusively by pro-NCRI and pro-Gulf media outlets, frame this as evidence of government corruption and mismanagement rather than an effect of sanctions co-opted for regime change narrative purposes.

While the US doesn't have all that much faith in the MEK as a credible and reliable proxy alternative, the group seems to be their best bet in helping open up Iran's free markets, allying with NATO powers, and neutralizing Iran's support for resistance movements in Gaza, Lebanon, and Yemen against US-backed allies Israel and Saudi Arabia.

In October, terrorist attacks in Paris and Denmark led the NCRI/MEK's propaganda outlets to point to the Islamic Republic to blame. Secretary Mike Pompeo, addressing an audience of Iranian-American expats at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library in July in support of escalating tensions with Iran and solidifying support amongst Iranian separatists with the US and Israel, issued a Tweet immediately after the attack attempt framing the Iranian government and calling for "allies and partners" to "confront" Iran.

We congratulate the government of #Denmark on its arrest of an Iranian regime assassin. For nearly 40 years, Europe has been the target of #Iran-sponsored terrorist attacks. We call on our allies and partners to confront the full range of Iran's threats to peace and security.

— Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) October 30, 2018

The attacks came at a time where the Iranian government was attempting to curtail the effect of US sanctions by strengthening economic ties with the European Union. In response to the pressure, France placed a freeze on Iranian intelligence assets in October. Despite the lack of evidence pointing to the Islamic Republic as the perpetrators of the Europe attacks, those European Union nations are considering following suit in a shift in policy towards sanctions.

The attacks were pushed by MEK and al-Ahwaz, the latter of which waged a deadly terrorist attack against a southwest Iran military parade that killed 25 civilians a month prior. Denmark, the Netherlands, and France's coverage to groups like the MEK in Paris and Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA) in Denmark, accomplished its objectives of garnering support for EU sanctions against Iran. The Zionist intelligence body Mossad assisted in the effort, tipping Danish intelligence off to blaming Iran.

The MEK's lack of any real support in their country of exile has prompted it to refocus its efforts on its "international audience," winning the sympathies of the West and the US. After 2006, the Bush administration ramped up financial support for Iranian expat civil society organizations, through its newly instated 'Iran Democracy Fund'. That year, an additional \$75 million went to promoting a change in "regime behavior."

Outside funds have supported a number of expat radio stations and media outlets, including London-based and Saudi-backed Iranian International, hosting Denmark-based ASMLA spokesperson to report that the attacks on the Ahvaz military parade terrorist attack in Iran were against military targets, France-based Iranian News Update, and Iranian News Wire in California. Of these include Radio Farda, established in 2002 as the Iranian branch of US-funded Radio Free Europe, having met with the Israeli Defense Minister in September and interviewed Shimon Peres in 2014. With the support of Israel and the United States, the station's objectives of advancing the goal of the conglomerate in advancing the goals of US and NATO foreign policy, regularly providing positive press and favorable coverage for the US (having used sources directly from the CIA) and Israel, using falsified information. Though the station is banned in Iran, enjoying the support of anti-government expats, Israel claims it is the most widely listened to source in Iran, signaling a media relationship just as prolific as its political and intelligence based ones.

In January, MintPress News found that the United States spent over \$1 million dollars since 2016 towards pro-regime change funding. Many of these funds also came from Saudi Arabia whom the MEK has always kept the relationship secret. These funds help bankroll media, lobby American elected officials, buy up land in Albania to use for training and propaganda camps and to support a headquarters in France. They even included John Bolton's personal \$180,000 stipend.

The proliferation of the unrest in the 2017-2018 protests received immediate support from US far-right, such as Trump, Paul Ryan, and John Bolton. Many top figures from the US far-right right-wing political pundits, who have aggressively fought civil liberties and support for workers rights in the US,

were the first to issue their lip service support of the demonstrations. Just a month before the 2017 protests, CIA analyst Kenneth Katzmann concluded that “domestic factors” that would incite “an uprising” would, towards the potential favor of US war hawks, “precipitate policy changes that either favor or are adverse to US interests.”

In late September, the Trump administration outlined in a report entitled “Outlaw Regime: A Chronicle of Iran’s Destructive Activities” identified as the government’s top “destructive activities,” highlighting its support of what the Trump administration considers “support of terrorist militias and proxies.”

The report devoted two sections to Iran’s “human rights” and “environmental” abuses, with the proposed solutions to not only continue US funding to these groups — many of whom echo accusations the US waged in its justification of anti-Iran hostilities.

Congress had previously allocated over \$20 million for “democracy promotion” in Iran, following accusations that Iran possessed nuclear weapons. It was the MEK that had given false and misleading information to US intelligence on Iran’s alleged possession of nuclear weapons in 2002, a year before the US destabilized Iraq over accusations of “weapons of mass destruction.” This polemic, inspiring an odd part of then-president George W Bush’s “Axis of Evil” speech, is also solidified in MEK leader Maryam Rajavi 10-point plan. The last point demands a “non-nuclear Iran,” calls for the Islamic Republic be “free of weapons of mass destruction.”

Despite its early leftist leanings, the group today galvanizers “private property” and “the free market” as another core component of its 10 point manifesto. The aggressively neoliberal rhetoric of the MEK, winning over the sentiments of Western so-called human rights values and ideals in many of these Western-backed and Saudi-sponsored “human rights” NGOs, provides the material and strategic support for economic and foreign policies that are the motivator for the regime-change inclinations against Iran. But they also solidify their support amongst many wealthy Iranian expats, angered by the government’s policies of aggressive wealth and asset redistribution and level of economic centralization comparable to socialist Cuba.

The 30 other countries that are on the US's regime change shit list also work through similar propaganda tactics. Top foundations employ the same tactics of objectives of regime change through "diplomatic" networks, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), set up in 1980. As of now, the activities of the NED include photo ops in Washington DC to support Nicaragua regime change and financing.

The NED continues its policy and these activities in Iran through the "Foundation for Democracy," whose board and work consists of a cohort of fellows and officials with right-wing think tanks, various U.S. intelligence agencies, defense companies, and contractors, and, like co-chair William Norjay, have accrued experience in other regime change propaganda apparatuses against countries like Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Ukraine.

Shortly after the U.S. announces the abandonment of its regime change policies in Syria, it is shifting its energy more towards direct confrontation with Iran. In the aftermath of failed proxy wars, the rehashing of old soft-power strategies might just be the "lessons for Washington" on how to overthrow a regime Bolton has contemplated in a 2013 op-ed in what he considered an otherwise "accomplished" ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Dispelling Myths About Iran, Trump's Bogeyman

Medea Benjamin

December 17, 2018

**M**edea Benjamin, CODEPINK co-founder, discusses myths and misconceptions about Iran and the Donald Trump administration's dismantling of the nuclear agreement. She also talks about her book "Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran"

**BEN NORTON:** It's The Real News Network and I'm Ben Norton.

One of the key elements of the Trump administration's foreign policy has been increasing aggression against Iran. Trump has cozied up with the Saudi regime, but at the same time, has repeatedly called for the overthrow of Iran's government. Well, joining us to discuss this is a leading figure in the U.S. peace movement who has been helping to lead the fight to save the Iran Nuclear Deal. I'm speaking with Medea Benjamin, who is a co-founder of the



women-led peace movement, Code Pink, and also the author of a book on Iran that expels many of the myths about the country, called *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Thanks for joining us, Medea.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Good to be here with you, Ben.

BEN NORTON: So let's talk about Iran as a country before we talk about U.S. policy. There are a lot of myths about the country. Of course, there is a lot to criticize. It is a theocracy, but it's also a democratic country. In fact, it's probably the most democratic country in the region, or at least one of them. They have presidential elections with three fourths voter turnout, which are much bigger than the U.S. They certainly have issues repressing women, they have issues repressing worker's rights. But compared to U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia, as you point out in your book, Iran actually looks much better. Why do you think there are so many myths and can you talk about some of the experiences you've had? You visited Iran for the first time in 2008 and you visited it several times since then, and you've seen that some of these myths are really ridiculous.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, I'm glad you start out by saying that it is a problematic government, because we are working with civil society in Iran. And depending on what's happening internally in the politics, there's more space or less space for civil society to try to make reforms and changes in the government. Right now, is a very difficult time, and there are many people who would be our counterparts in Iran who are in prison. But as you say, the U.S. has put forward a very misguided view of Iran. First of all, they always say it's the number one state sponsor of terrorism in the world. And when we hear that, we should just say, "Stop, no, not true." And then, in terms of internally in Iran, there are more avenues for women, for example, to study, to work. We are connected with a group of women business people that have enormous businesses. They have their own, very large factories, their own farms, their own—I'm friends with a woman who is an architect of some of the largest dams in the country.

So that's sort of something that you don't hear about, that women are so actively involved in the economy. There is a myth that the Jewish population

is such a repressed population. Being a member of the Jewish community and an American, when I first went to Iran I was very concerned about being both. And as soon as you said that to people, there went, “Oh, first of all, we love America.” And it is a very pro-American population. And then, they love Jews. And it’s funny, whether it’s among these religious Iranians, they’re saying, “Oh, we have so much in common between our religions,” and I try not to say I’m a non-practicing Jew. Or if they’re coming from the secular side, they say, “Oh, we love Jewish sense of humor, Jewish movies, Jewish this.” So that’s another myth. I’m not sure what are the other ones you wanted to bring up, but there are lots of them.

BEN NORTON: Well, and as you point out in your book, Iran has the second largest Jewish population in the Middle East after Israel. And what’s incredible is you cite a 2014 poll by the ADL, which is a pro-Israel group, and they have a vested interest in portraying Iran as an evil bogeyman, but they even were surprised to see that they surveyed anti-Semitic views in the Middle East and found that after Israel, Iran is the least anti-Semitic country in the region.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Absolutely. There’s even a designated position for the small population to have a member of parliament.

BEN NORTON: And what’s interesting is, in your book, you also talk about how Iranians are very careful to distinguish the American people from the American government, which many Americans are actually not. I mean, some Americans do it, but they’re not really privy to doing. Frequently, especially our politicians, conflate the Iranian people with the Iranian government. You hear racist rhetoric about how you can’t trust Iranians. And when we hear in Iran, frequently we see on Fox News and conservative media, they’ll show the signs that say Death to America, Death to Israel. They’re not saying Death to the American people, they’re saying American government policies, which as you point out, have destabilized their government, have imposed crippling sanctions on society that have led to large numbers of civilian deaths, that overthrew Iran’s democratically elected prime minister in 1953. They have good reason to be very critical and to even despise the American government. But they always are careful to distinguish it from Americans, like you.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Yeah. And maybe that is partly because the Iranian diaspora, and there's so many Iranians that are living in the United States and in Europe who go back and forth to Iran, and so there is a lot of American culture that gets infused in Iranian society. And people are very good at getting around restrictions of the government. The government restricts things like Facebook and Twitter, and yet it's very easy for Iranians, and almost all of them do, just get around those restrictions. So there is a lot of back and forth. But things have gotten worse on the U.S. end with Trump, because Iran has been put into the Muslim ban. And so, in Trump's trying to keep terrorists out of the United States, Iranians who have never been involved in a terrorist activity against Americans here in the United States, have been included in that ban, increasing the animosity towards Iranians in the United States and the equating Iranians with terror.

BEN NORTON: Yeah, let's talk more about the Trump administration's policies, and also the policies of his predecessor, Barack Obama. For all of the many criticisms of Obama, who started the war in Yemen, which was launched by Saudi Arabia, the war in Libya, destroying that government.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: The drone strikes.

BEN NORTON: Absolutely, the drone war. One of the few positive elements of his foreign policy was an important breakthrough, the JCPOA, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was an international deal. Although corporate media outlets have portrayed it as a deal between the U.S. and Iran, it was much more. It was a deal between the U.S. and Iran, but the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. So that includes China, the largest country in the world, Russia, also France and Britain, and the European Union and Germany.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: And approved by the Security Council in its totality.

BEN NORTON: Absolutely. So Obama was part of an international process that brought Europe, Russia and China together, and they agreed to a deal, a kind of rapprochement with Iran that would lift sanctions. And these sanctions have crippled the Iranian economy, they've led to large numbers of preventable deaths from people who can't get medication and other forms

of assistance in hospitals. But the Trump administration tore that deal up. And still, as of right now, in December 2018, all of the other parties to the agreement are abiding by it, including Iran. The United Nations has made it clear that even though Iran doesn't have to continue staying in the agreement because the U.S. unilaterally violated it, Iran is still abiding by the agreement. Can you respond to Trump's destruction, or attempt to derail, this important historic piece of legislation and why Iran is still abiding by its side of the deal?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, it's really tragic for the Iranian people, who put their hopes in pushing their government to make a deal with the international community, and then to see that the hardliners inside Iran who said, "Why are you doing that, you can't trust the U.S." were right, you couldn't trust the U.S. In comes a new president and unilaterally withdraws from that deal, reimposes sanctions. And the important thing for people to understand about those sanctions, because we toss around the word sanctions all the time, you never know how grave these sanctions are and how crippling they are. Because it says not only are U.S. businesses prohibited from trading with Iran, but any other business around the world that wants to trade with Iran cannot use the U.S. dollar, which is the international currency, and cannot do business with the United States. And so, it has been devastating for the Iranian economy and it's been devastating for the other countries who want to continue with the deal.

Now, Iran, the government, wants to continue with the deal if it sees some economic benefits, which was promised to it. And that's why the Europeans are scrambling now to come up with a vehicle for allowing their companies to work with Iran without getting sanctioned by the U.S. But it's very difficult, and it's not clear whether this is going to function and whether the Iranian we'll see enough benefit to the economy to justify staying within that deal. But we have to talk about what is the purpose of the U.S. pulling out, which is to cripple the Iranian economy and to encourage the Iranian people to rise up and overthrow their government.

BEN NORTON: The Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former CIA director, who is an anti-Iran hawk like many people Trump has surrounded himself with, he made that very clear. He essentially admitted that this is collective punishment, which is illegal under international law, but that's another point.

Let's talk more about the Trump administration's policies. Because not only do we have Pompeo, but we also have John Bolton, who is one of the most cartoonish hawks imaginable. This is a guy who cut his teeth supporting the Iraq war. He also has lobbied for many years for war on Iran. He has quite the range. I mean, it's kind of pathological for Bolton.

And we've seen that part of the Trump administration's policy has not only been imposing these crippling sanctions to try to strangle the economy and force the Iranian people to rise up, but the Trump administration has also been supporting other militant groups that have been trying to fight the Iranian government. Recently, we saw a horrific attack on a military parade in Iran by an Ahwazi Arab separatist group which has received support from Western governments as well. The attack was ostensibly targeting a military parade, but several civilians, including children, were killed in the attack. But even more egregious than that, we've also seen the Trump administration extend an olive branch to the MEK, the Mojahedin-e Khalq. Tell us about what the MEK is and why the Trump administration and John Bolton have been supporting this bizarre cult.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: It's absolutely astounding that this is the organization that they've chosen to be supporting as a "viable alternative" to the present government in Iran, because the MEK has absolutely no base of support inside Iran. Whether people in Iran hate the Iranian government or like the Iranian government, they hate the MEK. Why? Well, let's look at what the MEK did right after the revolution. They were part, initially, of trying to overthrow the Shah, but when they lost out, they then joined with Saddam Hussein in neighboring Iraq and were trained and equipped by Saddam Hussein to go into Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted for over eight years, and a bloody horrible war, and they were blowing up suicide bombers, killing civilians and siding with the enemy.

So they are seen in Iran as a group that has no legitimacy. And on top of that, that they are a crazy group, that they are a cult-like group. And this is not just us saying this, this is the Rand Corporation, this is the U.S. government, internal documents. They were chased out of Iraq after the U.S. invasion, and they now have their base in Albania, which is really like they hold their own people, they're imprisoned. If you decide, "Uh-oh, I'm seeing through this,

this doesn't look good for me anymore, I want to get out," you can't get out of there. And they have a reverence to the head of it, Maryam Rajavi, and her husband, who hasn't been seen in the last seven years, and seems like he died, but they pretend that he's still alive somewhere. It is a group that has been on the U.S. terrorist list until 2012, when they got a lot of money, and it seems like they get Saudi money, to pay off a lot of politicians to get themselves off that list.

You talked about John Bolton. It's reported that he's taken 180,000 dollars from the MEK. But it's also people like Giuliani, like Newt Gingrich, and Democrats as well. There are a number of different Democrats, and they just had this holiday party in Washington, DC in the Rayburn building of Congress, where you saw the Democrats like Eliot Engel, who will be the head of the Foreign Relations Committee in the House, going there to give his support. Nancy Pelosi has gone to give her support to the MEK. So it's very, very bizarre and dangerous.

BEN NORTON: Pelosi has, in fact, Tweeted support for the MEK's ostensibly human rights front group. But let's talk a little bit more about the MEK and then let's talk about the Democratic Party's response and the leadership's response to the Trump administration's unilateral destruction of the Iran nuclear deal. Specifically what's incredible with the MEK is they are actually a cult in the sense that Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, who are a married couple, the new members in the 90s, they refused to let them get married.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: They had to get divorced.

BEN NORTON: Yeah, they had to get divorced and their loyalty was only to the MEK cult. They have all these bizarre—for all the criticisms of the Iranian government, and there are many, including repression of women, MEK has equally backward views on women's liberation, and as you mentioned, is allied with Saudi Arabia. So maybe we could talk a bit more about that and how the Democratic Party has failed to stand up to many of these policies. We saw leaders of the Democratic Party under Obama actually side with Republicans against the Iran Nuclear Deal, most infamously Chuck Schumer. And now, even those who supported the JCPOA have been pretty mute.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, you would think ... Well, first of all, on the MEK, when we confront these members of Congress and their support for the MEK, they say, "Well, the MEK has changed." And they've changed because they've had these great PR firms that they've paid a lot of money to basically tell the MEK what to say. And they have all these different front groups. But you scratch under the surface and it is the MEK and it is this cult group and they torture people within their own organization who want to leave. So it is bizarre that so many people in the U.S. government would be supporting the MEK. But the real question is why isn't the Democratic Party coming out and really criticizing Trump for having unilaterally withdrawn from a treaty that was working and continues to be working, and put the U.S. on a collision course with the international community.

And I think it's because "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" kind of thing. We see now the Saudis working with Israel against Iran. And so many people in the Democratic Party are still beholden to the Israeli government and the lobby groups like AIPAC, and the Israeli government is determined to find a way to overthrow the Iranian regime. So the Democratic Party, unfortunately, I think through its allegiance to the Israeli government, doesn't want to speak out against Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal and dangerous course that could potentially lead to another horrific war in the Middle East.

BEN NORTON: Yeah, and let's conclude. I want to talk about the prospects of a new war. The war in Iraq, an illegal invasion in 2003, was absolutely catastrophic. It led to well over one million deaths and it destabilized the entire region. Ironically, it actually empowered Iran. But before the war, we saw that a major U.S. general had actually acknowledged that there was a list that the Bush administration had drafted of seven countries in five years they wanted to topple or destabilize. Many of the countries on that list have been destabilized or overthrown. Libya, Syria has been largely devastated, Iraq of course, but Iran was always the cherry on top. And it seems like John Bolton and the people that Trump has voluntarily surrounded himself with would love to see a war on Iran. Of course, it could be even more catastrophic than the war on Iraq.

Do you think that that's a possibility, and if it's not even a possibility, if it's not realistic, what other forms of indirect warfare is the Trump administration going to wage on Iran, and how can peace activists here in the United States



try to stop and push for peace and diplomacy?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: I would say that there is a war with Iran going on right now. And that is, one, through the proxy wars in the region and trying to goad Iran into retaliating. And the other is sanctions, which is war by other means. Supposedly, medicines and food are exempt from the sanctions, but they're not because the banks don't want to deal with Iran. So we see people who are dying from diseases like cancer diseases because they can't get their medicines. We see people who are having a very difficult time making ends meet in Iran right now because of the sanctions. So the U.S. is waging war on Iran right now. Will it get into a hot war? It could easily happen. We've already seen the U.S. attacking Iran in Syria and Iran holding back and not countering that. But how long will they be able to hold back? Will the Revolutionary Guards be pushing for retaliation?

The U.S. sanctions and the U.S. strangling of Iran are actually strengthening the Revolutionary Guards in Iran. They're hurting the reformists. And so, things are getting more and more tense. So I don't think we should sit around and wait and contemplate the possibilities of getting into a war with Iran. I think we should think that things are so bad right now, what are we going to do to move the U.S. in a different direction? What are we going to do to pressure the Democrats once they're in control of the House next year, to put forward legislation saying the U.S. should join the Iran Nuclear Deal? Let us say that we want to have diplomatic relations and trade with Iran. Let us counter all the efforts to be supporting the MEK. I think we have a lot of work to do to reverse course and stop a hot war, but also stop the war that's going on right now.

BEN NORTON: We'll have to end our conversation there. We were speaking with Medea Benjamin, who is the co-founder of the women-led peace group, Code Pink, and the author of several books, including *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Thanks so much for joining us, Medea.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Thank you.

BEN NORTON: For The Real News Network, I'm Ben Norton.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Europe's Extreme Right is in Bed with MEK

Eldar Mamedov

December 17, 2018

Lobe  
Log

Until recently Spain was the envy of Europe. While in most countries the resurgence of the populist right was reshaping national politics, Spain was able to dodge the trend: a centre-right government lost power six months ago in a no confidence vote, and was replaced, in an orderly fashion, by a centre-left one. A minority Socialist government, which had more female ministers than male, steered the country in a decidedly pro-European direction. The extreme right, meanwhile, polled in single digits.

Not any longer. The December 2 regional elections in Andalusia, Spain's largest region, saw a noisy irruption of Vox, a hitherto marginal extreme right party, into Spanish political life. Vox won almost 11% of the popular vote, which gave it 12 seats in the 109-seat regional chamber. For the first time since the death of the dictator Francisco Franco in

## Europe's Extreme Right Is In Bed With MEK

DECEMBER 17, 2018 ELDAR MAMEDOV / 3 COMMENTS



*Alejo Vidal-Quadras (Wikimedia Commons/jfuentesf)*

mid-1970s, the extreme right has entered a Spanish parliament, albeit for now only a regional one.

Vox leader Santiago Abascal is a professed admirer of Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French extreme right, and built his campaign on a platform of Euro-scepticism, anti-feminism, xenophobia, and exacerbated Spanish nationalism. The transatlantic extreme right political guru Steve Bannon sees Vox as a valuable part of his global ideological crusade against the “liberal elite” and “cultural Marxism”.

What is less known is that Vox's emergence is intimately linked to Mojaheddeen-e Khalk (MEK), an exiled Iranian cult bitterly opposed to the current government of Iran. MEK was on European Union's terrorist list until 2009 and on the U.S. terrorist list until 2012.

The Vox-MEK link goes beyond any ideological affinity that might exist between the two groups. According to an investigation on Vox' finances conducted by El Pais, a leading Spanish newspaper, Vox received a donation of 500.000 euros from MEK, acting under the umbrella of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), in 2014. The money reportedly came via thousands of contributions ranging from 200 to 5000 euros from individual members and sympathisers of the NCRI. This money allowed the party to kick-start its election campaign for the European Parliament.

The person who played a key role in securing this funding was Alejo Vidal-Quadras, a veteran Spanish politician who served as a vice-president of

the European Parliament from 2009 to 2014. Vidal-Quadras abandoned his center-right Partido Popular (People's Party—PP) in 2013, on the grounds that it moved too far to the center under the leadership of Spain's former prime-minister Mariano Rajoy. He became one of the founders of Vox, which sought to attract the disaffected voters of the right.

During his years as a vice-president, Vidal-Quadras was the most influential MEK lobbyist in the EP, leading the cross-party group “Friends of Free Iran“. This group acted mostly as a mouthpiece for the MEK. In his role as a vice-president he hosted on numerous occasions the NCRI “president-elect” Maryam Rajavi in the European Parliament.

At first sight, Vidal-Quadras and Rajavi would make strange bedfellows. Given Spain's own traumatic experience with terrorism, the country's right-wing has traditionally projected an image of unwavering toughness on the issue. Vidal-Quadras, however, saw no qualms in advocating for a removal of an avowedly Islamic-Marxist cult like MEK from the EU terrorist list—an effort that eventually culminated successfully in 2009. A self-professed defender of the “West”, Vidal-Quadras was lobbying on behalf of an organisation that was responsible for terrorist attacks on Westerners in Iran.

Vox did not make it to the EP in 2014, and Vidal-Quadras eventually parted ways with the party in 2015. He still spends a lot of time in Brussels, however, continuing to promote the NCRI/MEK, now through the “International Committee in Search of Justice” (ICSJ). Unfortunately the ICSJ's website shows a marked lack of transparency. It gives no disclosure on its funding and staff. It claims that it “enjoyed the support of over 4000 parliamentarians on both sides of Atlantic”, but doesn't identify a single one. Despite its lofty name, it seems to be narrowly focused on pushing the NCRI/MEK agenda of regime change in Iran. In sum, the “committee” looks more like a one-man operation.

Vidal-Quadras may no longer be with Vox, but that hardly means that MEK-Vox ties are severed. Rafael Bardaji, a former adviser to the Spanish prime-minister Jose Maria Aznar, recently joined Vox and is a staunch advocate of Trump's “maximum pressure” policy against Iran. And Aznar himself addressed a MEK rally in Paris in 2010.

Current leaders of Vox insist that they no longer receive any funding from foreign sources. They claim that the party is supported exclusively by small Spanish firms and crowdfunding. This, however, flies in the face of the party's apparent financial strength, as reported by El Pais, which has enabled it to acquire real estate, hire new personnel, pay lawyers to file complaints and petitions against the government, etc. Former party leaders accuse the current leadership of running financially opaque operations, falling far short of satisfying legal standards for transparency.

Whatever the financial status of Vox currently, the role of MEK in enabling this newcomer into the ranks of Europe's extreme right cannot be ignored. It should also serve as a wake-up call to mainstream Western politicians who have allowed themselves to be fooled by MEK's siren songs about democracy and secularism in Iran.

This article reflects the personal views of the author and not necessarily the opinions of the European Parliament.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## US Praises Albania for Expelling Iranian Diplomats

Gjergj Erebara

December 20, 2018

**U**S praises Albania's decision to expel the Iranian ambassador and another diplomat over an alleged 'terrorist plot' that is likely linked to the presence of Iranian dissidents on Albania's territory.

Albania on Wednesday expelled the Iranian ambassador and another diplomat over an alleged terrorist plot, whose exact nature has not been made public.



The decision was praised by US President Donald Trump and other US officials and apparently relates to the presence in Albania of several thousand Iranian dissidents from Mojahedin-e-Khalq, MEK, a group whose presence in Albania Iran resents.

"Thank you for your steadfast efforts to stand up to Iran and to counter its destabilizing activities and efforts to silence dissidents around the globe," Trump

wrote in a letter to Albania Prime Minister Edi Rama, published on the US embassy Facebook page.

“The leadership you have shown by expelling Iran’s ambassador to your country exemplifies our joint efforts to show the Iranian government that its terrorist activities in Europe and around the world will have severe consequences,” the letter added.

Albania accepted several waves of Iranian emigrants from 2013 onwards, when the MEK group had to evacuate Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime.

The MEK is a controversial resistance group. Founded in 1965 as a left-leaning opposition to the former Shah’s regime, it turned against the Islamic Republic following the 1979 Revolution.

The US listed it as a terrorist organization in 1997 but removed it from the black list in 2012, after it renounced violence.

A part of the group is currently building an extended compound in central Albania to host their comrades while others live around Tirana, or have emigrated elsewhere.

Mostly elderly and in some cases sick, members of the group appear to live a quiet life in Albania, despite which the Iranian government considers them active enemies.

There has been no official reaction from Iran but the country’s Fars News Agency interpreted the expulsion as part of US-led attempts to damage Iran’s relations with European countries. (Link in Albanian)

Taking aim at his predecessor Barack Obama’s legacy, Trump pulled out of the nuclear deal with Iran in May, reimposing a ban on Iranian oil exports and tilting US policy further in support of Iran’s regional enemies, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK: The Iranian Cult that has Washington's Ear

Yuri Neves

December 23, 2018



The People's Mujahedeen of Iran, also known as the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) is a controversial Iranian opposition group with a disturbing past. In the past, the group was labeled a terrorist organization by the United States and European nations but now styles itself as a legitimate political organization fighting for democratization in Iran. This stance endears them to many in Washington, including senior members of the Trump administration. However, the group's past use of violence, cultish practices and lack of support within Iran make it more of a liability to the U.S. than an asset. It is a strategic blunder to support such an organization and could harm U.S. interests both now and in the future.

### History of the Group

The MEK was formed in 1965 by a group of university students who opposed the Western-backed



monarchy. They followed an ideology that was a mixture of Islamism and Marxism and sought to overthrow the shah. During the 1970s the group carried out a series of attacks within Iran. It killed three U.S. colonels, three American contractors, attacked facilities belonging to U.S. companies, and attempted to kidnap the U.S. ambassador to Iran.[i] The group participated in the 1979 Islamic revolution and supported the takeover of the U.S. embassy. It allied with Ayatollah Khomeini during the revolution but soon the relationship turned sour. Uncomfortable with the group's Marxist ideology and seen as a threat to his own power turned against the group in 1981.



The Iranian state subsequently repressed the group and the MEK responded with dozens of bombings and assassinations, including one attack that led to the death of the president and prime minister of Iran in 1981.[ii] The group was exiled first to Paris and then Iraq.

While in Iraq, the group cooperated with Saddam Hussein in brutally suppressing Shia and Kurd uprisings and fought in the Iran-Iraq war against Iran. With financing from Saddam Hussein, the group also continued to plan and

carry out attacks against Iranian officials. The group remained in Iraq after the fall of Saddam until the rise of Nouri-al-Maliki. In 2009, Shia militias and the Iraqi army began attacking MEK camps in Iraq. The U.S. stepped in and facilitated the group's transfer to Albania in 2012.[iii]

## **U.S. Support for the Group**

The group's opposition to the regime in Tehran garners it many supporters in the United States. MEK's supporters include a former attorney general, former national security advisor, former FBI directors, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, a former Homeland Security secretary, governors, a former chair of the democratic national convention, ambassadors and a multitude of others. Within President Trump's administration, the group's two most vocal supporters are national security advisor John Bolton, and the president's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani. Both men gave speeches at an MEK conference in Paris this past June urging regime change in Iran and positing the group as viable alternative to the ayatollahs.[iv] Given the groups past, its current practice and its lack of support within Iran this support is harmful to U.S. interests.

## **How support for the MEK undermines U.S. interests**

The groups past use of terrorism, killing of Americans and acts of human rights abuse committed during Saddam's Iraq, should give any U.S. official pause. Furthermore, the group is widely seen as a cult.[v][vi][vii] The group indoctrinates followers into showing complete obedience to the group's leaders, Maryam Rajavi and her husband Massoud Rajavi.[viii] As evidence of the measures taken to compel group members' total submission to its leadership, MEK defectors have reported that the group forces even young children to stand in front a poster of the Rajavis every morning and shout their praises. Children are also separated from their families and forbidden to communicate with the opposite sex. Young women must remain celibate and married women have been forcibly divorced. All relationships within the group are subsidiary to loyalty to the leaders and members are even prohibited from discussing their past lives or maintaining relationships outside the group. Failure to abide by these and other rules is punished with imprisonment, violence and even death.[ix] Human rights organizations have extensively catalogued

the litany of abuses carried out by the group against its own members.[x] The secrecy, authoritarian tendencies and repression of contrasting viewpoints by the group throws into doubt the notion that the MEK would create a free and democratic society if they were to gain power in Iran.

That the MEK could fulfill its US supporters' hopes of spearheading credible democratic reform in Iran also seems unlikely considering the group has little to no support in Iran.[xi] The groups' involvement with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war and its killing of Iranian military conscripts during the war make the group extremely hated within Iran.[xii] Even among those who oppose the ayatollahs currently in power, little support exists for a group viewed as a traitorous, cult-like, and criminal.[xiii] U.S. support of such a group undermines the emergence of a genuine popularly supported opposition group. If such a group does appear, it may oppose the U.S. due to its support of the MEK.

Also, by supporting a group that is extremely hated by regular Iranians, the U.S. plays into the ayatollahs' hands, who will likely wield U.S. support of the MEK to undercut any calls for reform. The ayatollahs may instill fear into the populace that if they are overthrown, the widely hated MEK will gain power. The leaders of Iran can also use U.S. backing of the group to drum up anti-American attitudes. The MEK's calls for an overthrow of the regime can also give credence to the claim that the U.S. is continuing to meddle in Iran's affairs and seeking to stage a coup within the country.

Affiliation with the group also undermines the U.S.'s stated foreign policy objectives of advocating for democracy and protecting human rights. By backing an organization with so many questionable tactics and history, the U.S. is harming its reputation as a proponent of freedom, liberty and human rights. Support of a group which is both illiberal and inherently undemocratic alienates regular Iranians, makes cooperation with Iran more difficult and undermines the U.S.'s international reputation.

■ Access the article from [here](#).

2019



## Bolton's Radical Reshaping Plan for Mideast Included "Mind Boggling" Strikes on Iran, Syria, and Iraq

Whitney Webb

January 14, 2019

**B**olton's willingness to bring Syria and Iraq into the fray along with Iran betrays the fact that he is not just seeking regime change in individual countries but seeking to remake the Middle East as a whole.

In 2017, less than a year before he became national security advisor, John Bolton promised a gathering of the Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK) that:



The declared policy of the United States should be the overthrow of the mullahs' regime in Tehran. ... The behavior and the objectives of the regime are not going to change and, therefore, the only solution is to change the regime itself. ... And that's why, before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran!"

While some may have thought Bolton's statements of regime change in Iran before 2019 were just more

bellicose rhetoric from a well-known Iran hawk, a report published Sunday in the Wall Street Journal has revealed that Bolton did everything within his power to push for President Donald Trump to launch a military attack on Iran.

According to the Journal, Trump's national security team – which is led by Bolton – requested that the Pentagon develop “far-reaching military options to strike Iran” last September after Shia militias in Iraq fired three mortars at the U.S. embassy and diplomatic compound in Baghdad. As the report noted, the shells “landed in an open lot and harmed no one,” but the group that fired them is alleged to have ties with Iran.

This incident, though minor, notably took place amid considerable unrest in the Iraqi city of Basra and during competing efforts by the U.S. and Iran to influence the formation of Iraq's next national government.

Nevertheless, the minor nature of the incident was apparently the perfect pretext for Bolton and others on the national security team – which Bolton has been stocking with war hawks for much of the past year – to push for a military strike on Iran, something Bolton himself has long sought, as evidenced by his numerous speeches and editorials calling for preemptive bombing of the Islamic Republic.

For instance, in one meeting, Mira Ricardel – then serving as Bolton's ultra-hawkish deputy national security advisor – described the attacks in Iraq as “an act of war” and said the U.S. had to respond decisively. Ricardel is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a former executive of U.S. weapons-maker Boeing but left her post last November as result of friction with First Lady Melania Trump.

In addition, during those meetings, the Journal noted that Bolton did not even attempt to hide his real motivations, as he “made it clear that he personally supports regime change in Iran, a position he aggressively championed before joining the Trump administration, according to people familiar with the discussions.”

As a result of those meetings, the Bolton-led National Security Council

pushed for an attack plan on Iran so brazen that it deeply concerned Pentagon and State Department officials. One former senior U.S. administration official told the Journal that the request “definitely rattled people” and added that “people were shocked. It was mind-boggling how cavalier they were about hitting Iran.”

In other words, using a remarkably minor incident as a pretext, the Bolton-led group of hawks that compose the majority of Trump’s National Security Council (NSC) was preparing to launch a full-scale regime-change war on Iran. To make matter worse, the Journal also reported that the Pentagon had “complied with the NSC’s request to develop options for striking Iran,” meaning that Bolton and his team now have a range of Pentagon-developed strategies for bombing Iran at their fingertips.

## **Bolton’s obsession and unkept promise**

Bolton’s push to bomb Iran last September over such a minor incident may seem strange, but Bolton’s history makes it clear that he has long sought any excuse – from the minor to the non-existent – to justify waging war against Iran’s current government.

As MintPress reported last year, Bolton’s past indicates a near obsession with clearing the way for U.S. military action against Iran. As journalist Gareth Porter has noted, while Bolton was the Bush administration’s key policymaker on Iran, he — by flouting State Department protocol and taking several unannounced trips to Israel — “actively conspired ... to establish the political conditions necessary for the administration to carry out military action” against Iran.

Not only that, but Bolton’s behind-the-scenes dealings — using fabricated evidence, provided to him by an Iranian terrorist group that Bolton still openly supports, to convince the United Nations that Iran was secretly developing a nuclear weapon — led Iran’s nuclear program to become a matter overseen by the United Nations Security Council, as opposed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Since becoming national security advisor, Bolton has continued to make this claim — as recently as last week — despite

its having been rejected by the U.S. intelligence community repeatedly since 2007.

The terror group relied on by Bolton, Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK), was listed as a “Foreign Terrorist Organization” by the United States government from 1997 and 2012 and, in the past, has conducted terror acts to accomplish its goals, killing Iranians as well as Americans in the process. More recently, MEK has worked with Israeli Intelligence to murder Iranian scientists. Since its removal from the government’s terror group list after an extensive lobbying effort that targeted prominent U.S. politicians, MEK has sought to reinvent itself as a “moderate” Iranian opposition group even though it has next to no support within Iran and has consistently been characterized as both “cultish” and “authoritarian.”

It was to this very group that Bolton had promised regime change in Tehran in 2019, a promise he ultimately failed to keep, but not for lack of trying.

### **“Sunni-stan,” partition, and a Middle East rebuilt to suit**

Another highly significant revelation of the Journal’s report, which has been largely overlooked, is that the plans for “military options” that Bolton and his team requested from the Pentagon also included strategies for launching strikes, not just in Iran, but in Syria and Iraq. As the report noted, “the National Security Council asked the Pentagon to provide the White House with options to respond with strikes in Iraq and Syria as well, according to people familiar with the talks.”

Bolton’s willingness to bring Syria and Iraq into the fray betrays the fact that he is not just seeking regime change in individual countries but seeking to remake the Middle East as a whole. Indeed, both Syria and Iraq have long been in Bolton’s crosshairs, as evidenced by his 2015 editorial in the New York Times where he calls for the partition of both countries in order to benefit the United States, Israel and “friendly Arab” states like Saudi Arabia.

Bolton’s partition plan involves the creation of a Sunni state out of northeastern Syria and western Iraq, which he nicknames “Sunni-stan.” He asserts



that such a country has “economic potential” as an oil producer, would be a “bulwark” against the Syrian government and “Iran-allied Baghdad,” and would help defeat Daesh (ISIS).

Bolton’s mention of oil is notable, as the proposed area for this Sunni state sits on key oil fields that U.S. oil interests, such as ExxonMobil and the Koch brothers, have sought to control if the partition of Iraq and Syria comes to pass. Also notable is the fact that the area of Syria Bolton mentions is the area currently being illegally occupied by the United States. This could well be a driving factor in Bolton’s desire to delay or prevent the U.S. troop withdrawal in northeastern Syria.

However, the most notable part of the Bolton’s editorial calling for the creation of “Sunni-stan” is that he mentions exactly who would benefit from this partition, and it certainly isn’t the Syrians or the Iraqis. “Restoring Iraqi and Syrian governments to their former borders,” Bolton writes, “is a goal fundamentally contrary to American, Israeli and friendly Arab state interests.” In other words, allowing the Syrian government to return to its former borders is “contrary” to the interests of the nations that Bolton supports and that he seeks to make the dominant powers in the Middle East through his aggressive policy for the region.

With Bolton and his team on the National Security Council armed with the tools to bomb both Syria and Iran, it’s only a matter of time before Bolton finds the perfect pretext to begin enacting his vision for a “new” Middle East, most likely starting with Iran.

Top Photo | John Bolton, former US ambassador to the United Nations, speaks during the “Energy Independence Day Tea Party” rally on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 4, 2011. Dennis Van Tine | MediaPunch | IPX

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Pompeo, Bolton, and Iran’s “Fake Opposition”

Muhammad Sahimi

February 6, 2019

Lobe  
Log

As Iranian people struggle for democracy and respect for human rights and the rule of law, as well as preserving the national security and territorial integrity of their country, two main groups have emerged among the opposition to Iran’s hardliners, both within Iran and in the diaspora. One group, the true opposition that includes the reformists, religious-nationalists, secular leftists, various labor groups, human rights activists, and others, believes that it is up to the Iranian people living in Iran how to change the political system in their country. This group is opposed to foreign intervention, particularly by the United States and its allies, the illegal economic sanctions imposed by the United States on Iran, and the constant threats of military confrontation espoused by John Bolton, President Trump’s national security advisor, and other Iran hawks.

Many Iranians refer to the second group as the “fake” opposition. It consists mostly of the monarchists, some ethnic groups, and the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), the exiled group that is universally despised in Iran and was on the State Department’s list of “Foreign Terrorist Organizations” from 1997 until 2011. It is called the “fake” opposition because it supports the economic sanctions and the threat of military attacks, and has completely aligned itself not only with the Trump administration, but also with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Israel, and endorses their propaganda against Iran. This group, whose followers are based mostly in the diaspora, acts more like a lobby for convincing the Iranian people to support the Trump-Mohammed bin Salman (MbS)-Benjamin Netanyahu triangle in their confrontation with Iran, rather than as a group supporting the true opposition within Iran for lasting, irreversible, and positive changes in the political system.

The harsh economic sanctions imposed on the Iranian people have contributed significantly to the terrible state of Iran’s economy, increasing inflation and unemployment, making vital drugs and medications scarce, and hurting the middle class greatly. These groups’ support for the hostility of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and UAE toward Iran is particularly galling at a time when Saudi Arabia has threatened “to take the war to inside Iran,” Israel came close numerous times to attacking Iran from 2010-2011 and is still threatening it, and the UAE welcomed the terrorist attacks in Ahvaz in southern Iran last September.

## **The Secessionist Ethnic Groups**

Although National Security Advisor John Bolton supports the MEK and has met with its leader repeatedly, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Brian Hook, the State Department’s Special Representative for Iran who directs the “Iran Action Group,” have met with some of the leaders of the “fake” opposition. Last June, Abdullah Mohtadi and Mustafa Hijri who lead, respectively, the Iranian Communist Kurdish group Komala and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), traveled to Washington, with Mohtadi reportedly meeting with Pompeo and Hijri meeting with other the State Department officials. Komala’s office in Washington has registered with the Justice Department as a lobbying group intending to “establish solid and durable relations” with the Trump administration. Before he was appointed

the president's national security advisor, Bolton published a white paper that included a call for supporting "Kurdish national aspirations, including Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Syria," and for providing "assistance to Balochis, Khuzestan Arabs, Kurds" and other ethnic minorities in Iran.

Both groups have carried out armed attacks on Iran's military inside Iran, which amount to terrorism. Both have separatist tendencies, which they conceal under the guise of calling for a federal system that would partition the country into various regions based on ethnicity. The separatist nature of the KDPI became clear when, in 2012, Hijri asked the United States to declare Iran's Kurdistan province a "no-fly zone" so that his forces could attack government forces freely and eventually secede from Iran. Hijri has also called for "regime change" in Iran, declared the Islamic Republic "a common enemy" of the Kurds and Israel, and asked the Jewish state for support.

## Identifying Iranian Ahmed Chalabis

One goal of the meetings between Pompeo, Bolton, and the exiled "fake" opposition is to identify those Iranians who have the potential to act as the Iranian version of Ahmad Chalabi. This notorious Iraqi figure, whose Iraqi National Congress for years fabricated lies about Saddam Hussein's non-existent weapons of mass destruction, worked closely with the neoconservatives in the run-up to the 2003 invasion. Another goal is to buttress the claim that the Iranian people support Trump's policy vis-à-vis Iran.

One leading candidate is Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's last king, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi whose regime was overthrown by the 1979 Revolution. In the 1980s, the CIA provided Reza Pahlavi with funding. He has also had a long-term relationship with Israel and the Israel lobby in the United States, including meeting with Sheldon Adelson, the casino magnate and billionaire Republican donor who once suggested that the United States attack Iran with nuclear bombs. Reza Pahlavi has also called on Israel to help the "cause of democracy" in Iran.

Efforts to prop up Reza Pahlavi began immediately after Donald Trump's election in November 2016, even before he formally took office. Suddenly, the Farsi division of Voice of America (VOA), as well as Radio Farda, a

U.S. funded radio program, began promoting Reza Pahlavi as the “leader” of the opposition. Setareh Derakhshesh, director of VOA’s Farsi programs, interviewed Pahlavi, and both VOA and Radio Farda began presenting a very “modern” and positive portrait of Pahlavi and his family, a depiction that has continued.

In addition, Derakhshesh also interviewed several Iran hawks, including Bolton. She also interviewed Elliot Abrams, who served in George W. Bush’s National Security Council and is an ardent opponent of the nuclear agreement with Iran (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA), and Michael Ledeen, a veteran anti-Iran neoconservative at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a leading anti-JCPOA group closely associated with Israel’s Likud Party. Both Abrams and Ledeen support Trump’s policy toward Iran. VOA also hired Masih Alinejad, a controversial reporter who has turned against the Reformists in Iran, to begin her own program on VOA, giving her large sums of money and promoting her heavily.

In addition, VOA’s programs stopped interviewing the Reformist figures in the Iranian diaspora or in Tehran. Several Iranian staff members who ran various VOA Farsi programs and were not comfortable with the sudden change of direction, either left VOA or moved to positions off camera.

## **The New Pro-War Group**

Another “fake” opposition group that has emerged over the past several months and is closely linked with the Trump administration and the neocons is called Farashgard (“revival” in ancient Persian). Its leading member is Amir Etemadi who, together with Saeed Ghasseminejad, co-founded the so-called “Iranian Liberal Students Group” (ILSG), a small ultra-right group of student activists in Iran, most of whom moved to Canada and the United States and supported George W. Bush’s policy toward Iran. Ghasseminejad is now “senior adviser on Iran” at the FDD. In his Twitter account, Ghasseminejad refers to himself as a “classical liberal and non-partisan,” despite calling for the execution of the Islamic Republic’s leaders after regime change and working for the very partisan FDD.

Farashgard consists of 40 relatively young activists—most of whom are

members of the ILSG—who have called for “regime change” in Iran, supported Trump’s “maximum pressure” campaign against their native land, and promoted Reza Pahlavi as the leader of the opposition. Before the group announced its existence in September 2018, many of its members had signed a letter in December 2016 in which they declared the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic State (ISIS or IS) “two sides of the same coin”—never mind that Iran played a leading role in defeating IS in Iraq and Syria. The letter also urged then President-elect Trump to take on the Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) throughout the Middle East “by all available means” and help “the Iranian people to take back their country from the Islamic gang which has been in charge for the last four decades...” Echoing Bolton’s and Pompeo’s claim that Iran’s ballistic missile program is “a threat not only to the region but to the world,” they asked Trump to pressure Iran to stop its missile program, and impose tough economic sanctions that would hurt the Iranian people, not the regime

## “New Iran” Foundation

A few months ago, a new Iran “think tank” popped up called New Iran (TNI), led by Alireza Nader, formerly of the Rand Corporation. TNI claims to be “a nonprofit and nonpartisan 501(c)3 organization dedicated to the objective research and analysis of Iran.” But Nader has recently been more involved in political development than analysis. In late December 2017 and early January 2018, when demonstrations against the terrible state of the economy broke out in several cities throughout Iran, Nader was highly active on Twitter, trying to encourage more demonstrations—see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), for example—while working at Rand under a contract from the U.S. government.

Nader apparently left Rand a short time after those demonstrations, and suddenly TNI emerged with offices at a pricey Washington address and six permanent staff. The few analyses that TNI members, including Nader himself, have published—see [here](#) and [here](#), for example—indicate that they support the Trump/Pompeo/Bolton approach to Iran. This is in fact Nader’s modus operandi. A review of his writings over the years shows that he generally changes positions as the U.S. administrations do and tries to align with whoever is in power.

In addition to supporting Trump's Iran policy, Farashgard and TNI are also closely linked to the neoconservatives, the Israel lobby, and others. For example, a member of the board of directors of the TNI, Nader Uskowi, was a leftist student activist before the Iranian revolution and has worked at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, an offshoot of the American Israeli Political Affairs Committee. Another member of TNI's board is Thomas Parker who is also listed as a security expert on the website of the Washington Institute and has written for them in the past.

In a recent article, Uskowi seemingly praised Farashgard. In addition, Shay Khatiri, a researcher at TNI, is also a member of Farashgard, and in his Twitter account proudly describes himself as "the new Paul Wolfowitz," the discredited neoconservative former deputy Pentagon chief under George W. Bush and one of the key architects of 2003 invasion of Iraq. A picture shows him shaking hands with the late Senator John McCain, an Iran hawk who sang infamously "bomb, bomb, bomb Iran." His page on the TNI website claims that "he has researched Iranian politics, history, and public opinion at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and the American Enterprise Institute," whose "scholars" have included Wolfowitz, Bolton, Ledeen, and other Iraq and Iran hawks. Another TNI adviser, Sharon Nazarian, is "senior vice president of international affairs" at the Anti-Defamation League, a civil-rights group that is strongly pro-Israel and that has also long supported a confrontational stance towards Iran.

According to documents filed online by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the political arm of the MEK, Uskowi has repeatedly met with NCRI's Alireza Jafarzadeh. Iranians consider Jafarzadeh the "foreign minister" of the MEK leader, Maryam Rajavi.

Bolton and Trump's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, have been long-time lobbyists for the MEK, receiving large fees for their lobby activities. Both Bolton and Giuliani have also called for "regime change" in Iran.

It's not clear where TNI and other "fake" opposition groups receive their funding. The Gulf States, however, have made clear their their willingness to pay for anti-Iranian activities. Last November, The New York Times re-

ported that, in March 2017, intelligence and military officials of Saudi Arabia discussed a \$2 billion plan to destabilize Iran and assassinate its top officials, including Major General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds force.

## **No Significant Social Base of Support**

One of the most important aspects of all such groups is that they have no significant social base of support within Iran. Even in the diaspora a large majority of Iranians, while opposing the clerics in Iran, reject economic sanctions, military threats, and these groups' support for the anti-Iranian policy of the Trump-MbS-Netanyahu triangle. Within Iran, the hostility of the triangle has actually transformed the generally pro-West Iranians into strong opponents of the three countries, to the point of despising the three leaders and their governments.

Farhad Meysami, a medical doctor and human rights activist who has been imprisoned by the hardliners in Tehran and has even gone on hunger strike, criticized harshly the Trump administration in an open letter distributed widely on the Internet. He accused Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo of shedding "crocodile tears" for him and other jailed political and human rights activists, writing:

I was paging through a newspaper when I suddenly caught a glimpse of a story and got riveted to the spot. Apparently, [Donald] Trump's State Department has called for the "freedom" of this humble civil activist. Actually, I prefer to serve my whole life in jail at the hands of a group of wrongdoing compatriot oppressors and spend it endeavoring to rectify their mistakes, rather than be subject to the stigma of "deal-breakers' support" [a reference to the Trump administration leaving the JCPOA illegally].

Meysami ended his letter by saying, "I request the likes of Trump, Pompeo and Bolton to shed their crocodile tears for human rights elsewhere."

After promoting Reza Pahlavi heavily, Farashgard called on the Iranian people to go on strike and demonstrate on the anniversary of last year's scattered demonstrations, particularly on December 28 and January 7. No significant



demonstration took place anywhere in Iran, hence demonstrating the absence of any social support within Iran for the monarchists, Reza Pahlavi, and their promoters. It also demonstrated these groups' complete ignorance of Iran's realities. The lack of support for the demonstrations was so embarrassing that it ignited a fierce internal debate among the monarchists about the wisdom of such calls.

All Iranians despise the MEK for collaborating with Saddam Hussein and Iraq during the war with Iran in the 1980s, for revealing information on Iran's nuclear program and facilities, for working with Saudi Arabia, and for collaborating with Israel in the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists.

## **The Poland Summit**

In January, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced a summit in Poland on February 13-14 to build a global coalition against Iran. The idea, according to Pompeo, is to “focus on Middle East stability and peace and freedom and security here in this region, and that includes an important element of making sure that Iran is not a destabilizing influence.” Poland's Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz said in a statement that 70 countries, including all 28 members of the European Union, have been invited.

A well-placed Iranian activist told the author that, in the run-up to the summit in Poland, Pompeo has invited several figures from the Iranian “fake” opposition to Washington for “consultation.” The apparent purpose is either to select some of them to take to Poland to speak “on behalf of the Iranian people,” to prepare some sort of “manifesto” on what the Iranian people want, or both. In fact, on February 4, Pompeo met with the VOA's Alinejad and “underscored the United States' commitment to help amplify the voices of the Iranian people and to condemn the Iranian regime for its ongoing human rights abuses.” This is while the United States continues to support Saudi Arabia and Egypt, countries that are gross violators of the human rights of their own citizens.

After re-imposing harsh and illegal economic sanctions on Iran, threatening Iran repeatedly, and banning most Iranians from traveling to the United States, the Trump administration, in collaboration with the “fake” Iranian op-

position, sheds crocodile tears for the Iranian people. In Iran, meanwhile, the people struggle daily on two fronts. They continue to survive the sanctions and threats, and the rampant corruption of the hardliners. And they continue to pressure these same hardliners to stop the repression, open up the political space, and allow for free and fair elections.

Muhammad Sahimi, a professor at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, has been analyzing Iran's political developments and its nuclear program for 25 years. From 2008-2012, he was the lead political columnist for the website PBS/Frontline/Tehran Bureau. In addition, his writings have been published by Huffington Post, National Interest, Antiwar, and other major websites, as well as by the Los Angeles Times and New York Times, among others.

Editor's Note: This article has provoked mostly praise but also some criticism of which we would like to take account. What is noteworthy is that the critics have failed to provide one scintilla of evidence that the substantive assertions made in Prof. Sahimi's post is unfounded or incorrect. Instead, the main criticism has addressed the fact that the position Prof. Sahimi holds at the University of Southern California is named the N.I.O.C. Chair in Petroleum Engineering. Mark Dubowitz of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies tweeted: "NIOC was designated in 2012 for being an agent/affiliate of the IRGC and redesignated in 2018" with the apparent attempt to suggest that Prof. Sahimi and USC are somehow associated with or supported by the National Iranian Oil Company which in turn is an agent or affiliate of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In light of the foregoing, we asked Mr. Dubowitz the following question via Twitter Monday afternoon: "Are you asserting that the NIOC chair of Petroleum Engineering at the University of Southern California has or has ever had any actual or operational relationship to the IRGC?" As of midnight PST, he has not replied.

As Mr. Dubowitz must have known, his suggestion is patently absurd. What is currently named the N.I.O.C. Chair in Petroleum Engineering at USC was created in 1973 through a \$7 million endowment to the university by the Shah of Iran. From 1973 until the 1979 revolution, it was known as the Aryamehr Chair of Petroleum Engineering. After the revolution, however, USC renamed it the N.I.O.C. Chair of Petroleum Engineering. The Islamic Republic

of Iran sued to have the remaining funds in the endowment returned to Iran but lost its case in court. There has been no active relationship between the NIOC (or the IRGC) and USC (or Prof. Sahimi) since that time. Nor could there be under recent or current U.S. sanctions laws, as Mr. Dubowitz, of all people given his leading role in crafting and promoting U.S. sanctions against Iran, should know.

It should be emphasized that the suggestion that an individual living in the United States is an active IRGC agent without offering any evidence to support that insinuation is not only reckless and irresponsible; it's potentially dangerous for that individual. And for other critics of Prof. Sahimi's essay to rely on or cite this utterly specious, if not malicious insinuation in order to impugn the credibility of Prof. Sahimi's post without citing actual evidence that the substantive assertions of fact contained therein are false does them no credit.

If such evidence is provided, LobeLog will issue a correction and an apology, if relevant. But, in contrast to all the clearly ignorant commentary about the implications of the name of the chair held by Prof. Sahimi, not a single shred of such evidence has been produced to date.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK: Who is this Iranian ‘cult’ backed by the US?

TRT World

February 14, 2019

The MEK, an Iranian group that opposes the Iranian government and has committed several terrorist attacks is hugely controversial. But that doesn’t stop the US from supporting them.

“Iran should be isolated until Iran changes,” US President Donald Trump’s attorney Rudy Giuliani, who claimed to be representing the Iranian group the People’s Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (MEK), during a Middle East conference in Warsaw, Poland.

Giuliani’s suggestion for who will lead the democratic government after replacing the current Iranian government is Maryam Rajavi, the leader of the group that was, until recently, listed as a terrorist organisation by the US.

US support of the MEK is controversial not least

TRT WORLD

NEWS / MIDDLE-EAST

## MEK: Who is this Iranian 'cult' backed by the US?

14 FEB 2019

SHARE     

The MEK, an Iranian group that opposes the Iranian government and has committed several terrorist attacks is hugely controversial. But that doesn't stop the US from supporting them.



Maryam Rajavi, leader of the MEK, in Villepinte, a northern suburb of Paris, Saturday, June 20, 2009. (AP)

Mohammad Ali Rajai and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar in 1981 and is suspected of the assassination of six American servicemen.

The group relocated to Iraq after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, when Iran proved that the group had lost a power struggle against the government, and found military support and shelter in Camp Hurriya in Baghdad.

When the eight-year Iran-Iraq war broke out in 1980, the MEK fought alongside Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. That led to them being branded traitors by the Iranian government, who executed thousands of political opponents, including MEK supporters, at the end of the war in 1988.

The US State Department added the MEK to its list of terrorist organisations in 1997, and the exact reason why is unknown but the group carried out several terror attacks killing Iranians, Iraqis and Americans in the 70s and 80s. The terrorist label was reversed under the presidency of Barack Obama in 2012 after the group led a multimillion-dollar campaign. A Guardian investigation found that the group flew funds to members of Congress while running a lobbying campaign to erase its past.

because of the cult aspects which dominate its practices, but also the group's violent past which some suspect continues today.

### So, what is the MEK?

The MEK is a religious and 'Marxist' group aiming to remove the Iranian government. It was founded in 1965 in Iran in opposition to the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and launched bomb attacks against him. The group is responsible for killing Iran's then-president

When the US illegally invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003, the group surrendered to the Americans and began presenting itself as a group advocating democracy.

Until 2012, the group remained in Iraq under US protection, but in fear of Iranian attacks, it was relocated to an unlikely country, Albania, where the group built a massive compound surrounded by barbed wire, high-tech surveillance and armed guards.

## **Why the US supports the MEK**

There is one main reason behind the current US support of the MEK: defeating Iran, the biggest enemy of the US in the Middle East.

In 2015, the Obama administration, along with the UK, China, Russia and Germany reached a deal with the Iranian government. According to the agreement, Tehran would limit its nuclear programme and the world powers sat at the table would remove economic sanctions on Iran.

The US end of the deal eventually fell through when US President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the agreement in May 2018. Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton, who long advocated for the removal of the agreement, and Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump's lawyer, have been taking to the stage at the MEK's rallies, where the speakers are reportedly paid \$30,000 to \$50,000 per event. Despite speaking at the rallies, neither Giuliani or Bolton have ever confirmed receiving payment from the MEK.

For the US, the rebranded version of the group is the best alternative to fight against Iran, and Rajavi has been leading an expensive propaganda campaign through events at which she aims to attract more supporters. The group's supporters often make appearances in front of buildings where Iranian officials are attending political gatherings outside of Iran. The group advertises itself as the 'popular opposition', but the fact is that it is "almost universally despised among Iranians both inside the country and in the diaspora."


## **Is it a cult?**

Despite describing its founding principles as a mixture of Marxism and Islam, the group has practices that are characteristic of neither Islam nor Marxism. For followers of the MEK, applying those practices is a matter of dedication and obligatory as much as working against the Iranian government.

It includes the strict segregation of men and women almost from toddlerhood, compulsory divorce and a ban on having children. The members of the group reportedly attend weekly gatherings where they have to confess and clean any idea they have that could conflict with the rules.

The ideology is justified by the group as being in the state of war. “Soldiers can’t have wives and husbands,” one of the followers of the group was quoted as saying in a New York Times article in 2003.

Human rights groups often denounce the group’s cult practices and reported abuses such as torture, solitary confinement and compulsory divorce.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## As Giuliani Calls for Regime Change in Iran, Netanyahu Raises the Specter of “War”

Robert Mackey

February 14, 2019

It was supposed to be secret that the Middle East conference in Warsaw was really about confronting Iran, then Giuliani and Netanyahu showed up.

Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City who now serves as President Donald Trump’s personal lawyer, called for the overthrow of Iran’s government on Wednesday during a rally in Poland staged by a cult-like group of Iranian exiles who pay him to represent them.

The Intercept

Speaking outside the Warsaw venue for an international conference on the Middle East attended by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Giuliani said that his message for the 65 governments discussing ways to confront Iran was simple. “The theocratic dictatorship in Tehran,” Giuliani said, “must end



and end quickly.”

Giuliani went on to suggest that peace in the region would only come when Iran was ruled instead by his clients, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, an exile group of former terrorists also known as the Mojahedin-e Khalq, or People’s Mujahedin. The group’s leader, Maryam Rajavi, already refers to herself as “President-elect.”

Off-stage, the U.S. president’s lawyer admitted that he was paid by the exile group, but stressed to reporters that he was in Warsaw on behalf of the MEK in his personal capacity and would not be attending the diplomatic conference organized by the State Department.

Even before the conference began, the Israeli prime minister appeared to shrug off efforts by the State Department and the Polish government to portray the gathering as broadly focused on Middle East peace, describing it as primarily a meeting of Iran’s enemies.

In video posted on the prime minister’s official Twitter feed, Netanyahu characterized a meeting with Oman’s foreign minister as “excellent,” and one focused on “additional steps we can take together with the countries of the region in order to advance common interests.”

According to the English translation of Netanyahu’s remarks in Hebrew prepared by his office, the prime minister then added: “What is important about this meeting — and it is not in secret because there are many of those — is that this is an open meeting with representatives of leading Arab countries that are sitting down together with Israel in order to advance the common interest of war with Iran.”

Netanyahu’s use of the word “war” seemed to throw Israel’s diplomatic corps into chaos. Within minutes, as journalists speculated that the prime minister’s office might have mistranslated his comment, Netanyahu’s spokesperson to the Arab media, Ofir Gendelman, wrote that the Israeli leader had described his nation’s common interest with Arab nations as “combatting Iran,” not “war with Iran.”

The subtitled video produced by the prime minister's office was then deleted from his Twitter feed and replaced with the text of Gendelman's alternative translation.

As my colleague Talya Cooper explains, however, Netanyahu did in fact use the Hebrew word for "war" in the video, which has not yet been deleted from his Hebrew-language YouTube channel. In a separate video, posted by Netanyahu's office on Facebook earlier in the day, the prime minister had used the Hebrew word for "combat."

Aron Heller, an Associated Press correspondent based in Jerusalem, also filmed the remarks and reported that although Netanyahu had mentioned "war," his office said later that he was referring to "combatting Iran."

Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, seized on the Israeli leader's apparent Freudian slip as evidence that Netanyahu's true aim of provoking a war with Iran was now out in the open.

Zarif also suggested that the Trump administration and the exiles of the MEK might have been behind a suicide bombing on a bus in southeastern Iran on Wednesday, which killed 41 members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

"Is it no coincidence that Iran is hit by terror on the very day that #WarsawCircus begins?" Zarif tweeted. "Especially when cohorts of same terrorists cheer it from Warsaw streets & support it with twitter bots? US seems to always make the same wrong choices, but expect different results."

The foreign minister was clearly referring to the MEK, which spent three decades trying to achieve regime change in Iran through violence, including terrorist attacks. The well-funded exile group was also suspected of being behind social media trickery discovered by the BBC, which reported that Twitter bots had been deployed "to artificially create a trend which hints at popular support for the summit and — by extension — widespread resentment towards the Iranian establishment."

The Iranian exiles have been caught in the past paying nonsupporters to fill

out its crowds at rallies, a tactic reportedly used at the event in Warsaw on Wednesday, according to journalists on the ground.

Members of the MEK helped foment the 1979 Iranian revolution, in part by killing American civilians working in Tehran, but the group then lost a struggle for power to the Islamists. With its leadership forced to flee Iran in 1981, the MEK's members set up a government-in-exile in France and established a military base in Iraq, where they were given arms and training by Saddam Hussein as part of a strategy to destabilize the government in Tehran that he was at war with.

In recent years, as *The Intercept* has reported, the MEK has poured millions of dollars into reinventing itself as a moderate political group ready to take power in Iran if Western-backed regime change ever takes place. To that end, it lobbied successfully to be removed from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations in 2012. The Iranian exiles achieved this over the apparent opposition of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in part by paying a long list of former U.S. officials from both parties hefty speaking fees of between \$10,000 to \$50,000 for hymns of praise.

Despite the claims of paid spokespeople like Giuliani and John Bolton — who predicted regime change would come at a lavish MEK rally in Paris just months before being named Trump's national security adviser — the MEK appears to be as unprepared to take power in Iran as Ahmad Chalabi's exiled Iraqi National Congress was after the American invasion of Iraq.

Ariane Tabatabai, a Georgetown University scholar, has argued that the “cult-like dissident group” — whose married members were reportedly forced to divorce and take a vow of lifelong celibacy — “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 rush to the arms of what they consider a corrupt, criminal cult.

Despite such doubts, spending lavishly on paid endorsements has earned the MEK a bipartisan roster of Washington politicians willing to sign up as supporters. At a gala in 2016, Bolton was joined in singing the group's praises by another former U.N. ambassador, Bill Richardson; a former attorney general, Michael Mukasey; the former State Department spokesperson P.J. Crowley; the former Homeland Security adviser Frances Townsend; the former Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I.; and the former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean. That Paris gala was hosted by Linda Chavez, a former Reagan administration official, and headlined by Newt Gingrich, the former speaker who was under consideration to be Trump's running mate at the time.

Fears about Bolton's apparently open desire to start a war with Iran have been exacerbated by his boosting of the MEK and his steadfast denial of the catastrophe unleashed by the invasion of Iraq that he worked for as a member of the Bush administration. Last year, when Fox News host Tucker Carlson pointed out that Bolton had called for regime change in Iraq, Libya, Iran, and Syria, and the first of those had been "a disaster," Bolton disagreed.

"I think the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, that military action, was a resounding success," Bolton insisted to Carlson. The chaos that followed in Iraq, he said, was caused by a poorly executed occupation that ended too soon. On the bright side, Bolton said, the mistakes the U.S. made in Iraq offered "lessons about what to do after a regime is overthrown" in the future. Earlier this week, Sen. Chris Murphy warned that Bolton appeared to be laying the groundwork for war in a belligerent video message from the White House to mark the 40th anniversary of the Iranian revolution.

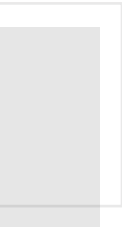
Another strong supporter of the disastrous U.S. invasion of Iraq was Netanyahu, who, between terms as prime minister, testified to Congress on Sept. 12, 2002 as a private citizen, and advised lawmakers that attacking Iraq would be wise.

A review of Netanyahu's 2002 testimony — in which he said, "I think the

choice of Iraq is a good choice, it's the right choice" — reveals that he linked his strong support for a United States invasion of Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein with the possibility of inspiring the implosion of the ruling theocracy in neighboring Iran.

"It's not a question of whether Iraq's regime should be taken out but when should it be taken out; it's not a question of whether you'd like to see a regime change in Iran but how to achieve it," Netanyahu said then. "If you take out Saddam, Saddam's regime, I guarantee you that it will have enormous positive reverberations on the region. And I think that people sitting right next door in Iran, young people, and many others, will say the time of such regimes, of such despots is gone."

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## US government no longer excludes MEK as leadership option for Iran

Barbara Slavin

March 6, 2019

The group, once on a State Department list of terrorist organizations, has influential supporters in the Donald Trump administration.

US administration talking points no longer exclude the Mujaheddin-e Khalq (MEK) as a potential replacement for the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Al-Monitor has learned.

AL-MONITOR 

Removed from a State Department list of terrorist organizations in 2012 after an expensive lobbying campaign, the MEK is understood to be widely reviled inside Iran as a leftist Islamist cult that sided with Saddam Hussein during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. The group advocates the overthrow of the Iranian government and the elevation of Maryam Rajavi, the wife of MEK founder Massoud Rajavi, as the new leader. She lives in exile outside Paris.

Top officials close to the Donald Trump administration — including national security adviser John Bolton and Rudolph Giuliani, the president’s personal lawyer — have taken tens of thousands of dollars in fees from the MEK and its front organizations over the years to speak before rallies that promote Maryam Rajavi’s leadership ambitions. Just last month, Giuliani told a pro-MEK rally in Warsaw, Poland, on the sidelines of a US-organized Middle East conference that Iran’s leaders are “assassins” and “murderers” who should be overthrown and then replaced by Rajavi.

In the past, State Department talking points have said that the United States believes that the MEK is not a viable political alternative for Iran. But that line was changed just before the Warsaw conference last month.

“We have said in the past, and say it now, that the Mujahideen Organization has no place among the people of Iran,” State Department spokeswoman Elizabeth Stickney told Deutsche Welle’s Persian-language channel as recently as September.

Asked this week if the MEK is now on a list of acceptable alternatives to the current government in Iran, a State Department spokesperson would not rule it out.

“We support the Iranian people. We have had many opportunities to engage the large and vibrant Iranian diaspora to hear many diverse views about the future of Iran,” the spokesperson told Al-Monitor. “As President Trump has clearly stated, the United States wants to see a free and prosperous future for the people of Iran. We do not back any specific Iranian opposition group; rather we back the Iranian people as they struggle to secure the freedoms and dignity they deserve.”

Officially, the Trump administration insists that its policy on Iran — quitting the nuclear deal last year and reinstating harsh sanctions — is meant to compel the Iranian government to change its policies, particularly on regional intervention. But the hawkish views of individuals such as Bolton and the rhetoric used by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo indicate that the real goal for many in the US administration is regime change.

On the 40th anniversary of the Iranian revolution, Bolton tweeted a harsh video message to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, telling him, “I don’t think you’ll have many more anniversaries to enjoy.” Pompeo has chastised European governments for seeking to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal despite continued Iranian compliance, as has Vice President Mike Pence.

Newt Gingrich, a veteran Republican politician who is close to the Trump administration, sought guidance from the Justice Department last year about whether he needed to register as a lobbyist for a “foreign political party” that appears to be the France-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the name for the MEK’s political front. In January, the NCRI hired Robert Joseph, a former undersecretary of state for arms control and international security, to lobby for it for \$15,000 a month. Joseph replaced Bolton at the State Department under the George W. Bush administration.

The MEK, whose name in Farsi means People’s Holy Warriors, came into existence as a guerrilla group that sought the overthrow of the US-backed shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. It was responsible for numerous acts of violence, including the assassination of six Americans in the 1970s, and supported the 1979 revolution. The group broke with the Iranian government after the revolution when it lost out in a struggle for power to supporters of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Massoud Rajavi fled first to Paris and then to Iraq, where Saddam Hussein gave the group refuge. The MEK fought against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, earning the enduring enmity of most Iranians. The government executed thousands of jailed followers of the MEK in 1988 after members of the group in Iraq entered the country following Iran’s acceptance of a UN cease-fire.

Over the years, the MEK has paid tens of thousands of dollars in speaking fees to former US officials from both the Republican and Democratic parties. Its sources of funding are a mystery. In the current environment, the group clearly sees an opportunity to find favor among those hoping that sanctions will weaken and destabilize the government in Tehran.

Some backers of regime change, particularly in the Iranian diaspora, have looked toward the son of the late Shah as a more plausible substitute for



the Iran's theocratic government. However, Reza Pahlavi made clear at an appearance late last year at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy that he doesn't see himself as a replacement for the current Iranian leadership but simply someone who could play a "guiding" role after that regime's fall. He spoke today at the conservative American Enterprise Institute.

At the Washington Institute, Pahlavi also appeared to reject any role in a post-Islamic Republic Iran for the MEK. "The continuing problem we have, or you can see with the MEK, is that they have yet to agree to work with democratic forces," he said. "Maybe it's because by doing so they'll lose the integrity and control of their structure."

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Are the MEK and Regime Change Finally Running Out of Road?

Anne and Massoud Khodabandeh

March 8, 2019

The “regime change in Iran” bandwagon—driven by warmongers, fueled by false prophesy, and hurtling pell-mell down the road to Iran—contains various characters, some new and some old.

The bandwagon itself is an ideological construct created 40 years ago in response to the Iranian Revolution. It has taken on various incarnations over the years, but its central purpose has always been to destroy the Islamic Republic of Iran and replace it with a compliant pro-American government. What that is hardly matters of course, as was the case with Iraq in 2003.

The drivers of this bandwagon are paid large sums to pursue this agenda at any cost. Others are mere passengers, hoping for a role after the vehicle reaches the destination. Among these passengers is the



## Are The MEK And Regime Change Finally Running Out Of Road?

MARCH 8, 2019 GUEST CONTRIBUTOR | 5 COMMENTS



Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), formerly a terrorist group and currently “democratic opposition.” The MEK has been a passenger for all 40 years of the journey, hanging on by paying the drivers. These drivers are public persons such as National Security Advisor John Bolton and Trump lawyer Rudi Giuliani, along with a host of other “influential” persons who steer the bandwagon inexorably toward conflict.

But just as the bandwagon appears to be gathering speed and momentum—enough to scare the Trump administration’s opponents—the MEK appears to be running out of road. And that could signal a halt to the whole enterprise.

The first sign of this came in a piece by Eli Clifton, which discussed the provenance of a large payment (\$165,000) received by John Bolton in relation to a tweet to “defend a non-governmental anti-Iran pressure group, United

Against Nuclear Iran (UANI)...”. Clifton’s own tweet was met by a couple of feeble MEK slave troll posts on his thread spouting the usual “no appeasement” and “terrorist Iran” themes. This indicates that the MEK has been outbid by a new bandwagon passenger UANI, since the MEK only managed \$40,000 for one of Bolton’s speeches. Also, the MEK trolls are running out of steam back in their closed camp in Albania.

Even while Bolton and the Trump administration, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman are pushing for a war with Iran, they are beginning to realize that the MEK is not the stick needed to strike fear into the enemy. Indeed, a look at the recent behaviour of the MEK in Albania reveals a failing group beset by internal crisis.

After a series of critical investigative articles by reporters from Al Jazeera, The Guardian, The Independent, Channel 4 News, NBC, and others, the recent report in Der Spiegel by Luisa Hommerich was apparently the last straw. The MEK issued a Farsi language statement (written and published in Europe) threatening to assassinate her—for just doing her job.

Hommerich reported that inside the camp in Albania, MEK militants were still practicing the deadly techniques for combat taught them by Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard—“cutting throats with a knife,” “breaking hands,” “removing eyes with fingers,” and “tearing the mouth open.” In 2017, the Trump administration reversed a 2013 plan by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to establish a De-Radicalisation Institute to disband and rehabilitate the MEK, allowing the dangerous cult to regroup behind closed doors in a de facto extra-territorial enclave and continue its violent practices.

In spite of this boost, the MEK, beset by exposures and defections, is trying to prevent the total collapse of the group. Around a thousand members have left the group since it relocated to Albania. The front line over which the MEK peers at its enemy, the Islamic Republic, is no longer Iraq but is now represented by a group of 40 former members protesting in Tirana. The MEK claim that these are all “agents of the Iranian regime” who want to kill the remaining cult members. So, instead of orchestrating regime change in Iran, the MEK can’t even deal with 40 destitute former members.

The MEK is engaged in a form of modern slavery by not paying thousands of activists for 30 years or more. Members who leave the group are left destitute because they have nothing but the clothes on their back even after decades of loyal service. The MEK claims that members offer their services as “volunteers.” But the preamble to the UN Declaration of Human Rights states in its opening sentence that human rights are inalienable—that is, they cannot be disowned by anyone for any reason. MEK leader Maryam Rajavi is responsible for such decisions and treatment.

Not only are the defectors that Hommerich profiles impoverished because they have not had financial recompense for their years of devotion, they are also deliberately left stateless. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees brought the MEK to Albania from Iraq on “humanitarian grounds.” But on arrival they were not granted UN refugee status, nor have they been issued Albanian identity documents that would allow them to work or travel. Lack of residency rights also means that they cannot register for a bank account. They have no identity papers whatsoever, except the flimsy piece of paper used to fly them through international airspace from Baghdad to Tirana.

In her pursuit of fame and glory, Maryam Rajavi treats her members as, essentially, cannon fodder. In the idealized future she paints for the members, they will one day march on Tehran, the vanguard of a spontaneous uprising of the Iranian people against their Islamic oppressors, the mullahs. Why would they need money or identity papers?

In the meantime, it suits Rajavi to have her “followers” incarcerated in a closed camp unable to live independent lives, subject to the whims and demands of the struggle that she purports to lead. But that struggle has almost evaporated. Sure, the MEK is still performing propaganda tasks for various Saudis, Israelis, and Americans to advance the anti-Iran push. But even that is becoming more and more irrelevant as the MEK itself begins to fail.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Mojahedin e-Khalq Aren't America's Friends

Michael Rubin

March 28, 2019

**A**nd even Iranians who hate their current regime don't want the MEK.

The Trump administration is not afraid to defy long-held conventional wisdom on U.S. foreign policy. With regard to the Middle East, such disruption can be a good thing: Across administrations and for decades, U.S. policy has achieved only lackluster results. For example, Israeli-Palestinian peace has receded even as successive administrations poured billions of dollars into a Middle East peace process. Nor has traditional diplomacy contained the growth and expansion of Iranian influence across the region.

Trump, however, has been willing to break diplomatic china. He has recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, cut funding to the Palestinian Authority, held Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's feet to the

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fire over the detention of U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson and walked away from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the JCPOA or Iran Deal). In each case, prognostications that the sky would fall, and disaster would loom proved false.

Sometimes, however, breaking conventional wisdom can backfire. While legal arguments about the necessity of an authorization for the use of military force in Syria are valid, a precipitous withdrawal would likely be disastrous. There has been tremendous mission creep in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) over the last several decades but defunding the American-European military alliance would probably encourage aggression rather than ensure stability. And, when it comes to the Mojahedin e-Khalq (MEK), an Iranian opposition group, any cooperation and coordination—let alone support—from the United States would be disastrous.

The Trump administration, however, is reportedly reconsidering the pariah status of the MEK within U.S. diplomacy. Barbara Slavin, an American analyst often apologetic to the Islamic Republic, reports that “US administration talking points no longer exclude the Mujaheddin-e Khalq as a potential replacement for the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” While there remains a great difference between “refuses to exclude” and “supports,” Slavin is correct to raise concern.

## Iranian Hatred for the Mojahedin e-Khalq

I spent seven months in the Islamic Republic of Iran during both the Rafsanjani and Khatami-eras while completing my Ph.D. dissertation. During that time, I shopped daily in the market, rode public transportation, and met fellow university students from across Iran. Most were curious to meet an

American with no family links to Iran. Most were cautious but keen to talk about the antipathy to the Islamic Republic once they were out of buildings or vehicles which could be easily bugged. For example, one couple from Ahvaz, in Tehran, complained while their twelve-year-old daughter underwent treatment for brain cancer that in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, the regime built mosques but not hospitals.

A professor in Isfahan would remove the ignition wire from his car every time he parked at night to deter car thieves. And, a lawyer in Isfahan laughed at a general amnesty for weapons taken home after the Iran-Iraq War because they might be needed in a future revolution. Many Iranians asked about the Diaspora, and especially the exiled crown prince Reza Pahlavi. That did not mean they were monarchists, but decades of being under the Islamic Republic had left them craving the past as a golden age. “Oh my shah, my shah, where is my shah?” one storekeeper asked when a merchant walked by with spoiled bananas selling for far more than what he said fresh bananas did pre-revolution. Whereas many Iranians rightly castigate the shah’s police state and his dreaded SAVAK intelligence service, they also acknowledge that the successor VEVAK was as bad if not worse.

But there was only one item that united Iranians inside Iran: absolute hatred of the Mojahedin e-Khalq (MEK). I offered a brief history of the MEK here but, in sum, they evolved out of reactionary anger at the shah’s more progressive agenda, especially elements which would have prioritized democracy and religious equality above the dictates of Shiism. Following the shah’s 1963 crackdown, the Islamist opposition splintered. While its older elements drew inspiration from the left-leaning nationalist and ousted Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, younger members concluded political reform impossible and embraced armed struggle. These younger members, including a University of Tehran political science student named Massoud Rajavi, coalesced what would become the MEK, though it would take another seven years before the MEK would declare itself to the wider world.

MEK ideology fused Marxism and Islamism. They believed both that God created the world and that he set forth societal evolution in which a classless society would overcome capitalist inequity. Rajavi and his fellow activists also argued that Islam justified terrorism. Death during armed struggle, they said, was consis-



tent with Shiite glorification of martyrdom. MEK militants trained both with the PLO and under Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi.

They put their training to quick use. In May 1972, shortly before President Richard Nixon's state visit to Iran, the MEK launched a series of bomb attacks against American diplomatic and business targets, including Pepsi Cola and General Motors. They also sought to assassinate the top U.S. general in Iran. In 1973, they bombed the Pan-American Airlines building, Shell Oil and assassinated the deputy chief of the U.S. military mission. They also targeted Iranians: striking at clubs, stores, police facilities, minority-owned businesses, factories, and symbols of the state.

The MEK participated wholeheartedly in the Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, after all, led not a coherent movement but rather a coalition of disparate forces united only in their opposition to the shah. Once the common enemy fell, his coalition immediately began to turn on itself. Khomeini welcomed MEK assistance in fighting the shah, but he considered their blending of Marxism with Islam to be sacrilegious. He and his followers labeled Rajavi and the MEK "hypocrites" and "unbelievers" and, the MEK, in turn, accused Khomeini of hijacking a revolution that was not supposed to be about him. Some of the worst post-revolutionary terror in Iran was planned, executed, and claimed by the MEK. Khomeini's regime responded just as brutally, with summary executions and, in 1988, the wholesale slaughter of alleged MEK prisoners. Many of the attacks killed their intended targets, but also many innocent Iranian bystanders.

What really broke any remaining popular support for the MEK among ordinary Iranians, however, was their embrace of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's regime against the backdrop of the Iran-Iraq War. For most Iranians, the MEK-Saddam relationship is unforgivable. The best analogy for Americans would be to John Walker Lindh, the American Taliban. While he may have embraced a movement, which sheltered Bin Laden and killed thousands of American servicemen in Afghanistan, the casualties Iran suffered pushing back the Iraqi invasion were several orders of magnitude higher.

## **The Mojahedin e-Khalq are a bad bet**

Unable to win any support from Iranians inside Iran, the MEK has turned

to the gullible and greedy: they are political chameleons. When in Iran, they were a combination between Islamists and social justice warriors. In Iraq, they were secularists, basically Baathists without the Arab identity. And while in France, they are democrats. In reality, their behavior resembles a cult, right down to dictating where members live, whom they should marry and divorce, and the rent-a-mobs who populate their rallies.

Which brings us back to the present: The MEK are no longer deemed a terror organization by the State Department, but that does not make them a responsible partner. Yet they have cultivated a bipartisan coterie of officials who attend their rallies and endorse Maryam Rajavi, their heir apparent. Among their supporters are National Security Advisor John Bolton and Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani. Critics say such hefty honoraria to attend and speak at MEK rallies amount to bribery. This is true in some cases but unfair in others, as some of those who headline MEK rallies may truly believe MEK rhetoric. The MEK, after all, is expert in telling officials what they want to hear about their program, and most senior and elected officials neither have the expertise in Iran nor the wherewithal to fact-check the spin. Other officials say the MEK has proven themselves and their infiltration of Iran by exposing such facilities as the covert nuclear enrichment plant at Natanz and later the underground nuclear facility in Fordow. The trouble with crediting the MEK for deep infiltration of Iran is that often MEK bombshell reports are wrong. It is far more likely that foreign intelligence agencies like Israel's utilize the MEK to launder intelligence rather than expose it directly.

As generous as the MEK is to their foreign supporters, they can be equally caustic to their critics. They usually throw flak at anything unflattering published about the group and rapidly produce online rebuttals filled with footnotes which, if tracked, do not prove what they purport to, even if the original source exists at all. Online trolls will also seek to drown out the criticism and de-legitimize the MEK's critics.

But, their behavior aside, what is the harm of working with the group or at least including them in any discussion of Iran's future after current Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's death? The answer is simple: The spin in Paris and Washington remains entirely discordant with the sentiments of the Iranians who matter most—those who live under and resent the Islamic Republic.

While most Iranians feel that the Islamic Republic has gone off the rails and cannot be reformed, they are more apathetic than revolutionary. After all, the last time Iranians supported a revolution, they replaced one dictator with an even more brutal one and ended up fighting an eight-year-war which killed up to one million people. Certainly, when a spark occurs, they will join in the protests, but otherwise most will stay on the sidelines and simply seek to provide for their families.

Herein lies the biggest problem with treating the MEK as anything more than a pariah: Because Iranians hate the group for its history, previous actions, and past allegiances, the current Islamic Republic will utilize the MEK to delegitimize any movement or group of which they are part. Indeed, many Iranians continue to insist that the only thing worse than the regime under which they suffer now would be the MEK.

The MEK may dismiss this as propaganda, but it is not. Nevertheless, whether they think their reputation fair or unfair, they must acknowledge the perception which surrounds them. If they are Iranian patriots, therefore, and truly garner the support they claim, they would stand aside for now. The Islamic Republic may very well die with Khamenei for two simple reasons: First, the regime elite may be unable to form a consensus on a successor and, second, even if they do, it is not certain the successor will be able to consolidate control. Many Iranians already expect a provisional government will usher in a new constitutional convention and internationally-monitored elections.

If the MEK is as popular as they say, let them support such a process from afar and then compete at the ballot box. Alas, the reason they so often seek to be spoilers now is they know—as does every Iranian—that they will never get more than 0.001 percent of the vote in any election.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Iran Hawks' Creepy Embrace of the MEK

Daniel Larison

April 12, 2019

**F**ormer Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge resumes his discrediting advocacy for the Mujahideen-e Khalq:

Which is why I include myself among an incredible cadre of men and women from across every spectrum of life and political affiliation, in Europe and here in America, who have decided to embrace publicly the viable alternative to the clerical regime, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), and the 10-point Plan advocated by the NCRI's leader, Maryam Rajavi.

It is rather incredible that so many former government officials and retired officers have embraced a totalitarian cult as the "alternative" to another country's government, but it has been going on for the better part of a decade now. All of the MEK's American boosters have proven that they have such





### The Iran Hawks' Creepy Embrace Of The MEK



John Bolton, 2015. Gage Skidmore/Flickr/CreativeCommons

extraordinary bad judgment that they should have no business talking about Iran policy (or any other foreign policy issue), and their continued advocacy on behalf of this awful organization is proof of how easily corrupted our foreign policy debates are.

The MEK probably does still engage in terrorism, since its members were reportedly the ones responsible for murdering Iranian scientists a few years back, but there is absolutely no

question that they are not and never could be a “viable alternative” to the current government. It is an indictment of Ridge and others like him, including the National Security Advisor, that they are so gullible or so obsessed with regime change that they are willing to make such ridiculous claims in public.

Ridge unsurprisingly doesn't mention that almost all Iranians everywhere hate the MEK and want nothing to do with it. They certainly don't want them to take over Iran, and I think it's safe to assume that any attempt to force this group on the people would be met with overwhelming resistance. So much for being “viable.” It is a reflection of many Iran hawks' ignorance of the country and its people that they think this could possibly work. He omits that Rajavi is a cultish leader who used to fight on the side of Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, and he leaves out the group's long history of abusing its members that continues to this day in their creepy compound in Albania. Every time that a prominent American shills for the MEK, it is an insult to the genuine Iranian opposition and another reminder that Iran hawks have nothing but contempt for the Iranian people.

In addition to shilling for the cult, Ridge urges the Trump administration to be merciless in its application of sanctions in order to strangle Iran's economy even more than it already has:

President Trump's views on Iran are both clear and appropriate, but frankly, I would like to see zero exports of energy. Some say that means the Iranian people will suffer, but they are suffering now. Inflation is at 40 percent, unemployment at 50 percent. The rial has lost 70 percent of its value. And the recent devastating floods engulfing 27 out of 31 provinces are a damning indictment of the mullahs for their 40 years of mismanagement, incompetence and the looting of Iran's national wealth. We must encourage the president, the administration and Congress to sustain the pressure.

Existing sanctions are responsible for causing much of the suffering that Iranians are already experiencing, and Ridge's answer to that is to cause even more harm in the vain hope that this will lead to regime change. Toppling the government in Tehran seems to be the only thing that matters to these fanatics, and they don't care how many millions of people have to be punished along the way.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Spain's Far-right Vox Received Almost \$1M from 'Marxist-Islamist' Iranian Exiles: Report

teleSUR

May 1, 2019

It is unlikely that Vox's hyper-nationalist voters know that their party scored a significant presence in Spain's parliament mostly thanks to Zionists, Islamists and foreigners.

With the April 28 general elections in Spain over, the far-right party Vox gained about 10 percent of parliamentary seats, marking the far-right's rising comeback into politics four decades after Francisco Franco's dictatorship. While a less alarmist reading would say that the far-right was always there, hidden in the conservative People's Party (PP), the fact that they are out in the open strengthens Europe's wave of far-right xenophobic and anti-European advance.

The party appealed to voters in one of Spain's most contested elections since its return to democracy, mostly basing its arguments against leftists politics, social liberals, migrants, charged mainly with an Is-



lamophobic narrative. Emphasizing the return of a long lost Spain and pushing to fight what they refer to as an “Islamist invasion,” which is the “enemy of Europe.” One could summarize it as an Iberian version of “Make Spain Great Again.”

Yet while this definitely appealed to almost two million voters, many are unaware of where their party’s initial funding came from. Back in January 2019, an investigation made by the newspaper El Pais revealed, through leaked documents, that almost one million euros - approximately 80 percent of its 2014 campaign funding - donated to Vox between its founding in December 2013 and the European Parliament elections in May 2014 came via the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a self-declared “Marxist” organization and an Islamist group made up of Iranian exiles.

However, this is where things get complicated. The NCRI is based in France and was founded in 1981 by Massoud Rajavi and Abolhassan Banisadr, nowadays its president-elect is Maryam Rajavi (Massoud’s wife). The Rajavis are also the leaders of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK). A reason for many to believe that the NCRI is just a front for the MEK, which over the past few decades has managed to create a complicated web of anti-Iranian, pro-Israel and right-wing government support from all over the world.

To understand MEK, it’s necessary to review the 1953 U.S. and British-backed coup which ousted democratically elected prime minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddegh and instituted a monarchical dictatorship led by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The oppression carried out by the Pahlavi royal family led to the creation of many radical groups, one which was MEK, whose ideology combined Marxism and Islamism. Its original anti-west, especially anti-U.S. sentiment pushed for the killing of six U.S citizens in Iran in the 1970s. While in 1979, they enthusiastically cheered the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. After the Iranian Revolution, its young leaders, including Rajavi, pushed for endorsement from the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, but were denied.

So Rajavi, allied with the winner of the country’s first presidential election, Abolhassan Banisadr, who was not an ally of Khomeini, either. Soon Banisa-



dr and MEK became some of Khomeini's main opposition figures and had fled to Iraq and later to France.

In the neighboring country, MEK allied with Saddam Hussein to wage war against Iran. In a RAND report, allegations of the group's complicity with Saddam are corroborated by press reports that quote Maryam Rajavi encouraging MEK members to "take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards."

The organization was deemed a terrorist organization by the U.S. and European Union for the better part of the 1990s, but things changed after the U.S. invasion to Iraq in 2003. This is when the U.S. neoconservative strategist leading the Department of State and the intelligence agencies saw MEK as an asset rather than a liability. Put simply in words they applied the dictum of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

The U.S.'s dismissal of past crimes reinvigorated MEK's intense lobbying campaign to have itself removed from terrorist lists in the U.S. and the European Union. MEK, which by the beginning of the 21 century had morphed into a cult-like group according to many testimonies from dissidents, moved from Camp Ashraf to the U.S.-created Camp Liberty outside of Baghdad. And that's when things rapidly changed.

According to the Guardian, between 2007 and 2012, a number of Iranian nuclear scientists were attacked. In 2012, NBC News, citing two unnamed U.S. officials, reported that the attacks were planned by Israel's Mossad and executed by MEK operatives inside Iran. By 2009 and 2012, the EU and the U.S. respectively took it out of its terrorist organizations list.

Soon after it gained support from U.S. politicians like Rudy Giuliani and current National Security Advisor John Bolton, who now call MEK a legitimate opposition to the current Iranian government. As the U.S. neocon forefathers did before, MEK shed its "Marxism." After the U.S.'s official withdrawal from Iraq, they built MEK a safe have in Albania, near Tirana, where the trail of money can be followed once again.

Hassan Heyrani, a former member of MEK's political department who de-

ected in 2018, and handled parts of the organization's finances in Iraq, when asked by Foreign Policy where he thought the money for MEK came from, he answered: "Saudi Arabia. Without a doubt." For another former MEK member, Saadalah Saafi, the organization's money definitely comes from wealthy Arab states that oppose Iran's government.

"Mojahedin [MEK] are the tool, not the funders. They aren't that big. They facilitate," Massoud Khodabandeh, who once served in the MEK's security department told Foreign Policy. "You look at it and say, 'Oh, Mojahedin are funding [Vox].? No, they are not. The ones that are funding that party are funding Mojahedin as well."

Meanwhile, Danny Yatom, the former head of the Mossad, told the Jerusalem Post that Israel can implement some of its anti-Iran plans through MEK if a war were to break out. Saudi Arabia's state-run television channels have given friendly coverage to the MEK, and Prince Turki al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief, even appeared in July 2016 at a MEK rally in Paris.

With Israel and Saudi Arabia backing MEK, the question of why a far-right movement would take money from an Islamist organization clears up a bit. Israel's support of European far-right parties has been public. In 2010, a sizeable delegation arrived in Tel Aviv, consisting of some 30 leaders of the European Alliance for Freedom, gathering leaders such as Geert Wilders of the Netherlands, Philip Dewinter from Belgium and Jorg Haider's successor, Heinz-Christian Strache, from Austria.

Yet for the U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia, MEK represents an anti-Iranian voice that they so desperately need, and that on the surface didn't come from them directly. It is unlikely that Vox's hyper-nationalist voters know that their party scored a significant presence in Spain's parliament mostly thanks to Zionists, Islamists and foreigners

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Bolton vs. Zarif on MEK

Massoud Khodabandeh

May 2, 2019

Lobe  
Log

When Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif took to the airwaves during his visit to the UN in New York, particularly for an interview with Fox News, a frisson of surprised anticipation swept the American political polity. How was it possible that Iran, the pariah nation, not only had the audacity to enter the lion's den, but from there to lecture the lion on its dirty behavior!

Of course, this is a spat that Iran cannot easily win. What mattered most was that Zarif did not go for the throat of the lion but instead those who are pulling its chain. In short, he accused a "B team" of actively working to wage war on his country. And he singled out National Security Advisor John Bolton for supporting the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a group that believes in fomenting violent regime change in Iran.

A goaded Bolton went on Fox News to reply. But

instead of answering Zarif's accusations, Bolton merely blamed former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for taking the MEK off the U.S. terrorism list in 2012. This was fantastic hubris. Bolton himself supported the MEK all the time it was on the list, attending rallies and taking speakers' fees worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Bolton's accusations against Clinton do not hold water. He, along with then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, started the war with Iraq partly on the pretext that Saddam Hussein supported terrorist groups, including the MEK, as an instrument of his foreign policy. Bolton was also on board with Rumsfeld when the United States unilaterally granted Protected Persons status to the MEK even while it was recognized a terrorist entity—in direct violation of international law. With the election of President Obama in 2009, newly appointed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was left to clear up the mess Bolton and the cabal of neoconservatives created in Iraq. One of those problems was continued U.S. support for the MEK (which the United States designated a terrorist entity in 1997). With the help of a new tough negotiator in the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, Clinton set about finding a peaceful resolution to the standoff between the sovereign Iraqi government and the unwanted and parasitic MEK.

Clinton searched for third countries to absorb the MEK. But the MEK, enjoying the backing of anti-Iran regime change pundits in Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States (including Bolton), dug in its heels and refused to be disbanded. In the end, only the dependent NATO ally Albania agreed to take the group's members. Clinton authorized \$10 million for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to transfer the MEK to Albania. She paid another \$10 million for the establishment of a de-radicalization institute in Tirana to first deal with the MEK as preparation for handling returning Islamic State families. Another \$10 million languishes in the account of the U.S. embassy in Tirana, money to rehabilitate the MEK members into normal society that Bolton and his cabal blocked.

All this was written into an agreement between the governments of Iraq, the United States, and Albania along with the UNHCR and the MEK. At that time this author was working as a consultant to the Iraqi government on security issues, including the safe containment and deportation of the MEK.

I was relieved when the Obama administration found a safe and above all a peaceful solution to the threat posed by the MEK to the security of Iraq. I was pleased to find in this agreement specific steps toward humanizing individual MEK members and restoring them to normal life and their families.

As someone familiar with the MEK, John Bolton must then and is certainly now fully cognizant of the beneficial elements of this agreement. Yet, almost as soon as President Trump was elected, the de-radicalization project was put on hold, allowing the MEK over the next year to regroup and reactivate its anti-Iran activities. With the support of Bolton, former Senator John McCain, Rudi Giuliani, and a whole cast of minor cheerleading warmongers, the MEK has constructed a purpose-built closed training camp in Albania in which the members are kept as modern slaves to serve the MEK's propaganda and terrorist agenda.

For all her faults, Hillary Clinton did not take money from the MEK while it was listed as a terrorist entity. And taking the group off the U.S. terrorist list, though controversial at the time due to the MEK's own well-funded pressure campaign, was not wrong, as it enabled the UNHCR to relocate the members to the safety of a third country. Her plan to correct the mistakes of the Bush administration was a vital step toward making the Middle East and the rest of the world, including the United States, a safer place. Meanwhile, John Bolton continued to take money to promote the MEK's warmongering agenda against American interests.

Before 2016, Iran did not have a diplomatic presence in Albania. Its embassy there dealt primarily with economic and cultural relations. But in 2018, the Albanian government of Edi Rama expelled two newly arrived Iranian diplomats at the behest of the Trump administration. John Bolton boasted about the achievement. Due to overt US support for the MEK, Iran drew its front line not in the Middle East but on the edge of the EU.

Now, with the Iranian foreign minister boldly speaking to the media inside the United States, Bolton has been reduced to deflecting rather than rebutting his accusations. Bolton's master plan for a war against Iran has not only backfired but prompted Tehran to redraw its front line once again, this time in Washington, DC itself.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## What John Bolton's Iranian Regime Change Looks Like

Davis Richardson

May 22, 2019

**N**ational security hawk John Bolton may finally have his opening to overthrow the Ayatollah.

As the Pentagon explores the possibility of deploying 120,000 troops to Iran, with President Donald Trump threatening the mullahs' regime over Twitter, Bolton has a unique opportunity to imprint his own vision on the region. Neither Bolton, nor any Trump official, however, has discussed what an alternative to Ali Khamenei's regime would look like—leaving a giant question mark over whether a president who campaigned on a non-interventionist platform intends to wage his own variant of the Iraq War.

**OBSERVER**

### Who Does Bolton Want to Replace the Mullahs?

Over the past decade, Bolton has endorsed regime

## What John Bolton's Iranian Regime Change Looks Like

By Davis Richardson - 05/22/19 10:38am



John Bolton and the People's Mujahedeen of Iran. Malik Dupree for Observer

change in Tehran at the hands of the People's Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK).

Founded in 1965 as an opposition movement to the Pahlavi monarchy comprised mostly of younger members of Iran's traditional middle-class intelligentsia, the group worked alongside Iran's former Supreme leader Ruhollah Khomeini to overthrow the Shah, who the United States supported and later provided asylum to after his overthrow.

The MEK's intellectual foundation is rooted in a secular interpretation of Islam mixed with Marxism, and many of the movement's founding members were opposed to United States interventionism—Massoud Rajavi, whose wife Maryam Rajavi now leads the MEK, once called U.S. imperialism the “main threat” facing the people of Iran. The group, both in its founding and up to the present day, advocates for violence—a summit hosted last fall featured blown up poster-boards emblazoned with the words “Death to Khamenei.”

After the group fell out of favor with Khomeini's clerical leadership, MEK members organized demonstrations against the Islamic Republic. At the height of the group's power, particularly in June 1981, the MEK could assemble crowds of tens of thousands of protestors, even 500,000, according to Iranian historian Ervand Abrahamian. As Khomeini executed and imprisoned MEK activists, the group's leaders fled to Paris and installed the NCRI—an international lobbying organization which has courted support from Western powers—though the group was later expelled from France after the French government attempted unsuccessfully to curry favor with Tehran.

“The policy of the NCRI, since its inception in 1981, has been this regime needs to change,” Ali Safavi, a member of the NCRI's Foreign Affairs Committee, told Observer. “The West has always weighed in on the side of the

regime and to the detriment of the Iranian people. And it is time this imbalance is rectified.”

Following exile from Iran and Paris, the MEK relocated to Iraq and provided Saddam Hussein’s regime support against Iran. By MEK’s own estimate, it killed over 50,000 Iranian troops—a decision seen as a betrayal by many Iranians, which Tehran continues to weaponize as a narrative against the group.

MEK’s relationship with the U.S. government is complicated, mostly due to a string of bombings which resulted in the death of six Americans during the 1970s. The State Department in 1992 described the MEK as inciting a “swath of terror” in its designation of the group as a terrorist organization, prompting the NCRI to mount a lobbying campaign—according to the organization, the bombings were the work of a breakaway Marxist faction, though some State Department directors refute this narrative and note a line of succession between the attacks and current MEK leadership. In 2005, a Human Rights Watch report found the MEK allegedly committed “physical and psychological abuses” to its members.

Only in 2012 did the State Department delist the MEK as a terrorist group, faced with the increasing likelihood that the Iraqi government would slaughter them in the absence of U.S. leadership in the region.

“I supported the delisting for the simple reason that it was a humanitarian necessity. It was humanitarian to prevent them from getting slaughtered, and not because they had become a peaceful group or the United States believed they were completely without a nefarious design. Would the MEK have been delisted absent the situation in Iraq? I don’t [think] there’s any question they would not have been,” Daniel Benjamin, the State Department’s counterterrorism director at the time who worked on the delisting effort, told Observer. “They have often mischaracterized the delisting to show that it was all a big mistake and that Washington came to its senses and saw them as staunch supporters of a free Iran.”

“I think Daniel Benjamin has a lot to answer for because the delay to delist the MEK gave [former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki] free reign to slaughter the MEK. From 2009 until the MEK was delisted, 140 MEK mem-



bers were killed in Iraq,” countered Safavi.

Currently the MEK is headquartered in Albania, where it has been dogged by allegations of mistreating its members. According to the MEK’s vision, the Islamic Republic will inevitably collapse under mass unpopularity, prompting MEK members and the NCRI to establish the Democratic Republic of Iran.

It’s “the NCRI that would establish an interim government, and they have a plan with regard to timelines for a general election,” former President Barack Obama’s national security advisor General James Jones, who now speaks at the NCRI’s events, told Observer in a statement.

## **Trump Administration’s Ties to MEK**

Many lawmakers and policy architects have promoted MEK’s interests in Washington.

Democratic Representatives Judy Chu (D-Calif.) and Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas) pushed heavily for the State Department to delist the group, the latter calling the decision “very important for the American people.”

But MEK’s biggest supporters are tasked with making foreign policy in the White House. Bolton has spoken at MEK events, touting regime change for over a decade, and as recently as 2017 promised the mullahs’ regime would collapse “before 2019.”

“There is a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs,” Bolton told an MEK gathering in Paris at the time. “And that opposition is centered in this room today.”

The national security hawk’s actions over the past year indicate he is looking for a fight with Tehran. Last week, Bolton ordered the Pentagon to draw up military preparations for the possible deployment of 120,000 to the Middle East should Iran attack American forces or ramp up production on its nuclear weapons, according to a New York Times report. A video uploaded to the White House’s Twitter page in February featured Bolton accusing Tehran of “terrorizing [its] own people.”

“You could really say that since the Islamic Revolution this is certainly the hot watermark of MEK’s influence,” Benjamin told Observer. “My guess is that they’re feeling pretty good about all the investments they’ve made to build their influence in Washington. Bolton has continued to make video messages that echo what he was saying before to MEK groups.”

Another member of President Donald Trump’s inner-circle who has spoken at MEK events at home and abroad includes Rudy Giuliani—who last fall told Iranian dissidents in Times Square that regime change is “going to happen.” When asked by Observer about the group’s controversial history said to include violence against Americans, he echoed the group’s narrative that an unaffiliated group of Marxist dissidents were behind the attacks.

“What you’re referring to happened over 30 years ago,” Giuliani told Observer during a press conference after his speech. “It happened during the overthrow of the Shah. It was a group of people that were not connected to the MEK. This particular organization has been extraordinarily friendly to the United States, embraced by the United States military.”

A spokesperson for Bolton at the National Security Council did not return Observer’s request for comment on whether he saw the NCRI’s vision as a suitable replacement for Tehran’s regime.

## **Recent NCRI Lobbying Campaign**

As the Trump administration escalates its rhetoric toward Iran and hints at possible military action in the region, the NCRI has seized on the conversation surrounding regime change to promote itself as an alternative to the Ayatollah.

“Decades of human rights abuses and domestic suppression need to be dealt with now,” reads a blog post uploaded to the organization’s website last week. “The regime is in the most vulnerable place it has ever been and this is when it could potentially be dangerous so the policy of exerting the maximum pressure should go on and the international community should more than ever listen to the only viable alternative which is the National Council of Re-

sistance of Iran (NCRI) with its president elect Maryam Rajavi.”

Earlier in May, a former NCRI lobbyist launched an advertising campaign on Facebook to promote a Washington Times article about an NCRI event, which quoted the organization’s deputy director of U.S. operations, according to The Daily Beast.

The organization has been careful not to advocate explicitly for a U.S. military invasion and has walked a fine line in promoting regime change, while recognizing Trump’s aversion to interventionism. Representatives for the NCRI also reject the narrative that the U.S. is aggravating Iran and point to the regime’s sponsorship of state terrorism throughout Europe. One policy they are in favor of is a continued push of the White House’s maximum pressure campaign.

“The regime is having a lot of problems domestically. It is also isolated regionally and internationally,” Safavi told Observer. “The maximum pressure policy hasn’t yet run its complete course. There are other areas where the regime should be sanctioned, in particular the petrochemical and gas industry. Another step that we see is necessary is to designate the Ministry of Intelligence as a voluntary terrorist organization because it qualifies as such.”

“I’d be surprised if they want to oppose Trump in any vocal way,” added Benjamin. “That would only diminish their fanning.”  
What Will Happen If the MEK Rises to Power?

The NCRI’s ten-point plan for Iran outlines a future free of nuclear weapons, Sharia law and the death penalty. The organization promotes universal suffrage, an independent judiciary and free market economics. Gen. Jones has praised the points as “Jeffersonian principles.”

Although the NCRI and MEK anticipate droves of Iranian activists flooding Tehran to support them should Khamenei’s regime fall—all cheering “Iran is Ravaji, Ravaji is Iran”—the group’s possible ascendance to power is likely to be met with fierce resistance from many Iranians who still see the group as traitorous given its support for Saddam Hussein.

“Any effort by the MEK to reinsert itself back into politics in Tehran would be met with a pretty violent reaction,” continued Benjamin. “We’re talking about an extremely marginal group with no support in Iran. It has some support in the diaspora, and there have been plenty of lawmakers who have carried their banner for them, but in terms of pushing for a regime change policy, we haven’t been this close since the invasion of Iraq... Absent an occupation, there is little chance of the government falling. Unless the U.S. manages a regime change, the MEK doesn’t have many prospects in Iran, and if there were regime change, the U.S. would have to put the MEK in the driver’s seat to have any role.”

With Bolton and Giuliani promoting the MEK, and other hardliners like State Secretary Mike Pompeo endorsing regime change, the group is the closest its ever been to claiming Tehran from the mullahs.

“They’ve got their man in the White House pushing dangerously hard against the opposition of his boss,” said Benjamin. “Their cult-like behavior, the abusive treatment of their members, their absolute refusal to acknowledge their past, all of those things cast a big shadow on the group.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## As tensions rise, moneyed interests pushing for hard line against Iran

Reid Champlin

May 22, 2019

Tensions between the United States and Iran have skyrocketed in recent weeks following American military movements in the Persian Gulf and resumed uranium production by Iran. Decades of animosity worsened by the collapse of the 2015 nuclear deal have sparked a major standoff, as both nations review strategy while denying any desire for war. Experts fear that an error on either side could spark a regional maelstrom that would dwarf the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in scope and lethality.

But while many members of Congress are seeking a way to prevent the potential conflict, others are pressuring the administration to maintain its aggressive stance. In a recent interview with PBS, Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) said the U.S. could end a potential war with Iran in two strikes, “the first strike and the last strike.” While he said he doesn’t want to

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SECRETS

go to war, he insisted that the U.S. would retaliate massively if provoked. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) demanded Monday that the U.S. “respond militarily and in an overwhelming fashion” if Iranian forces or proxies harm the United States or its allies in the region.

There may be more than genuine concern behind such aggressive stances towards Iran. Dozens of government officials, from Congress to the White House, have received financial support from an expansive network of interest groups, political action committees, foreign lobbyists and wealthy donors pushing for the hardest line possible against Iran.

At the heart of the rising hostility is National Security Advisor John Bolton, known throughout the political world for his hawkish foreign policy views and support for intervention in North Korea, Venezuela, Syria, Cuba and Iran. Rising to prominence during George W. Bush’s administration as the State Department’s undersecretary for arms control, Bolton has been a central figure in provoking the conflict between the U.S. and Iran. He recently sparked fears of war by suggesting that Iranian leaders wouldn’t “have many anniversaries left to enjoy” in a video posted by the White House and personally ordered updates to military plans that would send over 120,000 troops to the Middle East.

Bolton’s PAC and super PAC serve as the central financial mechanism of the wide-ranging influence network. Founded by Bolton in 2013, these groups quickly began to attract prominent megadonors who shared his aggressive view of foreign policy and his apprehension towards Iran. Over a five-year period up until when Bolton took office in 2018, the groups raked in more than \$24 million in contributions, the vast majority of which came from a handful of large backers aligned against the Obama administration’s efforts to seek a diplomatic solution with Iran.

Chief among Bolton’s backers is Robert Mercer, the reclusive billionaire who was Donald Trump’s top donor in the 2016 presidential election. Over the course of the 2014, 2016, and 2018 election cycles, Mercer donated \$5 million to The John Bolton Super PAC, a quarter of the super PAC’s lifetime receipts and one-sixth of Bolton’s combined contributions from both groups. OpenSecrets previously reported that Mercer was a primary funder of a se-

cretive nonprofit that targeted swing voters with three disturbing anti-Muslim videos during the 2016 election.

Another prominent supporter is Bernie Marcus, co-founder of Home Depot and ardent critic of nuclear diplomacy with Iran. Marcus donated \$530,000 to Bolton's super PAC over its lifetime. Marcus has publicly scoffed at the prospect of conducting diplomacy with Iran, saying in a 2015 interview with Fox Business, "When you do business with the devil, you're in deep trouble, and I think Iran is the devil."

He also notably donated \$3.5 million to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a Washington think tank that has decried the Iran nuclear deal and submitted a memo to the Trump White House in 2017 outlining ways to stoke domestic unrest in Iran with the ultimate goal of regime change. The FDD's suspected close ties with the Trump administration were further confirmed when Bolton selected a senior adviser at the organization to be his assistant in January 2019.

Bolton's connections to hardliners don't end with the committees. Sheldon and Miriam Adelson, the top individual political contributors for the 2018 midterms and major Trump donors, personally lobbied the president to select Bolton as deputy secretary of state. While this effort ultimately failed, Bolton eventually joined the administration as national security advisor- that move came after Sheldon Adelson supported publicity campaigns against Trump's first national security advisor, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, that claimed McMaster was anti-Israeli in an effort to open the position for Bolton. Adelson is also a prominent supporter of major anti-Iranian lobbying groups, having donated more than \$1.04 million to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee since 2007 and \$1.5 million to the FDD between 2008 and 2011.

Bolton and Adelson share strikingly similar beliefs: in 2013, Adelson publicly suggested that the U.S. drop an atomic bomb in the Iranian desert as a warning to the government to abandon its nuclear programs. In 2015, Bolton followed suit, writing an op-ed in The New York Times entitled "To Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran", in which he advocated for a pre-emptive strike on Iranian military facilities to stymie potential nuclear weapons development.

Also among Bolton's financial backers is the Mojahedin-e Khalq (M.E.K.), an Iranian opposition group with a history of violence towards Iranians and Americans alike. Founded in 1965 by left-leaning Iranian students in opposition to the Shah, the group committed dozens of terrorist acts throughout the 1970s that killed thousands of Iranians and numerous American citizens.

Supporting Ayatollah Khomeini's forces in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the group quickly came to blows with the new government, conducting the 1981 bombing that killed Iranian president Mohammad Ali Rajai and prime minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar as well as six other senior officials. They fought alongside Saddam Hussein in the 1980 Iran-Iraq War and formed a close alliance with the dictator over the next two decades, killing thousands of Iranian soldiers in combat and launching brutal campaigns of repression against the Kurdish people of northern Iraq.

The group was long-labeled a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. government, with numerous Congressional transcripts showing the group was responsible for decades of terrorism. The group, whose philosophy is heavily influenced by Marxism and Islamism, has been described by many researchers as a cult, with women being forbidden to marry and all followers pledging near-fanatical support to the group's leader, "Iran's future president" Maryam Rajavi. The group's goal has remained constant since its inception: overthrow the Iranian government. The M.E.K. has dramatically expanded its presence in American policy spheres, attracting prominent political fans and spending millions on lucrative speaker fees to gain allies in Washington. The M.E.K.'s political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), led a multimillion-dollar influence campaign beginning in the latter half of the 2000s that lobbied dozens of congressmen to push the State Department to remove the group from its designated terrorist organizations list. Three of Washington's top lobbying groups — DiGenova & Toensing, Akin Gump and DLA Piper — were paid over \$1.5 million dollars in 2012 to lobby for the delisting and protection of the group's members in Iraq. The effort was ultimately successful, as then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton removed the M.E.K. from the list in 2012.

Their lucrative speaking deals have attracted some of the biggest names in American politics, among them former Secretary of Homeland Security Tom



Ridge, former FBI director Louis Freeh, and former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Robert Joseph.

The M.E.K's influence extends to many members of the current government. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao was paid \$50,000 to give a five-minute speech to a meeting of the NCRI in 2015. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich spoke at the group's 2016 gala in Paris, commending the group's dedication and promising to tell the Trump campaign about their demands for regime change in Iran.

But Bolton has always been the star of the show. Records show that the M.E.K has paid Bolton at least \$180,000 in speaker fees to attend the group's annual Paris conference for more than a decade. At the 2017 annual summit, Bolton declared that the president's review of Iranian policy should conclude that the Ayatollah's government shouldn't survive into its fortieth year, promising the crowd in attendance that they would meet again in 2019 to celebrate their victory in Tehran.

The M.E.K is finding themselves welcomed by many on Capitol Hill who have been funded by Bolton's political action committees and allies. Cotton, described by some as the loudest voice advocating for escalated conflict alongside Bolton, also received thousands of dollars in contributions from Sheldon Adelson and \$5,000 from John Bolton PAC in 2014 and spoke at a 2015 event run by the Organization of Iranian American Communities, which is closely aligned with the M.E.K.

Cotton was joined there by Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), who, in addition to being backed by \$1.37 million in independent expenditures from Bolton's super PAC, journeyed to Albania in 2017 to meet with Rajavi and express admiration for the former terrorist group's "struggle for democracy and human rights in Iran." Joining him in Albania was Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), current chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee and another Bolton beneficiary. Overall, 28 sitting senators have received sizable contributions from John Bolton PAC during the election cycle, as have nine representatives on the House defense, foreign affairs, and homeland security subcommittees.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Bolton's Relationship with the MEK Is a Scandal

Daniel Larison

June 6, 2019

John Limbert calls attention again to John Bolton's relationship with the deranged cult, the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK):

I recently spoke about the group and its influence to a highly educated audience in Washington—graduates of three of the world's best universities. Most of the Americans present were unaware of the MEK and its payments to the bellicose national security adviser [bold mine-DL]. All of the Iranian Americans at the meeting, however, knew the group well and detested it. They knew its murderous history in Iran: They knew that in 1979–1980 it supported Iran's religious extremists in their campaign to silence voices calling for democracy and women's rights; they knew it called for more executions in the early days of the revolution; they knew it fought alongside the hated Iraqis during the long and bloody Iran-Iraq war; they knew it even launched an armed

*The American  
Conservative*

invasion of Iranian territory in 1988—an invasion stopped with heavy losses.

Although the Iranian Americans present expressed no love for the brutal rulers of the Islamic Republic, they knew that an MEK-ruled Iran would be far worse.

Bolton’s long relationship with the MEK discredits everything he has to say about Iran. No one that has praised this cult as a potential replacement for the Iranian government should have anything to do with U.S. policymaking at any level, much less at the White House. No one foolish or fanatical enough to side with this cult should be entrusted with any government position.

Bolton’s ties to the MEK should be mentioned in every story that reports on him and the administration’s Iran policy, but unfortunately they are only rarely included in media coverage. It is not surprising that few people in Limbert’s audience knew about any of this, because it is so often omitted from accounts of Bolton’s career and his support for regime change in Iran. Except among people that focus on Iran policy, the rehabilitation of this creepy totalitarian group in Washington has received remarkably little attention. If the National Security Advisor of a different administration had a record of taking payments from a discredited exile group and “former” terrorist organization, you can bet that it would be a major scandal and would shortly lead to that person’s resignation. There is so much corruption and unethical behavior in this administration that Bolton’s MEK ties seem to get lost in the mix.

It is unacceptable for a top government official responsible for shaping U.S. foreign policy to have been the paid shill of this awful organization that previously killed Americans. It is wrong for an official with ties to the MEK to be influencing decisions on Iran policy. There are many reasons why Bolton should be fired, and this is right at the top of the list.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Suspicious Twitter Network Trolling for Regime Change in Iran

Ali Breland

June 6, 2019

As the Trump administration has ramped up economic sanctions against Iran and aimed increasingly threatening rhetoric at the country, an influence network has popped up on Twitter pushing similar messages.

Networks comprising over four hundred Twitter accounts composed of likely bots along with real accounts and “cyborg” accounts—accounts run by real people, but augmented with software to push posts faster and more frequently—have consistently released messaging opposing the Iranian government.

The accounts often tweet messages backing regime change in Iran and calling for an end to the rule of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Many of the accounts also frequently voice their support for the People’s Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), a militant opposition group

**Mother Jones**

POLITICS | JUNE 4, 2019

## The Suspicious Twitter Network Trolling for Regime Change in Iran

An American non-profit says it's been the victim of a harassment campaign.



ALI BRELAND  
Reporter



National Security Advisor John Bolton and a little-understood Twitter network have both boosted MEK, an armed Iranian opposition group. Douglas Christian/ZUMA

the Islamic Republic of Iran; a federal judge found that the defendant's actions didn't amount to defamation, but made no ruling on the truth of his allegations.\*

The full impact of the networks is hard to gauge, but one set of over 350 accounts has collectively tweeted over 5 million times to nearly 500,000 followers, according to numbers collected by independent researcher Geoff Golberg, who first flagged the accounts to Mother Jones. Golberg, who founded the social media manipulation research project SocialCartograph, says that he has no specific interest in Iranian geopolitics and stumbled onto the accounts amid broader research into social media influence campaigns.

Another set of 75 accounts found by researcher Ben Decker, who runs the media and tech investigations consultancy Memetica, also post pro-regime change and anti-NIAC content. Decker, who is a former researcher at Harvard's Shorenstein Center, says the accounts exhibit signs that suggest they are possibly either not real or are being augmented. Beyond accounts posting at a superhuman pace on a 24 hour a day, seven day a week schedule, Decker noted that "the network of accounts had a massive spike in followers, totaling around 125.2k users, during the last week of February"—a "red flag as far as inorganic network activity is concerned."

that some have called a terrorist organization, and its leader Maryam Rajavi. The accounts also frequently criticize the National Iranian American Council (NIAC)—a non-profit representing Iranians in the U.S.—claiming it advocates in support of Iran's current religious authorities. There is no evidence to suggest this is true, and NIAC firmly denies the assertion. In 2008 the group filed a defamation suit against a writer who alleged they had lobbied on behalf of

While coordinated attempts to manipulate discourse on Twitter are explicitly against the platform's rules, NIAC says it has been a victim of such attacks and complains the company hasn't taken enough action to protect them. The organization claims that it was targeted by a coordinated social media attack over Memorial Day weekend, when accounts critical of NIAC tweeted out the hashtag #NIACLobbies4Mullahs in droves, to push the notion of NIAC's supposed ties to Iran's religious authorities. Jamal Abdi, the NIAC's president, believes the efforts are an attempt to undermine his organization's credibility and effectiveness.

"The goal of these attacks is simple: to divide and weaken our community. To ensure that Iranian Americans do not have a voice, do not hold influential positions in Washington D.C., do not run for office and build political power, and shy away from civic engagement," he wrote in a piece for The Iranian. Golberg's work has caught the attention of NIAC and he has publicly communicated with it his findings, but he says he is not being paid by the organization.

The networks are made up of a mix of legitimate and false accounts, and it can be difficult to definitively say which are bots, cyborgs, or normal posters augmented via other means. But some of the profiles' behavior echoes patterns that experts use to judge if accounts are not being run organically. The five most prominent accounts in the network have tweeted hundreds of thousands of times in the several years since they were created, averaging over 100 tweets a day. That speed alone doesn't confirm that the accounts are inauthentic or engaging in artificial coordination, but to Golberg it's a clue, along with the interconnectedness of the network's accounts and their similarities in the users they retweet, follow and interact with, as well as the sometimes nearly identical content of their tweets.

Twitter has deleted thousands of Iranian accounts in the past several months, including some of the over 350 accounts that appear to be a part of the influence campaign identified by Golberg. Over 200 of the accounts he flagged remain, pumping out content in support of regime change in Iran.

It's unclear who is behind the accounts, but their positions mirror the posi-

tions of the MEK and what is seen as its international political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). Both have consistently pushed for regime change in Iran, earning allies in and close to the Trump administration, despite the organization formerly being labeled by the State Department as a terrorist group, a designation some experts believe it should still have.

Trump's National Security Advisor, John Bolton, called the MEK "a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs" at an MEK event in 2017. Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, who has taken payments from the group, called for Iran's current ruling regime to be replaced by the armed group at a 2018 rally hosted by the organization in Paris.

The MEK has a history of running online disinformation campaigns. Al-Jazeera has documented a Russian Internet Research Agency-style troll operation run out of Albania, interviewing former MEK members who detailed how the organization controlled thousands of accounts to spread propaganda about regime change and other political aims. And according to the Daily Beast, a former lobbyist for the NCRI, Soheila Aligholi Mayelzadeh, ran an influence campaign on Facebook in support of more aggressive confrontation with Iran.

It's unclear what action Twitter is taking on the accounts. Golberg has for many months repeatedly flagged the network to Twitter employees, and had direct message conversations with the company about his disinformation research more broadly.

"Platform manipulation is a violation of the Twitter Rules," a company spokesperson wrote after being asked about the accounts. "For accounts that we can reliably link to a nation state, we disclose every information operation down to the Tweet to a dedicated public archive—the largest of its kind in the industry. We have disclosed activities linked to Iran in the past and will remain vigilant."

While news of Russian attempts to use social media platforms to influence politics both in the U.S. and elsewhere have dominated headlines, more and more examples of influence efforts related to Iran have surfaced. In addition to the online campaigns being carried out by people sympathetic to the

MEK's perspective, Iran's ruling regime also appears to have engaged in its own political manipulation attempts.

Late last month, both Facebook and Twitter announced that they had deleted thousands of Iranian accounts that were engaged in what Facebook's chief of security Nathaniel Gleicher called "coordinated inauthentic behavior." The accounts appeared to have been created to mislead by posing as news organizations, journalists, and under other false identities, and to spread information about "political and social issues in Iran and globally," according to Yoel Roth, Twitter's head of site integrity. Both companies had previously deleted batches of accounts originating in Iran that they identified as being a part of a network trying to influence political discourse.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## The MEK's Fake Mouthpiece and Western Credulity

Daniel Larison

June 9, 2019

The American  
Conservative

Murtaza Hussain has reported an important story on the ongoing propaganda campaign sponsored by the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) cult. This is the group of discredited Iranian exiles that has been building up its support in the West over the last decade by cultivating ties with and paying many Iran hawks, including the current National Security Advisor John Bolton. Hussain has found that a prominent online figure, Heshmat Alavi, is a fake persona created by the MEK's troll farm in Albania to harass and attack journalists and analysts that criticize the cult and oppose war and regime change in Iran:

There's a problem, though: Heshmat Alavi appears not to exist. Alavi's persona is a propaganda operation run by the Iranian opposition group Mojahedin-e-Khalq, which is known by the initials MEK, two sources told The Intercept.

## The MEK's Fake Mouthpiece And Western Credulity



Borna\_Mushmagham / Shutterstock

“Heshmat Alavi is a persona run by a team of people from the political wing of the MEK,” said Hassan Heyrani, a high-ranking defector from the MEK who said he had direct knowledge of the operation. “They write whatever they are directed by their commanders and use this name to place articles in the press. This is not and has never been a real person.”

Heyrani said the fake persona has been managed by a team of MEK operatives in Albania, where the group has one of its bases, and is used to spread its message online.

The MEK has long been harassing and attacking journalists and analysts that oppose their fanatical regime change agenda and their creepy, abusive organization. On occasion, I have also been subjected to some of this same treatment on Twitter when I have pointed out the group’s past and its current abuses against its own members, but others have had to endure much worse harassment and threats for a long time. The Alavi case goes beyond unleashing the usual army of bots against the group’s critics. In this case, the fake persona was able to publish dozens of articles in Western news and opinion outlets promoting the MEK as the main Iranian opposition group and advocating for regime change in Iran:

Alavi, whose contributor biography on the Forbes website identifies him as “an Iranian activist with a passion for equal rights,” has published scores of articles on Iran over the past few years at Forbes, The Hill, the Daily Caller, The Federalist, Saudi-owned al-Arabiya English, and other outlets.

The problem here is not just that the MEK has managed to spread its poison in Western media using this fake persona, but that so many of these outlets readily accepted submissions from a pro-MEK trolling operation. It isn’t sur-

prising that a creepy cult intent on rehabilitating its image in the West would resort to trickery and lies, but it is disturbing how willing so many of these outlets were to lend legitimacy to that effort and broadcast outright propaganda. It is equally troubling how long the MEK was able to get away with this before the deception was uncovered.

The Alavi case is an important piece of a larger story about how advocates of regime change in Iran have been resorting to harassment, intimidation, and smears of Iranian and Iranian-American journalists, analysts, and genuine activists for years. It is similar to the recent scandal involving U.S. government funding of the so-called Iran Disinformation Project that engaged in similar smear tactics and harassment against many of the same people, and it is part of the same phenomenon of shouting down credible opponents of regime change and war in an attempt to control the debate. Fortunately, thanks to Hussain's story, Twitter has suspended the Alavi account and the fake persona has been outed to the entire world. No doubt the MEK will keep trying to promote their message in Western media outlets, and some will be happy to oblige them, but an important part of their campaign of deception and intimidation has been exposed and stopped.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Prominent Iranian writer not ‘real person’: report

Umar Farooq

June 10, 2019

**H**eshmat Alavi believed to be fake persona run by Mojahedin-e-Khalq opposition group.

A so-called activist that has been writing anti-Iranian articles for right-wing outlets in the U.S. is not a real person, but an account run by an Iranian opposition group, The Intercept reported Monday.



Heshmat Alavi is touted as an activist with a “passion for equal rights” and has been featured in publications such as The Hill, the Daily Caller, the Saudi Arabian owned outlet al-Arabiya English and The Federalist. Most notably written in Forbes magazine, where 61 byline articles between April 2017 and April 2018 have been published.

Alavi’s writings are aimed at a Washington audience, working to increase anti-Iranian sentiment in the

## Prominent Iranian writer not 'real person': report

Heshmat Alavi believed to be fake persona run by Mojahedin-e-Khalq opposition group

Umar Farooq | 10.06.2019



U.S. and suggest regime change. The articles written have been seen by a number of prominent conservative figures in the U.S., and have even influenced decisions made by American President Donald Trump.

When the White House claimed the Iran nuclear deal was increasing Tehran's military budget, it used a Forbes article written by Alavi for justification.

But The Intercept found that Alavi is not a person but an online persona created by the Iranian opposition group Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK).

“Heshmat Alavi is a persona run by a team of people from the political wing of the MEK. This is not and has never been a real person,” Hassan Heyrani, a high-ranking defector from the MEK, told The Intercept.

“The Mojahedin wants to show to the world that their narrative has support,

even from people who are not directly members of the group,” the news outlet wrote.

However, while using writing to hint at overthrowing the Iranian regime, Alavi’s articles have also suggests giving control of the country to MEK and its leader Maryam Ravagi.

While currently the organization has been using political lobbying and writing articles to try and depose the Iranian government, the MEK have a complicated history. It was designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the State Department until 2012, and was on the side of the Islamic Revolution in Iran until the group fell out of favor with the Islamic Republic of Iran and was pushed into exile.

Alavi’s persona has not only been used to publish articles, but is a part of MEK’s social media strategy that has many pro-MEK accounts to push the organizations agenda. Alavi’s Twitter account boasted 30,000 followers, including conservative think tank employees and journalists.

According to The Intercept, some of the outlets where Alavi’s articles would frequently appear have said they no longer publish his work, citing violations of publication standards.

Since the news outlet published the story, Alavi’s Twitter account has also been suspended, according to the persona’s online blog.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Backing Pompeo's 'Gulf of Tonkin' incident is a massive anti-Iran online propaganda campaign

Helen Buyniski

June 14, 2019

Twitter has announced that it is removing 4,779 accounts associated or backed by Tehran, the latest strike in the ongoing anti-Iran campaign perfectly timed to coincide with the attack on two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman.



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was already blaming Iran hours after the incident, offering not a shred of proof aside from a few other dubious incidents in the Middle East that the US has previously pinned on Iran, without evidence. Even the mainstream media has initially been reluctant to take his word for it, mostly because the narrative is so improbable. Japan's PM Shinzo Abe was in Tehran, promising to use his "utmost effort" to de-escalate tensions, when as if on cue, a Japanese ship was hit along with a Norwegian vessel.

When even CNN is acknowledging that the attack



“doesn’t appear to benefit any of the protagonists in the region,” and Bloomberg admits “Iran has little to gain” from blowing up the ship of its esteemed guest, Pompeo must realize another route of influence is required. Who better to call in for reinforcements than Twitter, which has demonstrated time and again its willingness to serve the US’ preferred narrative with mass deplatformings?

Some 4,779 accounts were removed for nothing more than tweeting “global news content, often with an angle that benefited the diplomatic and geostrategic views of the Iranian state.” This was deemed “platform manipulation,” and therefore unacceptable, the company declared in a blog post.

## Just the tip of anti-Iran campaign iceberg?

Tweeting with an angle that benefits the diplomatic and geostrategic views of the American state, however, is just fine – at least, it wasn’t Twitter that brought the “Iran Disinformation Project” crashing to a halt earlier this week. The State Department shut down the social media campaign it created to “counter Iranian propaganda” after it supposedly went rogue, smearing any and all critics of Trump’s hawkish Iran policy as paid operatives of the Iranian government.

Human rights activists, students, journalists, academics, even insufficiently-militant American propagandists at RFE/RL, Voice of America and other US-funded outlets were attacked by @IranDisinfo – all on the US taxpayer’s dime.

Congress only learned of the project in a closed-door hearing on Monday, when the State Department confessed the troll campaign had taken \$1.5 mil-



lion in taxpayer money to attack those same taxpayers – all in the name of promoting “freedom of expression and free access to information.”

The group contracted to operate Iran Disinfo is run by an Iranian immigrant and claims to focus on strengthening “civil society” and “democracy” back home, though its work is almost exclusively US-focused and its connections with pro-war think tanks like the Foundation for Defense of Democracies have alarmed congressional staffers.

While the State Department was long barred from directing government-funded propaganda at its own citizens, that rule was quietly repealed in 2013 with the passage of the Smith-Mundt Modernization Act, which gave US government narrative-spinners free reign to run influence operations at home.

The Pentagon is also technically forbidden from running psychological operations (“psy-ops”) against American citizens, but that rule goes out the window in case of “domestic emergencies” – and the domestic emergency declared by then-President George W. Bush days after the September 11 terror attacks remains in effect, 18 years later.

## **Trump’s favorite Iran troll exposed?**

Nor was the State Department’s trolling operation the only anti-Iran psy-op to be unmasked this week. Heshmat Alavi, a virulently anti-Iranian columnist promoted by the Trump administration and published in Forbes, the Hill, and several other outlets, was unmasked as a propaganda construct operated by the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a controversial Iranian exile group often called a cult that has only recently lobbied its way off the US’ terror list. The MEK is notorious for buying the endorsement of American political figures, and national security adviser John Bolton, Senator Bob Menendez (D-New Jersey), and former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani are among those who have spoken at its events.

The fictional Alavi’s stories were used to sell Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran deal to the Washington Post and other more reputable outlets, as well as to promote the MEK as a “main Iranian opposition group” and viable option for leadership post-regime-change. In reality, it is very much a fringe group,

hated by the majority of Iranians for fighting on the side of Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. Indeed, Alavi's relentless advocacy for the group may have scared off a few of the sites that initially published his work – the Diplomat and the Daily Caller both quit publishing him in 2017, citing quality concerns.

“We were always active in making false news stories to spread to the foreign press and in Iran,” a Canadian MEK defector told the Intercept, describing a comprehensive online propaganda mill run out of the group's former base in Iraq that sought to control the narrative about Iran on Facebook and Twitter.

Alavi may have been unmasked, but there could be thousands more where he came from. Twitter's attempts to aid the US war effort by deplatforming thousands of pro-Iran accounts is an implicit endorsement of their activities. The Intercept's comprehensive investigation of the Alavi persona essentially dropped the key to the MEK's propaganda network in Twitter's lap; their refusal to act on this information, merely removing the Alavi account without investigating the swamp of “coordinated inauthentic behavior” surrounding it, indicates they are content with being weaponized in the US propaganda war against Iran. Trolling is fine, as long as it's “our guys” doing it.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK Impunity Undermining America's Democracy

Massoud Khodabandeh

June 17, 2019

Even before its inception, the Trump administration was accused of foreign interference and repeated counter allegations that such charges are fake news. Now, even as House Democrats are squeezing whatever advantage they can from the Mueller investigation into Russian influence, a fresh allegation of foreign interference has emerged.

Lobe  
Log

An investigation by The Intercept revealed that the White House used an article written by “Heshmat Alavi” to justify President Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. After probing the propaganda element in Alavi’s other articles, former members of the Iranian Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) have confirmed that the group is linked to the article. According to one such former member, Hassan Heyrani, “Heshmat Alavi is a persona run by a team of people from the political wing of the MEK. This

is not and has never been a real person.”

Heyrani said the fake persona has been managed by a team of MEK operatives in Albania, where the group has one of its bases, and is used to spread its message online. Heyrani’s account is echoed by Sara Zahiri, a Farsi-language researcher who focuses on the MEK. Zahiri, who has sources among Iranian government cybersecurity officials, said that Alavi is known inside Iran to be a “group account” run by a team of MEK members and that Alavi himself does not exist.

This new scandal—Heshmatgate—involves a wide political and media class that has become so besotted with an unrealistic anti-Iran agenda that it has left the door open to an unchecked, unverified flow of MEK propaganda throughout American politics and the media. Thanks to these regime-change advocates, a foreign group funded by a foreign government has easily manufactured a false narrative aimed at sending American soldiers to die in a war with Iran that is against U.S. national interests.

The MEK’s target audience is not Iran or Iranians. It barely services its Farsi language outlets. The MEK is almost universally hated by Iranians everywhere and has no credibility among them.

After 2003, the MEK’s military strategy in Iraq under benefactor Saddam Hussein gave way to an intelligence-based strategy under the patronage of Prince Turki Al Faisal, the former intelligence chief of Saudi Arabia. The MEK is now based in Albania where, under more favourable conditions facilitated by the Trump administration, it has been allowed to build and equip a troll farm using the infamous slave labour of its hapless members. Its aim is to influence people in the English-speaking world through online activity.

The Intercept revealed just one case of MEK’s deceptive anti-Iran work. But this is the tip of the iceberg. MEK interference in the internal affairs of America goes well beyond online attacks on Iran. In 2016, the Organization of Iranian American Communities in the US—a front for the MEK—announced a “General Elections Mobilization Effort,” publicly urging its members to “fulfill their civic duty through active engagement in the 2016 general elections to help inform candidates of our communities’ policy priorities.”

In America, warmongers and regime change pundits, John Bolton and Rudi Giuliani in particular, openly support the MEK. The MEK exploits this impunity to the full. Critics of the MEK are subjected to character assassination and defamation campaigns. Journalist Jason Rezaian writes, “These efforts actively sought to undermine our credibility about the best approach to deal with Iran and resorted to personal attacks in order to do so.”

This revelation comes at the tail end of another scandal, the Iran Disinformation Project. This project, funded by the State Department, was ostensibly launched to expose and counter Iranian government propaganda. It paid for social media accounts to smear and discredit Iranian-American human rights activists, academics and journalists who criticize the Trump administration’s hard-line policies on Iran.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo must answer for the actions of the State Department, but who is behind the MEK and the mysterious Heshmat Alavi? How much influence does the MEK wield in Washington? And on whose behalf?

The formula for MEK activity is “the MEK and somebody’s money.” This explains how, back in 2014 just before the European Parliament elections, “somebody’s” money was used to fund the campaign of an Islamophobic far-right party called Vox. Investigations into electoral misconduct revealed that “at least 971,890 euros” was gifted through thousands of contributions ranging from 200 to 5,000 euros from individual MEK members and supporters. The money did not originate with the MEK, but the money laundering was facilitated through the organization by Vox co-founder Alejo Vidal-Quadras, a long-term MEK advocate while he was vice-president of the European Parliament.

In Albania, enjoying the freedom granted by such money and impunity, the MEK is playing out in microcosm what it does in North America and Western Europe. After the MEK arrived in Albania, local journalists were disturbed by its bizarre behavior and filed reports on this activity. In response, the MEK used bribery and corruption to buy publishers and a broadcaster there. They use intimidation tactics to silence journalists. One journalist confessed to me he felt afraid in his own country when the MEK, accompanied

by hired armed Albanian security personnel, followed him. In a public space, they photographed him and made verbal threats, demanding that he hand over his phone on which he had earlier filmed activity outside the MEK camp gate.

MEK corruption and deception is insidious and highly dangerous. In America, neoconservatives use the MEK as tool to destroy the Democratic Party. MEK members inside the Albanian troll farms have admitted to me that, in addition to the usual “regime change” and “nuclear” tags they use, more recent additions include the names of various U.S. political candidates and “Virginia” with a view to swaying electoral opinion in the primaries. Since the MEK is not a benign group, it is under heavy surveillance. It would be naïve to believe that the intelligence services do not know the identity of the three individuals behind the Heshmat Alavi persona as well as the others who work in the troll farm.

Saudi money and U.S. political advocacy help the MEK exploit America’s democratic systems to expand its influence. According to The Independent, “MEK articles were picked up by US government funded Voice of America’s Persian-language service.” In 2003, I gave testimony to the UK parliament that the MEK’s cult nature was an even greater threat than its terrorist or violent behavior. The MEK regards its needs superior to any considerations of law, morality, or mortality.

Back in 2001, commentator Elizabeth Rubin warned that the MEK “is not only irrelevant to the cause of Iran’s democratic activists, but a totalitarian cult that will come back to haunt us.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Filings reveal Iranian dissident group's foreign influence operation to push for regime change

Reid Champlin

June 20, 2019

Tensions between the United States and Iran are rising to a fever pitch following the downing of an American drone Wednesday by Iran's Revolutionary Guard over the Strait of Hormuz. It comes less than a week after an attack on two tankers purportedly conducted by Iran.

Iran has declared that although it does not want conflict, it is "ready for war." Hawkish voices in the U.S. have called for aggressive action as top military leaders review plans for a possible confrontation.

As both nations move closer to the brink of war, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a little-known advocacy group determined to install itself as the new government of Iran, continues to build a powerful influence network in Washington and beyond.

 **open** REVEALING THE  
HIDDEN SIDE OF POLITICS  
**SECRETS**

Recent documents in accordance with the Foreign Agents Registration Act reveal that the council, the political arm of opposition group Mujahedeen Khalq or MEK, has been hosting opulent events at the National Press Club and elsewhere, publicizing itself through national and international media, and meeting with dozens of current and former government officials, all with the end goal of toppling the current Iranian government and rising to power in its place.

OpenSecrets previously reported on the MEK's deep ties to National Security Advisor John Bolton and other voices currently agitating for war against Iran. The new documents reveal the extent to which the dissident group is using media and its vast array of prominent supporters to push the national discourse toward confrontation.

The council of resistance either submitted or was quoted in 51 media pieces between December 2018 and May 2019, according to FARA filings. These pieces were concentrated in right-leaning media outlets such as Fox News, The Washington Times, The Washington Examiner and NewsMax.

Throughout their appearances, the organization stood firm behind dubious claims that Iran is currently carrying out assassinations in Europe and the U.S., an assertion widely rejected by experts. The rhetoric, based on Dutch intelligence reports that two Iranian dissidents were murdered by Tehran in 2015 and 2017, portrays the threat as dire and immediate, including calling for all Iranian embassies in Europe to be shut down in May.

The group also continued to meet with a number of major former government officials, including James Jones, who served as Barack Obama's national security advisor from 2009 to 2010, and Tom Ridge, the first Secretary of Homeland Security.

The council has been building a war chest of prominent advocates to justify its mission to the public and to national and international political communities, including Bolton, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey and former U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson.



Some of these individuals were investigated by the Treasury Department in 2012 for accepting significant speaking fees from the MEK, which was, at the time, still designated by the federal government as a terrorist organization. The investigation ultimately dissipated after the group was de-listed as a terrorist organization later that same year following a multi-million dollar lobbying blitz.

The group continues to organize public protests, rallies and speeches claiming to represent the Iranian people, even though the group is reportedly “widely despised” within Iran and has been exiled from the country for decades. The group spoke with several U.S. senators on Nowruz (Persian New Year) in March and received the backing of two sitting senators, John Boozman (R-Ark.) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.).

Standing between two Iranian flags emblazoned with the MEK’s golden lion insignia, Boozman told the group, “We are committed to helping you in any way that we can.”

Boozman and Shaheen aren’t the only members of Congress to have publicly backed the MEK. Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), who has repeatedly called for launching a first strike on Iran, spoke at a 2015 meeting of the Organization of Iranian American Communities, an advocacy group closely aligned with the MEK.

Two other senators, Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) and Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), flew to Albania in 2017 to meet with the MEK’s leader Maryam Rajavi and wish her group “success in their struggle for democracy and human rights in Iran.”

Supporters of the MEK claim that Rajavi will usher in a secular democratic state in the place of the current theocratic regime. They champion her stated commitment to free-market capitalism and promises to modernize the nation.

The council was founded in the early 1980s as the political front of the MEK, which itself was started by self-described Marxist Iranian students in 1965. Initially fighting with other opposition groups to take down the Shah in the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the group soon came into conflict with the new

Ayatollah Khomeini's government, with members of the MEK eventually killing the Iranian president and prime minister in 1981.

They later fought alongside Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980 Iran-Iraq war and into the 1990s and early 2000s against Iraqi Shiites, Kurds and Americans. They have been blamed for the deaths of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and at least six American citizens.

The group plans to demonstrate in front of State Department headquarters in D.C. on Friday in a protest dubbed "March 4 Regime Change by Iranians" by social media supporters and closely-aligned groups, including OIAC. OIAC has been spending to amplify the march with more than \$300 going to Facebook ads in the days leading up to the event and multiple tweets promoting the demonstration on Twitter, but the amount of that spending is unknown since OIAC is not on the list of issue advertisers tracked by Twitter's Ads Transparency Center.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Why the State Department Let a Terrorist Cult Gather on its Doorstep

Alexander Rubinstein

June 24, 2019

**H**ow did the MEK go from terrorist cult to State Dept partner in pushing regime change in Iran? MintPress went to their DC rally to find out.

Watching the Trump administration's push for war with Iran, news consumers may find it hard to be surprised by the lengths the U.S. government is willing to go to in order to instigate war — or regime change at the very least — against the Islamic Republic. U.S. citizens have been treated to lengthy lectures by the mainstream media, which laments the loss of an unmanned drone and a targeted Japanese oil tanker whose owner disputes Washington's version of events.

Yet, it isn't the Trump administration that solidified the U.S.'s relationship with its strangest bedfellow in the battle against the Iranian government. That dis-



tion goes to then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Clinton declassified the Mojahedin-e Khalq (People's Mujahedin of Iran, or MEK) as a terrorist organization in 2012. The Guardian described the move as a result of a "multimillion-dollar campaign."

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 U.S. 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."

The outlet continued:

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 U.S. 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."

Today, years after the group was removed from Washington's terror list, it enjoys even more access to the halls of power, despite its dismal levels of approval in Iran, the country it claims to represent.

"The MEK has incredible influence in the White House and on the Hill. I frequently see them lobbying members of Congress and attending hearings with matching yellow jackets that say 'Iranians support regime change,' Lily Tajaddini, Iran Coordinator at CodePink, told MintPress News.

The group claims to want democracy, but it is abundantly clear that their ideal leader for the future of Iran is Maryam Rajavi, the woman who leads their cult. The contradiction was laid bare last week at a protest held by the group in Washington with chants of "Democracy and freedom, with Maryam Rajavi."

A recent investigation by The Intercept revealed that the White House used an article by one Heshmat Alavi to justify its illegal withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or Iran Nuclear Deal). The only problem is that Alavi “is a persona run by a team of people from the political wing of the MEK. This is not and has never been a real person {emphasis added},” according to one former member of the cult, whose story was corroborated by other former members.

As LobeLog reported:

This new scandal...involves a wide political and media class that has become so besotted with an unrealistic anti-Iran agenda that it has left the door open to an unchecked, unverified flow of MEK propaganda throughout American politics and the media. Thanks to these regime-change advocates, a foreign group funded by a foreign government has easily manufactured a false narrative aimed at sending American soldiers to die in a war with Iran that is against U.S. national interests.”

That foreign government is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Even the U.S. government’s own Voice of America outlet reports:

Observers have long been puzzled about how the group [MEK] managed to shell out \$25,000 speaker fees to the likes of [former Speaker of the House Newt] Gingrich, [former Governor of New Mexico and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Bill] Richardson, [former Chairman of the Democratic National Committee Howard] Dean, former New York Mayor [and President Trump’s lawyer] Rudy Giuliani and others, given its small basis of support within the Iranian diaspora. It’s entirely possible that the Saudis have funded the MEK for years.”

And there is a consensus that Saudi Arabia is financing the group across the axis, with Russia’s SputnikNews reporting:

A former MEK member who oversaw the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of materials explained how the group has stayed financially afloat.

Massoud Khodabandeh explained that three tons of solid gold, a minimum of four suitcases of customized Rolex watches, and fabric that had been used to cover the Muslim holy site of Kaaba in Mecca were among the commodities shipped from Saudi Arabia to MEK operatives in Baghdad as part of the scheme.”

As MintPress News previously reported:

Testimony from a former high-ranking official from the Iranian militant opposition group...has confirmed that the group had been covertly financed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For decades, the Gulf Kingdom...contributed hundreds of millions of dollars in gold and other valuables.”

### **Several fronts and bigtime backers**

The MEK operates through several fronts, including the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the Organization of Iranian American Communities (OIAC), inter alia.

The former is a “little-known advocacy group determined to install itself as the new government of Iran,” which “continues to build a powerful influence network in Washington and beyond,” according to the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP). The latter is a U.S.-based lobbying group.

NCRI has “been hosting opulent events at the National Press Club and elsewhere, publicizing itself through national and international media, and meeting with dozens of current and former government officials, all with the end goal of toppling the current Iranian government and rising to power in its place,” the watchdog reports. CRP adds:

“The [C]ouncil of [R]esistance either submitted or was quoted in 51 media pieces between December 2018 and May 2019, according to FARA [law requiring registration of foreign lobbyists] filings.”

Meanwhile, some of the biggest names in American politics openly back the group. The ultra-hawkish Sen. Tom Cotton, who has advocated for a pre-emptive strike on Iran, has spoken at their events. National Security Ad-

visor John Bolton promised the group at its 2017 conference in Albania that “before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran.” Richardson, Gingrich and Guiliani also gave speeches there.

Among other prominent supporters of the group: former Sen. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ); retired General and former Vice Chief of Staff of the United States Army Jack Keane; Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH); Sen. John Boozman (R-AR); Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC); Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO); Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA); Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA); and former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, among many, many more.

## Chaos at the State Department

On Friday, some 500 MEK members demonstrated in front of the State Department building in Washington, equipped with stages, two large-screen TVs, and three confetti cannons. In between speeches, demonstrators chanted “Change, change, change / Regime change in Iran!”

They also chanted their support for MEK leader Maryam Rajavi — who is banned from entering the United Kingdom, yet bills herself as a progressive reformer despite her group’s terrorist past. “Rajavi yes / Mullahs no / They are terrorists, they must go!” MEK members chanted.

According to organizers, the MEK members flew in from “40 different states.”

One speaker opened the rally by proclaiming:

In one voice, we declare that the only solution is for the Iranian people to overthrow this regime and create a democratic nation. Our rally is timely, our message is clear. Thousands of Iranians are here to say it loud: “We call on the United States to support the Iranian uprisings for regime change.”

He went on to call for more sanctions and for the designation of Iranian intelligence agencies as terrorist groups. The speaker continued:

With this comes the recognition of an alternative to the Iranian regime. Misses Maryam Rajavi and the NCRI have demonstrated leadership, a significant network, and the organizational capabilities to free Iran. And we support Misses Rajavi and her 10-point plan for a free, democratic, and non-nuclear Iran.

Let's make sure that we are heard and on social media with the following hashtags: #MarchForRegimeChangeByIranians, #IStandWithMaryamRajavi, and #FreeIran.”

Some people who spoke were not included on the list of speakers, including representatives McClintock and Sherman. Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ), ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Rep. Van Taylor (R-TX) also had statements read to the MEK crowd. Later, former U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain Adam Ereli also spoke.

A handful of counter demonstrators with the anti-war women's group CodePink showed up to rally against the MEK group. Tajaddini had organized the protest but stayed at a distance, noting:

They target me because I am Iranian. They have yelled sexist slurs at me and make false claims that I am paid by the regime inside of Iran solely because I do not support sanctions or war against Iran.”

Days prior, CodePink co-founder Medea Benjamin had confronted MEK members as they attempted to lobby Congress. On Friday, MEK had pictures on hand of Benjamin meeting with Iranian officials during her participation in peace delegations printed out in an effort to intimidate her. They surrounded her, pushed her, and called her a terrorist.

Immediately after the State Department security personnel escorted Benjamin from the mob, she told MintPress News:

This is an example of the mentality among these people. They have no respect for democracy.

If it weren't for the police, they would be hitting us and assaulting like they have done many times. They are a cult and a former terrorist group. They have been legitimized with the support of John Bolton and other people in the administration. They're hated inside Iran.”

One of the MEK members who was captured on video being pushed away by police for being too aggressive towards Benjamin, told MintPress News that Benjamin and the other members of CodePink “have got money from



the Iranian agent to participate here.” The accusation of spying for or being on the payroll of Iran is included in most public testimony of those targeted by the group. The MEK member continued:

We want just change of the regime, nothing more, but they are supporting the Iranian terrorist regime.

I hope that the Iranian terrorist regime [is] overthrown and the people can choose anybody they want to. For example, if they elect Maryam Rajavi.”

Maryam Rajavi is the de-facto leader of the MEK since her husband mysteriously disappeared. Rajavi addressed the protest remotely, on two occasions reminding her supporters that the U.S. is their ally and accusing the Iranian government of having it backwards. She congratulated MEK members for their growing support in Washington and shared her vision of opening up markets in Iran. Despite originally billing itself as a Marxist organization, MEK is now staunchly capitalist — perhaps a necessary condition for alliance with the U.S. According to the group:

The council accepts national capitalism and the bazaar [marketplace], private ownership and enterprise, as well as private investment.”

But it isn't only about the benjamins, CodePink's Tajaddini argues:

Many members in Congress and the White House have strong ties to the Israeli and Saudi lobby groups [that] support sanctions and a war with Iran. They also support the MEK because they are then able to say that Iranians support the U.S.-led regime change.”

## The Congressional Cult Caucus

Gov. Richardson opened his speech with red meat for the MEK: “We need a new regime. That regime is you, the MEK.” Richardson concluded by leading a chant of “M-E-K!”

Richardson's interest in the outcome of United States policy in the Middle East isn't just confined to his support for the MEK, for which he is rewarded generously. He is also involved in a U.S. oil project in the Syrian Golan Heights, which are illegally occupied by Israel, via a company called Genie

Energy Ltd. Given the transnational nature of pipelines, Genie Energy stands to benefit from both regime change in Syria and Iran. Other figures on the company's advisory board include former Vice President Dick Cheney, media mogul Rupert Murdoch, investment banker Jacob Rothschild and former CIA Director James Woosley.

Former Sen. Robert Torricelli, who helped lobby the Clinton state department to drop the MEK from its terrorist list, cheered Rajavi's sacrifices for the movement.

Rep. Brad Sherman, Democratic member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, assured the crowd that the Iranian government "may be on its last leg." He said that he was sure that Iran's military was watching the protest remotely. "So Rouhani, this is the future of Iran. Watch it on your video streams," he said.

Rep. Tom McClintock told the crowd that "the gang of thugs that have appointed themselves the rulers of Iran — their claim on power is illegitimate and the time to topple them is approaching."

Jack Keane, a retired four-star general and former Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, said Iran is "choking" on U.S. sanctions and condemned Iran for its alleged support of Houthi rebels in Yemen and Hezbollah in Syria. He told the MEK to "keep up your fight, keep up your resistance."

Sharing a bit of what appears to be insider knowledge with the cultists, the general told them "the United States will lead a coalition of nations to keep the shipping lanes open in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. That will unfold in the days ahead."

Following the rally, the MEK marched to the White House, again calling for regime change.

Chant outside the White House:

"What do we want?"

"REGIME CHANGE" [pic.twitter.com/Xs7VNgcduD](https://pic.twitter.com/Xs7VNgcduD)

— They're concentration camps. (@AliMortell) June 21, 2019

## MEKing history

Virtually every investigation into the so-called “People’s Mujahedeen” — whether by think tanks, NGOs, or the media — concludes that their support inside of Iran is virtually non-existent. The group participated in the revolution against the Shah but was not invited to the table as a new government was being formed. And so they rebelled, engaging in a campaign of terror marked with assassination attempts against Iranian, U.S. and Jordanian officials. They bombed many businesses. Three U.S. military officials were killed; as were three contractors, and that was prior to the revolution. Afterwards, MEK attacks would see as many as 70 high-ranking officials from other political parties killed. Suicide attacks and assassinations continued.

Eventually, the MEK sided with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war and was responsible for scores of Iranian casualties. This is largely credited as the reason the group is so widely despised in Iran.

In 1989, Maryam and Masoud Rajavi made divorce compulsory to advance the so-called “ideological revolution.” In 1992, the group conducted “near-simultaneous” raids on Iranian embassies in 13 countries. By August 2002, the group started holding press conferences in Washington highlighting the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran. The next year, it bombed a UN compound in Iraq, causing the international body to vacate the country.

The RAND Corporation, a U.S. government-funded militarist think tank, was asked by a Marine Corps major-general to provide a “rigorous analysis” of the group. The 133-page report states:

The MeK naturally sought out Iranian dissidents, but it also approached Iranian economic migrants in such countries as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates with false promises of employment, land, aid in applying for asylum in Western countries, and even marriage, to attract them to Iraq. Relatives of members were given free trips to visit the MeK’s camps. Most of these ‘recruits’ were brought into Iraq illegally and then required to hand over their identity documents for ‘safekeeping.’ Thus, they were effectively trapped.

During the more than four decades since its founding, the MeK has become

increasingly adept at crafting and promoting its image as a democratic organization that seeks to bring down Iranian tyrants, both secular and religious. This profile has been especially effective in the United States and Europe, where, until recently, the MeK's extensive fundraising activities have been very successful.”

In the internet era, the cult has managed to keep up with the times. A Channel 4 report found one defector whose job it was to run pro-MEK sockpuppet accounts pretending to be Iranian.

In a possible testament to the group's effectiveness at manipulating narratives, one media outlet has released what it says is leaked audio of the head of MEK's cyber unit speaking to a U.S.-based supporter. “We did our best to blame the [Iranian] regime for the [oil tanker] blasts. The Saudis have called Sister Maryam [Rajavi's] office to follow up on the results,” the MEK official tells him.

One leading NGO — Human Rights Watch — did even more digging into the cultish behavior of the group. It interviewed a number of former members, uncovering one case in which a man was “held in solitary confinement for eight-and-a-half years” for wanting to leave. Two people were killed in interrogations.

The level of devotion expected of members was [on] 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.”

The rights group also reported “mass divorces” as a result of leadership's “ideological revolution.” MEK told members it would enhance their “capacity for struggle.” Celibacy is likewise mandatory.

Human rights abuses carried out by [MEK] leaders against dissident members ranged from prolonged incommunicado and solitary confinement to beatings, verbal and psychological abuse, coerced confessions, threats of execution, and torture.”

Today, the MEK is constructing a massive compound in Tirana, Albania. A

former head of Albanian military intelligence told Channel 4 he thought they were trying to build “a state within a state.”

The outlet reported that Albania agreed to allow the camp to be set up in order to earn itself additional support from the United States. The report contains the story of one couple from Canada who say their daughter was kidnapped 20 years ago by the group and who traveled to Albania to find her. The MEK social-media troll said there was “forced public confession about any thoughts about sex,” every night. Another said he was tortured for 45 days. The journalist behind the report was repeatedly harassed by MEK and its Albanian private security on camera.

A separate report, in LobeLog, states:

“One journalist confessed to me he felt afraid in his own country when the MEK, accompanied by hired armed Albanian security personnel, followed him. In a public space, they photographed him and made verbal threats, demanding that he hand over his phone on which he had earlier filmed activity outside the MEK camp gate.”

These horrifying anecdotes are apparently of little concern to former Sen. Torricelli, who lobbied to have the group removed from the U.S. terrorist list. “To those of you in Tirana, thank you for being who you are: the point of the spear in the effort for Iranian freedom,” he told the MEK crowd in D.C. on Friday.

## **Media downplay the MEK**

It appears that the horror stories from MEK compounds from Europe to the Middle East are also of little concern to the D.C. press corps. Multiple journalists tweeted about the events in manners clearly designed to manufacture a pro-war consensus. Reuters’ White House reporter Steve Holland and Eamon Javers, Washington correspondent for CNBC, offered no context on the group, thereby presenting the pro-regime change cultists as ordinary, concerned, Iranian-Americans.

NBC News White House Correspondent Kelly O’Donnell called the group “pro-democracy protesters seeking Iran regime change.” She eventually de-

leted the tweet without offering an explanation.

But despite the correspondent's likely realization of the complete failure in her characterization, the report from NBC News that aired on its local affiliate made no mention of the MEK, yet somehow managed to regurgitate MEK's inflated claim that it had "thousands" of protesters who attended, when it was clearly far less. The report even concluded with an unsourced claim:

I am told this march and rally was seen in Iran because of live coverage streamed over the internet. Reporting from the White House, Chris Gordon, News 4."

The report was also tilted "US-Iran Tensions Trigger Protests in DC." The headline gives the impression that the MEK was protesting in response to recent escalations, when its protest had in fact been long planned to mark the anniversary of a major protest held by the group in Tehran decades ago. But when CodePink decided to have its own rally out in front of the White House — a feat organized in just three days — calling for an end to sanctions on Sunday, the media virtually ignored it save for a handful of independent reporters.

The MEK's influence operation in the United States is monied and arguably successful. The cult has the backing of a number of Trump administration officials and allies, current and former members of Congress, and the establishment media. As they say, politics makes strange bedfellows. When it comes to the overthrow of a sovereign foreign government, it seems they are made even with those who are not allowed to keep bedfellows.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Propaganda War to Real War: The MEK's Treacherous Operation

Assal Rad

July 1, 2019

Lobe  
Log

Under the guise of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and ties to al-Qaeda, the Bush administration invaded Iraq in 2003—and the consequences have reverberated across the Middle East to this day. With the specter of war again on the horizon, striking parallels have emerged between the lead-up to the Iraq War and the current discourse on Iran. The media has parroted the Trump administration's claims regarding Iranian "threats," and U.S. media outlets continue to provide a pulpit for fringe Iranian opposition groups like the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), a formerly designated terrorist organization.

Just as the Bush administration hinged their hopes of Saddam Hussein's fall on the exiles of the Iraqi National Congress (INC) who duped U.S. officials with the now infamous "Curveball,"

Trump and his regime-change cabinet are now touting the MEK as a viable alternative to the current government in Iran. Despite these parallels, the mainstream media continues to give a platform to radical groups like the MEK, which are weaving together a questionable story to build a case for regime change and war with Iran.

Also similar to the INC, which claimed that it did not seek power in Iraq, the MEK pretends to work for democracy in Iran in the name of the Iranian people. Though both organizations have used fabrications to push their agenda, the tools of disinformation have evolved over time and the MEK has mastered the art of false narratives.

Coordinated efforts by small interest groups to undermine critics of Trump's Iran policy and stifle pro-peace and pro-diplomacy voices have become increasingly hostile. Revelations have come to light on the role of the MEK in magnifying efforts at misrepresentation through inauthentic social media accounts aimed at manufacturing "Iranian" support for the Trump administration's pro-war policies. The MEK also utilizes promoted content on news sites. For instance, The Hill is running a 10-week mini-series on Iran sponsored by the Organization of Iranian-American Communities (OIAC), a front group for the MEK.

Even more unsettling is the MEK's creation of fake personas that publish in major U.S. outlets as a way to promote the pro-regime change narrative, falsely inflate support for war, and secure legitimacy as real "analysts." Outlets such as Forbes and The Hill continue to host the writings of a person that is not real, a character created by the MEK called Heshmat Alavi.

Evidence of MEK machinations are substantiated by online campaigns intended to influence the narrative on Iran in favor of regime change. Former MEK members have confirmed the operation of MEK troll farms based in Albania, where members create thousands of inauthentic accounts and promote hashtags, propaganda, and tweets targeting anyone that favors diplomacy with Iran. The group also uses front organizations, like the OIAC, to take out paid ads that advance its cause at the expense of U.S. security interests in the region.



Despite its propaganda mission, the MEK is loathed inside Iran and has no support as an opposition force. Support for the fringe group fares no better in the Iranian diaspora. According to a 2018 poll among Iranian-Americans, only 6 percent said that they supported the MEK as a legitimate alternative to the current regime in Iran. The history of this enmity can be traced back to the Iran-Iraq War, when the MEK fought alongside Saddam Hussein.

The United States first placed the MEK on the Foreign Terrorist Organization list when the list was established in the 1990s based on their role in the murders of Iranians as well as Americans in bombings at U.S. companies in Iran in the 1970s. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the MEK has continued to carry out assassinations and terror attacks inside Iran.

The group's ideological premise is a subversion of Islam. In his seminal study of the history of the MEK, Ervand Abrahamian argues that it "developed an all-consuming hatred for the clerical regime and, at the same time, the burning conviction that its own radical version of Shiism was the one and only true interpretation of Islam."

Although the MEK outwardly espouses human rights as a guiding principle, it is itself a cult-like group with a history of abuse and torture against its own members. According to a report by RAND, the group's disturbing human rights cruelties against its members include physical abuse, seizure of assets, imprisonment, mandatory divorce, emotional isolation, and forced labor—to name but a few. Former MEK members who have escaped the group also report sexual abuse and forced marriages during their captivity. One of their more nefarious practices of authoritarian control over members is removing children from their parents.

The group's removal from the terror list in 2012 was a result of a well-funded PR campaign led by paid spokespeople, including National Security Advisor John Bolton, who has received at least \$40,000 in "speaking fees" from the group. Other members of the Trump team, such as his attorney Rudy Giuliani, have also received money from the MEK to lend their endorsement and speak at rallies calling for the overthrow of the Iranian government. The MEK has never revealed the source of its funding, although evidence suggests that Saudi Arabia may play an integral role in propping up the orga-

nization to manipulate U.S. policy and sow discord in Iran.

Ultimately, despite the parallels between the run-up to the Iraq War and today's escalating tensions with Iran, the MEK and other radical faux-opposition forces with no legitimacy in Iran continue to be given platforms to propagate distorted Iran narratives. Despite the failures of the Iraq War, the experience seems to have done little to impel the mainstream media to produce more accurate, nuanced reporting.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Whitewashing the MEK Makes No Sense

Daniel Larison

July 7, 2019

The National Interest has published a strange bit of pro-MEK propaganda by Ilan Berman:

Eliminating that threat, the MeK argues, requires regime change in Tehran. And while many opposition activists advocate “civil disobedience” to achieve this aim, the MeK is convinced that the Iranian regime is simply too brutal, too entrenched and too invested in maintaining its hold on power to be removed solely by peaceful means. The alternative could well be armed resistance, and here the MeK holds a distinct advantage should such action become necessary—both because of the past military-style structure and discipline of its cadres and owing to its past successes against the regime.

Berman does not address much of the relevant criticism of the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) in this ar-

The American  
Conservative



### Whitewashing The MEK Makes No Sense



Randy Miramontez / Shutterstock.com

ticle, and he takes the superficial “democratic” rhetoric and agenda of a totalitarian cult at face value. The article is titled “Making Sense of The MeK,” but a previously uninformed reader would come away from reading this with a very distorted and false picture of what the group is and what it has done. For instance, he talks about the MEK’s efforts to cultivate U.S. politicians and former officials, including John Bolton and Rudy Giuliani, but he leaves out the part where they have paid

their newfound supporters for their endorsement to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars per speech. Berman says that their “outreach” has succeeded in “garnering endorsements from luminaries on both sides of the U.S. political aisle and in both chambers of the U.S. Congress,” but he doesn’t tell his readers how they managed to get all those endorsements. The ease with which a discredited cult can buy support in Washington should be a cause for alarm, but in this article it is incredibly presented as proof that the cult is a “relevant” part of the opposition.

The MEK’s history of violence and abuse of its own members is never mentioned. The involvement of the cult and its current leader, Maryam Rajavi, in fighting for Saddam Hussein’s government in the Iran-Iraq war never comes up. The group’s past terrorist attacks inside Iran, including the killing of several Americans, have vanished down the memory hole. The group’s suspected involvement in the murder of Iranian nuclear scientists in the last decade is likewise nowhere to be found. These are fairly relevant details if the purpose of the article is to “make sense” of the group, but the real purpose here seems to be to whitewash its past and present and to repeat its talking points.

Berman also fails to mention that the MEK is hated by almost all Iranians in Iran and the diaspora. Assal Rad confirms that the group has no support in

her recent article on the group:

According to a 2018 poll among Iranian-Americans, only 6 percent said that they supported the MEK as a legitimate alternative to the current regime in Iran. The history of this enmity can be traced back to the Iran-Iraq War, when the MEK fought alongside Saddam Hussein.

A group that has virtually no support among Iranians anywhere outside of its own membership is obviously not a viable alternative to the current government. A group that sided with a foreign aggressor against their own country is understandably viewed as an enemy by the vast majority of the population. For these and other reasons, the cult is widely viewed as illegitimate and extremely dangerous. The group is sometimes referred to as the Iranian Khmer Rouge for good reason. John Limbert made a similar comparison when he described the cult and its ideology in an article earlier this year:

Following those defeats, the MEK transformed itself into a bizarre cult, with an ideology combining the practices of Jonestown and the Khmer Rouge.

As in many other similarly deranged cults, members are subjected to physical and psychological abuse, cut off from their families outside the cult, and brainwashed to devote themselves to the cult leader. These abusive practices continue inside the MEK's compound in Albania. Arron Merat wrote about some of this in his extensive report on the cult last year:

Mostafa and Robabe Mohammadi came to Albania to rescue their daughter. But in Tirana, the capital, the middle-aged couple have been followed everywhere by two Albanian intelligence agents. Men in sunglasses trailed them from their hotel on George W Bush Road to their lawyer's office; from the lawyer's office to the ministry of internal affairs; and from the ministry back to the hotel.

The Mohammadis say their daughter, Somayeh, is being held against her will by a fringe Iranian revolutionary group that has been exiled to Albania, known as the People's Mujahedin of Iran, or MEK (Mujahedin-e Khalq).

Rad also describes the torments that the MEK inflicts on its own members:

According to a report by RAND, the group's disturbing human rights cruelties against its members include physical abuse, seizure of assets, imprisonment, mandatory divorce, emotional isolation, and forced labor—to name but a few. Former MEK members who have escaped the group also report sexual abuse and forced marriages during their captivity. One of their more nefarious practices of authoritarian control over members is removing children from their parents.

If this is what they do to their own adherents, one can easily imagine how much worse their treatment of everyone else would be if they somehow managed to take control of the coercive apparatus of a government. This is the creepy and dangerous group that quite a few Iran hawks want to promote and possibly install as the next government of Iran. Fortunately, Iranians would never accept such a twisted organization as their new political leadership. The disturbing thing is that so many Americans are still prepared to advocate on behalf of such a horrible group simply because it seeks regime change.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Rudy Giuliani, Joe Lieberman Team Up For Albania MEK Conference

Josh Kovensky

July 12, 2019

President Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani has joined buckraking forces with former Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT), speaking at an event in Albania for a bizarre, cultish Iranian group that fashions itself as a government-in-exile for the Islamic Republic.

Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) — once designated as a foreign terrorist group — hosted the conference at a compound that MEK operates in Albania.

In addition to Giuliani and Lieberman, former Colombian Senator and longtime FARC hostage Ingrid Betancourt appeared at the event, along with former Marine Corps Commandant James Conway.

Billed as “The 120 Year Struggle Of The Iranian People For Freedom,” the conference appears to focus in part on extolling the virtues of MEK leader

**TPM**

Maryam Rajavi. Rajavi styles herself as the “leader of the Iranian resistance,” but has faced criticism for alleged brainwashing by the group.

In a video posted to Twitter, Giuliani says that “an alternative exists to the theocracy in Iran. It’s our responsibility to support it.”

In March, the Trump Administration reportedly shifted its position to no longer rule out MEK as a potential replacement for Iran’s current government.

Giuliani seems to have gone straight to the conference from a Thursday evening call-in appearance on Sean Hannity.

Giuliani also spoke at an anti-Iran rally in Warsaw in February, saying that he was representing MEK, and not Trump. He did some work for Trump on the sidelines of the event, however, meeting with a Ukrainian prosecutor who was claiming to have dirt on presidential candidate Joe Biden.

At Friday’s conference, Lieberman echoed Giuliani’s statements.

“When I’m here I feel that I’m representing the spirit of my great friend, the late Senator John McCain, who was warned by the establishment to stay away from this organization, but he spent time learning about it,” Lieberman said. “He came to Ashraf 3, believing in this organization and its cause.”

This isn’t Giuliani’s first time in Albania. In May 2018, he traveled to the southern European country for another MEK event. The relationship has gone on for years.

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Giuliani's Cuckoo Praise for the MEK

Daniel Larison

July 14, 2019

Josh Kovensky reports on this year's annual MEK gathering at their strange compound in Albania:

President Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani has joined buckraking forces with former Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT), speaking at an event in Albania for a bizarre, cultish Iranian group that fashions itself as a government-in-exile for the Islamic Republic.

Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) — once designated as a foreign terrorist group — hosted the conference at a compound that MEK operates in Albania.

Giuliani delivers pretty much the same speech every time he attends an MEK event, but this year he added the flourish of condemning people that referred to the totalitarian cult as a cult: "These are





### Giuliani's Cuckoo Praise For The MEK



Randy Miramoney / Shutterstock.com

people that are dedicated to freedom, and if you think that's a cult, there's something wrong with you! There's something missing in your soul?" Then the camera looks out at the crowd of identically-dressed cult members obediently applauding Giuliani's rote recitation of the cult's talking points. The video is priceless, as Pouya Alimagham points out here:

You know you're a cult when you have to give thousands of dollars in speakers fees to have

international figures come to your rallies and expressly say that you're not a cult—all while your members are dressed exactly the same and clap on cue in unison. #facts#Iran#MEK<https://t.co/EzpYJy7y6n>

— Pouya Alimagham (@iPouya) July 14, 2019

When Giuliani affirms that the MEK's agenda "looks just like our Bill of Rights," you begin to wonder if he has undergone some of the group's brainwashing techniques. He goes on to praise them as "miracle workers" because of the speed with which they built their creepy compound. The idea that a group that subjects its own members to physical and psychological abuse stands for "human rights" is laughable, and it is a measure of how divorced from reality Giuliani's speech is that he would make such a claim. "This is a decent organization, this is a good organization," the president's lawyer asserts because this is what he has been paid to say. "This is a group we can support," Giuliani says near the end. It speaks volumes about the horrible judgment and poor ethics of Giuliani and his fellow MEK cheerleaders that they are willing to take money from this group and say these things publicly about them.

The MEK's paid American boosters are a disgrace, but their participation in

these propaganda spectacles is useful in confirming that we can automatically dismiss anything these people have to say about Iran or Iran policy. No one that takes money from a deranged cult hated by Iranians has any business talking about Iran's political future, and anyone that chooses to echo MEK propaganda has absolutely no credibility on any issue related to Iran. MEK boosters clearly know nothing about Iran and its people, and they definitely don't care about what the Iranian people think or want. The "decent" and "good" organization that Giuliani praises fought for Saddam Hussein against their own country, it has killed Americans and Iranians in terrorist attacks, and it holds its own members captive and subjects them to brutal and dehumanizing treatment. The fact that he and others advocate for them to have any role in Iran's government shows their utter contempt for the Iranian people.

The shameless cheerleading for a totalitarian cult might not seem so important, but we should remember that one of the cult's biggest fans, John Bolton, is now National Security Advisor in charge of making Iran policy. The insane claims that Giuliani and others were making in Albania this weekend aren't just confined to a bunch of has-beens on the take. Bolton has said many of the same things on many occasions, and I suspect he is fanatical enough in his desire for regime change that he would consider the MEK to be a legitimate ally.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump allies' visit throws light on secretive Iranian opposition group

Shaun Walker

July 15, 2019

**M**EK operates out of compound in rural Albania and has been described as having cult-like attributes

The gates to the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) compound, situated on a gently inclined hillside in rural Albania, are usually firmly closed, guarded by two sculpted lions atop stone pedestals and a large team of Albanian security guards. Unannounced visitors are not welcome at the fenced-off, secretive site, where more than 2,000 MEK members live.

**The  
Guardian**

The history of the MEK, or the People's Mujahedin of Iran, is long and complicated. Critics and many of those who have left the group in recent years describe it as a shadowy outfit with little support inside Iran and many cult-like attributes, condemned to die out at the obscure base in Albania because of its enforced celibacy rules.

But for its backers, which include many politicians and, notably, members of Donald Trump's inner circle, the MEK are tireless fighters for a free and democratic Iran who could potentially become the country's next government.

This was highlighted over the weekend when the group held a gathering of international backers attended by, among others, Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani. Other visitors included the former Democratic senator Joe Lieberman and the British Conservative MP Matthew Offord.

Giuliani described the MEK as a "government in exile" and suggested it was also a government in waiting after potential regime change in Iran. "It gives us confidence that if we make those efforts to overthrow that horrible regime, sooner rather than later, we will not only save lives but will be able to entrust the transition of Iran to a very responsible group of people," he said to cheers from the assembled audience.

Giuliani has been a regular visitor to MEK events for several years, as has the US national security adviser, John Bolton. While they have been predicting an MEK government in Tehran for years, the fact that these officials now have positions in the Trump administration, combined with the increasingly fraught geopolitical situation around Iran, makes their support for the MEK matter more than ever.

Originally a Marxist-Islamist group that played a leading role in the 1979 Iranian revolution, the MEK ended up exiled and fighting against the Iranian regime from a base in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In the process, the MEK lost a lot of support inside Iran.

The group was only removed from the US terror list in 2012 and the Obama administration later helped negotiate its relocation to Albania as the situation in post-Saddam Iraq became perilous. There, in the countryside, it has constructed a vast compound where men and women lead segregated existences. Last month, the Guardian spoke with about a dozen men in Tirana who had fled the MEK compound over the past two years. With no passports or other documents, they remain in limbo, unable either to work or to leave

the country. The picture they painted of life inside the compound was of a cult-like atmosphere in which mobile phones and contact with relatives were banned, all interactions between men and women were prohibited, and days were spent sitting at computers firing out tweets and other online messages in support of the MEK.

Each evening, the men had to gather in small groups with their commanders for “ideological training” as well as a confessional about any sexual thoughts they might have had that day.

“For example, you would have to say: ‘I saw a girl on television and I got an erection,’ or ‘This morning I masturbated,’” said Hassan Heyrani, one of the defectors. He said there was no specific punishment for such admissions except scolding and embarrassment. “If you admit to it too often they will get angry and say: ‘How do you want to create freedom for the Iranian people if you have an erection every day?’”

An investigation by the Intercept recently found that an anti-regime Iranian activist, who had written extensive media columns about Iran, appeared, in fact, to be an invented persona created by MEK trolls.

When leading political figures came to visit, the rank-and-file MEK members were told to do everything to make sure their high-level guests felt appreciated. Heyrani remembered a visit by John McCain in 2017, who was greeted by a chanting crowd of MEK members. “We had to cheer and clap. One of the commanders told us: ‘You speak English. Please tell him he is the best of democracy,’” he said.

For the MEK leadership, the election of Trump in 2016 was a godsend. Those who have left the camp since recalled that in the run-up to the election the group often prayed for a Trump victory and the defeat of Hillary Clinton.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Stephen Harper speaks at conference held at ‘cult’ Iranian dissident group’s Albanian compound

Jolson Lim

July 17, 2019

For a second straight year, former prime minister Stephen Harper spoke at a conference organized by the MEK, a controversial Iranian dissident group that his government once labelled a terrorist organization and has been described as a cult.

Harper, who has been a vocal critic of the Iranian regime during and after his time as prime minister, gave a speech at the Free Iran conference on July 13. This year’s gathering was held at the MEK’s newly-built headquarters located in rural Albania.

“I am delighted to be here, because there are a few causes in this world today more important, at this moment, than what you are pursuing: the right of the people of Iran to change their government and their right to do it through freedom and the power of the ballot box,” he said, to applause from the audience.

POLITICS

The conference was organized by the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a group founded by the MEK, which aims to topple the current theocratic regime in power since the Iranian revolution. The council calls itself “an inclusive and pluralistic parliament-in-exile.”

According to the Guardian, the MEK’s new headquarters is located in a rural fenced-off hillside compound outside Albania’s capital of Tirana. It’s where more than 2,000 of its members live.

The well-funded and well-organized MEK, also known as the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran, has received the backing of numerous high-profile politicians in the West.

For example, U.S. President Donald Trump’s personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, spoke at the conference and called for the overthrow of the clerical regime. Former Democratic senator Joe Lieberman and British Tory MP Matthew Offord also participated.

Members of Trump’s inner circle, including his national security adviser John Bolton, have also spoken in favour of the group and its mission.

Harper’s former foreign affairs minister John Baird was also a speaker at the event. Former B.C. Conservative MP Paul Forseth also spoke.

Conservative figures calling for a regime change have increasingly offered support in recent years, but Liberals, such as Irwin Cotler, David Kilgour and Judy Sgro, have also publicly supported MEK.

While the 50-year history of the organization is long and complicated, the MEK has been criticized more recently as a cult.

According to a 2009 RAND Corporation analysis, the MEK turned toward cultlike practices after its leadership relocated to Paris in the mid 1980s. It included engaging in “near-religious devotion” to the married Massoud and Maryam Rajavi.

Its members were said to engage in “public self-deprecation sessions, man-



datory divorce, celibacy, enforced separation from family and friends, and gender segregation” — allegations reinforced by independent reporting over the years.

Massoud disappeared during the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, where the MEK was based for years with the support of Saddam Hussein, but Maryam Rajavi has continued to represent the MEK.

Rajavi is now the “president-elect” of the NCRI. According to the council’s website, she will hold the position for “the provisional period for transfer of power to the people.”

In his speech, Harper endorses Rajavi’s 10-point plan for a post-clerical Iran, calling it “the future the world wants.”

The plan includes universal suffrage, political freedom, ending the death penalty, secular governance, equality, an independent judiciary, upholding human rights, installing a capitalist economy, promoting regional peace and establishing a non-nuclear Iran.

Thomas Juneau, a Middle East expert at the University of Ottawa, said while the group bills itself as a “viable democratic opposition to the Islamic Republic,” that’s far from the truth.

“It is a violent, thuggish, corrupt cult,” he said. “It’s also a movement that has absolutely no support inside Iran.”

“For Canadian politicians, serving or retired, to endorse the MEK and by attending the event ... that should not be acceptable.”

Juneau, who took to Twitter over the weekend to criticize Harper, said supporting an “undemocratic” leader like Rajavi does a “disservice” to the actual cause of democracy in Iran. Harper was criticized last year for speaking at an MEK-sponsored conference in Paris.

Juneau also noted independent reporting has shown the MEK runs a “slick propaganda machine” and handsomely pays speakers to support their cause.

The Guardian recently spoke to men in Tirana who had fled the MEK compound over the last two years, where they said life inside the camp was of a “cultlike atmosphere” in which mobile phones and contact with relatives, and between men and women, were prohibited.

Members were also required to spend days sitting at computers flooding the internet with messages in support of the MEK.

Questions from iPolitics sent to Harper’s office on Monday via his website, including whether he was paid by the MEK to speak at the event, were not met with a response.

Until 2012, the U.S. and Canada designated the MEK as a terrorist entity. The group was once an armed faction, carrying out assassinations of Iran regime figures, but now supports propping up a secular government via non-violent means.

For much of his speech, Harper called for countries to take a harder line on the ayatollah’s regime.

“The right policy, the only realistic policy is to impose sanctions, boycott, designate institutions as terrorist organizations and do what my government did in Canada: close down the regime’s embassies around the world,” he said.

“Weakness and appeasement will not avoid a military confrontation with this regime.”

Juneau said he believes political figures such as Harper know of MEK’s reputation but want to be seen as taking a hard line on the Iran regime through a controversial, but well-organized group.

“It’s opportunism in the most cynical way possible.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## How Iranian MEK went from US terror list to halls of Congress

Ali Harb

July 17, 2019

**D**escribed by critics as ‘a cult’, Iranian opposition group is now lauded by top US officials as alternative to Iran’s government. As soon as Maryam Rajavi, her face beaming across a giant screen, finished speaking, the sky above hundreds of her supporters in the United States filled with red, white and green confetti - the colours of the Iranian flag.



Dressed in a glossy, dark blue suit and matching scarf tied loosely around her neck - a modest way to wear the hijab that went out of style decades ago in the Middle East - Rajavi had just accused the Iranian government of “terrorism and belligerence”.

“Iran Maryam, Maryam Iran,” the protesters chanted back, holding up posters of Rajavi in a show of admiration bordering on religious devotion to the leader of the Iranian Mujahideen-e Khalq, com-



monly referred to as MEK or PMOI.

Dressed in yellow, the MEK supporters were lively but disciplined, standing in military formations as they stared up at the screen outside the US State Department building in Washington.

They waved pre-Islamic Revolution Iranian flags, which feature a golden lion brandishing a sword instead of the name of God in Arabic script that adorns the country's emblem today.

Critics have described the Iranian opposition group as a “totalitarian cult”, voicing concerns about its growing clout in the halls of power in the US capital. Only seven short years ago, the US State Department listed the MEK as a terrorist organisation - and the group's sordid reputation is something Rajavi and her followers are acutely aware of.

At the 21 June demonstration, Rajavi even acknowledged it, accusing the

MEK's detractors of siding with the Iranian government and carrying out a "disgraceful demonisation campaign" against the group. That effort, she said in Farsi in the video, which was accompanied by English subtitles, "seeks to perpetuate the narrative that the people of Iran are better off with the theocratic rule of the mullahs".

In her brief speech via video feed, Rajavi also thanked her "friends" in the US. Today, they include representatives, senators, ex-generals, former ambassadors and current policymakers of all political stripes.

In fact, two of Donald Trump's right-hand men have been on the MEK's payroll: National Security Adviser John Bolton and the president's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, have both charged hefty fees to speak at MEK rallies in the past few years.

For their part, the MEK protesters, standing in front of the same building that labelled their organisation a terrorist group in 1997, were making demands of the US government: "US, US, take action; mullahs must get more sanctions," they shouted. "#Free Iran" was spelled out in golden balloons in the crowd.

Beyond Giuliani and Bolton, lawmakers from both major American political parties have lauded the MEK as a pro-democracy movement despite its checkered past.

"It's just ridiculous that they've been able to get the influence that they have had in the US," said Barbara Slavin, director of the Future of Iran Initiative at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank.

"I think that's primarily due to the money ... that they pay lobbyists to press their case," she told MEE. "They've had some very influential people like John Bolton and Rudy Giuliani who have taken their side."

Giuliani showed up at an MEK podium again this month, headlining a conference in Albania, where the dissidents are now based. The former New York City mayor described the group as a "government-in-exile", saying it is a ready-to-go alternative to lead the country if the Iranian government falls.

“We don’t have to say, ‘What could be worse?’ We know that there is something much better,” said Giuliani, who has publicly entertained and backed the prospect of regime change in Tehran.

He went on to joke that Rajavi has more support than he does in the US Congress - and judging by the group’s influence among powerbrokers in Washington, he may be right.

## **Bipartisan support**

Over the years, Senior House Democrats Eliot Engel and Brad Sherman, Republican Congressman Tom McClintock, GOP Senator John Cornyn, Senate Democrats Gary Peters and Jeanne Shaheen, and late Senator John McCain have all attended events linked to the MEK and spoken in its favour.

At the rally in Washington last month, both Democratic and Republican politicians praised the group’s struggle against the Iranian government.

Since being removed from Washington’s list of foreign terrorist organisations in 2012, the MEK has taken advantage of its ability to operate legally in the country - and a growing hostility towards Iran - to court policymakers.

“Bashing Iran is good politics in certain circles... If there is a possible financial incentive as well, it becomes easy for a lot of lawmakers to sign up,” said Ryan Costello, policy director at the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), a Washington-based advocacy group.

Last month, key legislators and former officials delivered messages of support at the MEK gathering in Washington, including Senator Bob Menendez, the top Democrat on the Committee on Foreign Relations.

“Thank you for continuing to highlight the plight of Iranians under an oppressive, brutal regime,” Menendez said in a written statement that was read out during the demonstration. “I share your vision for a better future for Iran and all Iranians.”

The rally came less than 24 hours after Trump ordered, then cancelled, mili-

tary strikes against Iran amid escalating tensions between the two countries. The New York Times reported at the time that Bolton was one of the top White House officials encouraging military action.

Bolton, a regular speaker at MEK gatherings, shares the group’s view that the Iranian regime cannot be reformed and instead must be toppled. At a MEK conference in Paris in 2017, a few months before he joined the Trump administration, Bolton told the crowd they would be celebrating the fall of the Iranian government before 2019.

“I have said for over 10 years since coming to these events that the declared policy of the United States of America should be the overthrow of the mullahs’ regime in Tehran,” he said at the time.

Several speakers at last month’s rally also stressed that the MEK is the right replacement for the government in Tehran. “We need a new regime, and that regime is you, the MEK,” Bill Richardson, a former governor of New Mexico and US ambassador to the UN from 1997 to 1998, told the crowd.

The Organization of Iranian American Communities (OIAC), a US-based, MEK-linked advocacy group, did not return MEE’s multiple requests for an interview about its lobbying efforts in the US.

Asked if the MEK has enough legitimacy to be an alternative to the Iranian government, as some of the group’s backers have said, Slavin told MEE: “No, not at all.”

But she added that not all the lawmakers who speak at MEK events are necessarily aware of the group’s history or supportive of the organisation itself. “They figure out, this group is opposed to the Iranian regime,” Slavin said. “They don’t look at the fine print; they don’t examine the history of the group.”

**MEK history**

The MEK started in Iran in 1965 as an ideologically driven, socialist and Islamist movement opposed to the dictatorial rule of Shah Mohammad Reza

Pahlavi. It joined the ranks of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 but ran afoul of the uprising's leader Ruhollah Khomeini shortly after Pahlavi's fall.

After facing a deadly crackdown by Iran's new authorities, the MEK embarked on a series of attacks on government officials and security forces. The group's members, led by Maryam Rajavi's husband, Massoud Rajavi, went into exile and eventually settled in Iraq in 1986. There, they sided with Saddam Hussein in his war against their home country.

The Iran-Iraq war raged from 1980 to 1988, as hundreds of thousands of people were killed and Iraqi forces openly used chemical weapons in battle. In a late stage of the war, MEK militants were at the forefront, leading a major incursion into Iranian territory, which was repelled by the country's military in 1988.

After the war, the MEK remained in Iraq, and according to some of its critics, including NIAC, the group helped Iraqi forces brutally put down Kurdish and Shia uprisings in the early 1990s - accusations that the MEK rejects.

During the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq that toppled Hussein, American forces bombed MEK bases in the country before reaching a ceasefire agreement with the group. Massoud Rajavi disappeared that year, and his whereabouts remain unknown, putting Maryam alone in charge of the organisation. Starting in 2009, the Iraqi government became more openly hostile to the MEK amid growing Iranian influence in Baghdad. As a result, the US led efforts to get the group's members out of Iraq and shutter their main base at Camp Ashraf outside the capital, where the group's members were confined after the invasion.

Once out of Iraq, the MEK began to resettle in Albania in 2013. A year earlier, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton removed the group from the State Department's terrorist blacklist - 15 years after it was originally added - allowing its members to work openly in the US.

During the debate about legalising the MEK in the US, New York Magazine contributor Elizabeth Rubin presciently warned that the group may use its new status to get Washington into war with Tehran.



“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,” she wrote in 2011, comparing it to the influence Iraqi exiles exerted on the US decision to invade Iraq.

“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.”

## **Blacklisting and popularity**

But not everyone views the MEK in a negative light, as anti-Iran hawks have questioned why the group ended up on the US’s terrorist blacklist in the first place.

Raymond Tanter, a political science professor who served on the White House’s National Security Council in the early 1980s, said he studied the history of the group and is convinced it is on the “right side of justice”.

In a recent interview with MEE, Tanter said former President Bill Clinton placed the Iranian dissidents on the list of foreign terrorist organisations in 1997 to appease Tehran. “They were there because the Clinton administration wanted to do a favour for some of the so-called ‘moderates’ who had been elected in Iran,” he said.

“[Supreme leader Ali] Khamenei was making sounds as [if] he was willing to negotiate, but those sounds became very, very hollow and nothing came of that.”

Tanter said he avoids using the term MEK because of its affiliation with the State Department’s blacklist, preferring to go with PMOI, which stands for the People’s Mujahideen of Iran.

Tanter told MEE that bipartisan support for the group stems mostly from the organising efforts of the OIAC advocacy group. He said the OIAC is composed of Iranian Americans from across the US, including many white-collar professionals.

Still, support in the halls of Congress does not necessarily translate into tangible influence on the ground. MEK's critics say the group has no representation inside Iran itself, where the people loathe the movement because of its militant history.

“They don't have a following in Iran; in fact, they are widely detested for siding with the regime of Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war,” Slavin said. “They have no constituency in the country.”

With a lack of independent reporting in Iran and the underground nature of MEK activities there, it is difficult to ascertain what level of support the group has among Iranians.

Tanter, however, said the MEK's popularity can be measured by the Iranian government's stated concern about it. Citing recent research by his students at Georgetown University, Tanter said the Iranian government incessantly mentions the MEK. “Attention paid is an indicator of the significance of the PMOI and the larger NCRI have in Iran,” he said.

Slavin dismissed that argument, however, saying the Iranian government shows concern about the MEK because it views the group as a proxy for Saudi Arabia and Israel. “The MEK has committed acts of terrorism in Iran; let's be real about this,” Slavin told MEE.

## **Militant past**

Seven years ago, NBC News cited two US officials as saying that Israeli-trained MEK operatives were behind the assassination of five Iranian nuclear scientists between 2007 and 2012. The group denied the report at the time, calling it a “sheer lie”.

Still, the MEK has been accused of being responsible for a string of attacks throughout its history.

In 2006, a US State Department report said the MEK carried out a series of deadly attacks in Iran, blaming the movement for a 1981 bombing in Tehran that claimed the lives of dozens of top Iranian officials, including Chief Jus-

tice Mohammad Beheshti. The group also openly conducted violent raids on Iranian embassies across the world in 1992.

Moreover, in the pre-revolution era in Iran, the MEK was behind “bombings and shootings directed against American military personnel stationed in Iran”, former US State Department official Daniel Benjamin wrote in a Politico column in 2016.

But that militant past is behind the MEK now, said Kazem Kazerounian, an engineering professor at the University of Connecticut who spoke at the pro-MEK rally in Washington in June. Kazerounian called the movement an “organised, legitimate resistance to the tyranny of the Iranian regime”.

“Currently, they’re not violent; they’re not a military organisation,” he told MEE. Kazerounian said members of the group are the “key organisers” of peaceful protests inside Iran, and added that the MEK’s ongoing struggle against the Iranian government gives it credibility.

“In the lack of possibility of having a democratic election - which actually we would like to get as soon as this regime falls - resistance is the basis of legitimacy of the [MEK-dominated] National Council of Resistance of Iran,” Kazerounian said.

Yet for a group that advocates gender equality and says it is the main pro-democracy Iranian faction, the MEK does little to hide its ties to the ultraconservative, autocratic government of Saudi Arabia.

MEK rallies often feature pro-Saudi speakers and sometimes even Saudi officials. For instance, Turki al-Faisal, a Saudi prince, former intelligence chief and key diplomat, addressed MEK rallies in Paris in 2016 and 2017, prompting accusations from Tehran that Riyadh supports terrorism.

Salman al-Ansari, president of the Saudi American Public Relations Affairs Committee, a pro-Riyadh lobby group in Washington, also spoke at the MEK conference in Albania on 13 July. He was repeatedly interrupted by cheers from MEK supporters as he bashed Iran in both Arabic and Farsi.

“I tell you clearly, as a Saudi citizen who loves and adores his country and an Arab proud of his Arabism and a Muslim honoured by his religion... we are all Ashrafi,” he said, paying tribute to the MEK’s base in Albania, known as Camp Ashraf-3.

## Cult of Rajavi

The Saudis are not the only foreign officials to attend MEK events. Former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper spoke at the group’s conference this month in Albania, where he was joined by dozens of legislators and ex-ministers from around the world, including former US senator and Democratic vice-presidential candidate Joe Lieberman and parliament members from across the Middle East.

Most of the speakers denounced Iran and sang the praises of Maryam Rajavi and the MEK.

But Rajavi was not always so revered in Western capitals. In 2003, she was briefly detained in Paris along with dozens of MEK members on terrorism charges. A decade later, she released a 10-point plan for the MEK in which she pledged support for free elections, gender equality, abolishing the death penalty and ending Iran’s nuclear programme.

Still, one provision of the manifesto seemed to address lingering concerns among the MEK’s Western backers about the group’s communist ideology - vowing to respect private property and a free-market economy.

The 2006 State Department report says the MEK mixes “Marxism, feminism, nationalism and Islam”. Indeed, the group’s original logo showcases communist symbols, including a sickle and red star, below a verse from the Quran that praises those who struggle - the mujahideen.

The group’s leftist beliefs may appear to make it a strange bedfellow of right-wing hawks such as Bolton and Harper. But Tanter, the political science professor, said he has spoken to many MEK members and found them to be to the “right of” US Senator Bernie Sanders, who describes himself as a Democratic socialist.

Ideology aside, rights groups have decried the MEK's treatment of its own members. The movement requires complete devotion to the Rajavis and the organisation, and a 2005 Human Rights Watch report accused the group of asking its followers to divorce their spouses to be fully dedicated to the MEK. HRW also said the group has committed violations "ranging from detention and persecution of ordinary members wishing to leave the organisation, to lengthy solitary confinements, severe beatings, and torture of dissident members".

In 2009, Rand Corporation, a California-based think-tank, said the MEK started demanding "near-religious devotion to the Rajavis" from its members in the 1980s. In addition, the MEK forced its followers to remain celibate and cut ties to friends and relatives, the Rand report said.

And to make up for a drop in popularity tied to its alliance with Iraq's Saddam Hussein, the group started recruiting Iranian economic migrants in the Middle East under false pretences - promising jobs and visas to Western countries, the report found.

Despite these reports about its activities, the MEK remains shrouded in secrecy - and its complex ideological foundation is hard to fully understand, Slavin said.

Put simply, she said: "It's a cult."

This article is available in French on Middle East Eye French edition.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Will the Presence of Iran's MEK Threaten Albania's Already Shaky Stability?

Frida Ghitis

July 18, 2019

It might have seemed like a barely consequential item amid another torrent of breaking news. But word that President Donald Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, just attended the annual gathering of a controversial Iranian opposition group at its unlikely base in Albania should raise flags for many reasons, not least of which are concerns for Albania's troubled and fragile democracy.



If Albania is now unexpectedly drawn into one of today's most dangerous geopolitical conflicts—the one pitting Iran against the United States, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states—the timing couldn't be worse. The country is in the midst of a full-blown political crisis that has at times turned violent and whose outcome is still uncertain. A member of NATO, Albania has also been trying unsuccessfully to join the European Union for years; its current domestic turmoil makes that goal even more distant.



# Will the Presence of Iran's MEK Threaten Albania's Already Shaky Stability?

Fidda GARIB | Thursday, July 18, 2019



President Donald Trump's attorney and former New York mayor, Rudy Giuliani addresses a rally organized by the Iranian exile group Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK, in Warsaw, Poland, Feb. 13, 2019 (AP Photo/Dan Szlachetka)

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Access the article from [here](#).



This Iranian opposition group was labeled a terrorist organization. Now it has supporters in the White House

Melissa Etehad

July 29, 2019

For decades, the United States categorized the Mujahedin Khalq, or MEK, as a terrorist organization. In the Trump era, members of the Iranian dissident group, which seeks to topple the government in Iran, have found key allies in Washington.

Los Angeles Times

People close to President Trump, including national security advisor John Bolton, and Trump's personal lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, are supporters of the Mujahedin Khalq. For years, Bolton and Giuliani have called for a change of government in Tehran and have described the Mujahedin Khalq as a viable alternative to the government of the Islamic Republic.

This month, Giuliani appeared at a Mujahedin Khalq conference in Albania, where he gave a speech condemning the Islamic Republic and described the



WORLD & NATION

# This Iranian opposition group was labeled a terrorist organization. Now it has supporters in the White House



Mujahedin Khalq members wave Iranian flags during the conference, titled "120 Years of Struggle of the Iranian People for Freedom," at the Ashraf-3 camp, a base for the Iranian group, in Manza, Albania, on July 13, 2019. (Gent Shkullaku / AFP/Getty Images)

group as a “government in exile.”

“This is a group that we can support. It’s a group we should stop maligning and it’s a group that should make us comfortable having regime change,” Giuliani said to a cheering audience.

During a 2017 Mujahedin Khalq conference in Paris, Bolton told a room filled with its members that U.S. policy should be “the overthrow of the mullahs’ regime in Tehran.”

He added, “There is a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs and that

opposition is centered in this room today.”

Both Giuliani and Bolton have received tens of thousands of dollars from the group in exchange for speaking at its rallies and conferences.

Founded five decades ago by leftist students in Iran who opposed the Western-backed monarchy of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, the Mujahedin Khalq is an insular organization with a militant past. Many Iranians despise the group and from 1997 to 2012, it was on the U.S. State Department’s list of terrorist organizations in part because of its bloody attacks in the 1970s that left American diplomats and businessmen dead.

The Mujahedin Khalq and its supporters claim that the group stands for a free and democratic Iran and that its decades-long struggle has helped make it the most qualified opposition group. But critics and human rights organizations describe the group as a cult, and many lawmakers and State Department officials don’t believe it has popular support or influence.

The group has a history of networking with U.S. politicians on both ends of the political spectrum.

“Different people come and go with each administration. We’ve had the same position and demands over the years no matter who is in the White House,” said Alireza Jafarzadeh, deputy director of the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a Mujahedin Khalq-linked group based in Washington.

But despite its continued lack of support among many in Washington, the Mujahedin Khalq feels emboldened now that tensions with Tehran have escalated and it has key supporters who have Trump’s ear. “I can’t recall in the past 40 years seeing such a two-year period where there’s been lots of developments shaping Iran,” said Jafarzadeh.

The Mujahedin Khalq, founded in the early 1960s by husband-and-wife team Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, carried out a series of terrorist attacks during the 1970s against Iran in which several U.S. military personnel and civilians who were working on defense projects in Tehran were killed, according to a 1994 U.S. State Department report.

The group also helped the country's Shiite Muslim clerics topple the shah during the 1979 revolution. But it didn't take long before the newly formed conservative theocracy headed by anti-Western Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to view the Mujahedin Khalq as a rival.

About 2,000 members of the group relocated to Iraq during the 1980s.

In addition to providing shelter, then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein armed the group with heavy military equipment. During the Iran-Iraq war, its members teamed with Baghdad in an attempt to take down the Islamic Republic. Iraq remained a safe haven for the Mujahedin Khalq for nearly two decades.

Throughout that time, the group continued to launch attacks inside Iran and on its embassies abroad. The State Department described the Mujahedin Khalq in its 1994 report as "the single most violent underground group" in Iran.

"Shunned by most Iranians and fundamentally undemocratic," the report said, the Mujahedin Khalq is not "a viable alternative to the current government of Iran."

U.S. relations with the group, however, grew complicated after the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Although the group disarmed and was confined to Camp Ashraf, a 14 square-mile former Iraqi military base, the new Iraqi government wanted its members to leave. Faced with a potential humanitarian crisis, officials in Washington sought to find the Mujahedin Khalq a new home.

Daniel Benjamin, the State Department counter-terrorism coordinator under then-President Obama, said that was a factor in removing the Mujahedin Khalq from its list of foreign terrorist groups.

"All these people were the subject of violence, that's what really caused the U.S. to look at the issue ... to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe," Benjamin said.

Eventually the U.S. brokered a deal with the government of Albania.

“The Albanian government basically wanted reassurance that they weren’t a terrorist group. I didn’t promote them as an ideal group but they didn’t deserve to be slaughtered,” said Daniel Fried, who was tasked by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to find a country that would accept Mujahedin Khalq members.

Their future looked grim up until after the presidential election in 2016, when Trump’s “maximum pressure campaign” on Iran became American policy.

Already, several policies that the Mujahedin Khalq had long advocated for, such as designating Iran’s Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist group and placing U.S. sanctions on Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have been implemented under Trump.

“This administration sees ‘the enemy of my enemy as my friend.’ So any organization that opposes that Islamic Republic is fine by them,” said Barbara Slavin, the head of the Future of Iran Initiative at the Atlantic Council. “The administration knows it makes the Iranian government crazy. It sends a message of animosity.”

But the extent to which the Mujahedin Khalq can gain stronger credibility in Washington — even during the Trump administration — remains uncertain.

“The MEK has American blood on its hands. No serious observer or scholar of the region that I’ve met has thought that the MEK was remotely acceptable to any significant percentage of the Iranian people,” Benjamin said.

And in recent months some officials in the Trump administration have taken steps to distance it from the Mujahedin Khalq.

In April, Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo met privately with a small group of Iranian Americans in Dallas. Michael Payma, an attorney, was one of those people invited to attend the roughly hourlong conversation.

“Pompeo said he knows Giuliani and Bolton have had some kind of relation-

ship with the MEK, but he made it clear that neither him nor the president have any association with the group,” Payma recalled.

In June, Brian Hook, U.S. special representative for Iran, reiterated those points when he told reporters that the State Department meets with all members of the Iranian diaspora and that the future of Iran will be decided by its people, not the United States.

“We have been, I think, zealously neutral with respect to groups who all care very much about the future of Iran, and that’s going to be something which the people of Iran decide for themselves,” Hook said.

Regardless, Washington’s cozier relations with the Mujahedin Khalq has Tehran concerned.

In recent years, there has been an uptick in attacks against the group by Iran. Two Iranian suspected of surveilling the Mujahedin Khalq were arrested in Albania in 2018, and an Iranian diplomat in Vienna was arrested on suspicion of plotting to bomb a Mujahedin Khalq rally outside Paris.

Nader Karimi Juni, a Tehran-based analyst, said Iran is on edge because the Mujahedin Khalq has members and supporters in positions of power in the U.S. and Europe.

“Iran has good reason to regard the MEK as a threat,” Juni said.

Special correspondent Ramin Mostaghim in Tehran contributed to this report.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## MEK: Totalitarian Cult or Iran's Brightest Hope for "Democracy"?

Sina Azodi and Giorgio Cafiero

August 5, 2019

Certain Trump administration officials favor the US government supporting the MEK, an Iranian opposition group exiled in Albania. Yet a look at the MEK's history paints a disturbing picture that should give officials in Washington major concerns about any plans for enhancing US cooperation with the organization.



The People's Mujahedin of Iran, or Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), has a dark history of violence and acts of terrorism against American interests. Established in the 1960s, the Marxist-Islamist group killed members of the Shah's security apparatus on the streets of Iranian cities. Anti-American to its core, the MEK quickly earned a negative reputation in Washington for killing six US citizens, and for targeting American-owned hotels, airlines, and energy companies in Iran. The lyrics from an MEK song illustrate the vitriol which the organization held for

the US during its early years: “Death to America by blood and bonfire on the lips of every Muslim is the cry of the Iranian people.”

The revolutionary student-led group played an important role in the Shah’s 1979 ouster. However, after Ayatollah Khomeini’s ascendancy and the Islamic Republic’s consolidation of power, Khomeini and his loyalists refused to share power with their former ally and began to crackdown on MEK protests. MEK responded by accusing Khomeini’s loyalists of monopolizing power, and then resorted to acts of violence and terrorism, including the bombing of the Office of the Prime Minister, killing both President Mohammad-Ali Rajai and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar.

Having been forced to take refuge in Iraq under Saddam Hussein’s protection, the MEK sided with Baghdad in the eight-year conflict with Iran. In 1986, Saddam Hussein provided the MEK with a military base at Camp Ashraf, located 50 miles from the Iranian border. From there, the organization waged attacks in Iran with arms provided by the Iraqi government. Immediately after the implementation of the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq in 1988, roughly 7,000 Iraqi-backed MEK fighters launched Operation Forugh-e Javidan (Eternal Light) aiming to oust the regime in Tehran, only to be crushed in a counter-offensive days later by Iranian forces. In 1999, the MEK took its revenge by assassinating Lieutenant General Ali Sayyad-Shirazi, Deputy Chief of Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff, who had suppressed the MEK’s incursion.

As part of its overture to Iran, former President Bill Clinton’s administration designated the MEK a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In 2002, when President George W. Bush was seeking to build up international support for his plans to invade Iraq, he cited Saddam Hussein’s record of sponsoring “terrorist organizations that direct violence against Iran, Israel, and Western governments”, a tacit reference to Baghdad’s patronage of the MEK. Meanwhile, in the post-Saddam environment, more figures in the US government began to view the MEK as a tool to pressure the Islamic Republic. As such, the US military began secretly training the MEK in Nevada. “We did train them here, and washed them through the Energy Department because the Department of Energy owns all this land in southern Nevada,” a former

senior US intelligence official told investigative journalist Seymour Hersh.

In Baghdad however, the Shi'a government no longer welcomed MEK's presence in Iraq, and tacitly allowed the Iranian military to attack MEK's base on its territory. By 2012, when it became clear that the MEK had no security in Iraq, the Obama administration, under much pressure from well-funded lobbyists, removed the group from the State Department's FTO list. Meanwhile, the US government reached a secret deal that would relocate roughly 3,000 MEK members from Iraq, where they no longer had security, to Albania. As one former US diplomat involved in the deal explained, the relocation agreement had to be done secretly given the extent to which many government officials in France, Iraq, and Iran would have objected had they been aware of it at the time.

As the MEK openly calls for the overthrow of the Iranian government, and the recognition of Maryam Rajavi (the wife of MEK's founder) as Iran's next leader, the group has garnered strong support from Trump administration officials. But how, one must ask, has a Marxist-Islamist group that defined itself based on an ideology hostile to America gained popularity in Washington?

MEK's role in exposing Iran's nuclear activities during the early 2000s, gained the support of DC, where some officials unwisely began seeing it as a force capable of leading Iran into a post-Islamic Republic. Credible reports further suggest that MEK has paid handsome speaking fees to US officials for their appearance. Addressing MEK's "Free Iran" conference in 2017, National Security Advisor John Bolton proclaimed that "the only solution is to change the [Iranian] regime itself." Bolton also predicted that before 2019 "we here will celebrate in Tehran." In January 2019, Ayatollah Khamenei, told a Qom audience that "... one of the US politicians [Bolton] said that he hopes and wishes to celebrate this year's Christmas in Tehran. Christmas celebration was a few days ago... they are truly first-class idiots."

Vagueness and a lack of transparency surround the MEK's source(s) of funding. Numerous investigative journalists in Albania have explored this question. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia shows support for the MEK politically, yet there is no solid evidence to back up the common assumption that



the Saudi government finances the group.

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## The Regime Change Debate

Fortunately for Tehran, opposition to the Islamic Republic has been fragmented. Deep divisions between various opposing factions—including the MEK, monarchists, and various non-Persian ethnic minorities —have thwarted the establishment of any unified opposition. As the Middle East expert Borzou Daragahi recently explained, a common perception among Iran's ethnic minorities is that for all their reasons to loathe the Islamic Republic regime, both the MEK and the monarchists would be more hostile to them than their ruling government.

Daragahi also noted that officials in Tehran do not perceive the MEK as a grave threat to the regime's survival, using it instead as a prop to persuade more Iranians that the "opposition" is dark and beholden to hostile foreign powers targeting Iran since 1979.

Realistically, the MEK lacks any means to mobilize support in Iran for an overthrow of the regime. Furthermore, if there is one thing that unites all Iranians of different affiliations, it is the loathing for a cult that sided with Iraq during its war against their homeland. But for American and British officials who vocally support it, public displays of solidarity with the MEK serve to enrage Iran's government. They, on the other hand, continue to isolate the country politically and depress its economy through comprehensive sanctions. However, beyond angering those in power in Tehran, it is not clear what the US could achieve by providing more support to the MEK.

Notwithstanding objections to the MEK on moral grounds, it makes little sense to sponsor an organization that is struggling to survive, and has no support within the Iranian population. Since relocating to Albania, approx-

imately 1,000 MEK members have left the group's base outside of Tirana. The MEK later accused 40 of its former members, who subsequently held protests against it in Albania's capital, of being "agents of the Iranian regime." Hence, it is difficult to imagine a group, which still castigates its defecting members, successfully orchestrating a regime change in Iran, let alone one that is coordinated from southeastern Europe.

Shrouded in secrecy and controversy while harmed by global media reports about its conduct in Albania, the MEK has justified its reputation as a cult organization. After the disappearance of her husband Massoud, the 65-year-old Maryam Rajavi has been living in a delusional dream that one day she and her "followers" will march on Tehran to lead a revolution that ends the Islamic Republic. More realistically, MEK's supporters in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the US, will continue heaping praise on the group and support its formal and social media campaigns, which align with their anti-Iran agendas.

Yet none of the actors that want to see the Iranian regime fall should have any reason to believe that the MEK is a reliable actor capable of bringing about the desired outcome. It seems though that they all have reached the conclusion that supporting the MEK can be an effective tool to harass the Islamic Republic and use the group that the State Department once had on its FTO list as a bargaining tool. Nevertheless, Washington policy makers should keep in mind that regardless of the fate of the Islamic Republic, the widely despised MEK will have no political future in Iran.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## We asked Canadian politicians why they engaged with a ‘cult’-like group from Iran

Shenaz Kermalli

August 9, 2019

It looked like a scene from *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Two glittering flags projected on jumbo screens behind a well-known politician as he addressed a massive gathering, flanked by women dressed in identical red headscarves and black-and-white overcoats.

But this was no Republic of Gilead: it was rural Albania, the flags were Canadian, and the politician — former prime minister Stephen Harper — was addressing Iranian men and women, alongside dignitaries from at least 10 different countries.

“I am delighted to be here because there are few causes in this world today more important at this moment than what you are pursuing — the right of the people of Iran to change their government, and their right to do it through freedom and the power of the ballot box,” Harper declared to loud applause last month.

CANADA'S  
**NATIONAL  
OBSERVER**



Clockwise from top left: Stephen Harper addresses a MEK-linked event, Conservative MP Michael Cooper, former public prosecutor and MP David Kilgour, Conservative Senator Linda Frum and former Liberal attorney-general Irwin Cotler

Harper was speaking at an event hosted by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, which the U.S. government-funded think tank RAND Corporation describes as “exclusively controlled” by the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK).

Peculiar as it may have appeared to Canadian viewers, the setting was not an unfamiliar one to many Canadian political figures. For almost a decade now, Liberal and Conservative Parliamentarians have attended gatherings or spoken, as Harper did, at events linked to the MEK.

The Iranian opposition group aims to replace Iran’s theocracy with a secular, democratic and Western-facing government. It was previously listed as a terrorist entity in Canada, before Harper’s government dropped the group from the list in 2012, after the United States and the European Union did so. It has long renounced political violence.

The MEK now works closely with powerful hardliners in the White House, including U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton. But the MEK has also been described in other terms.

RAND, for example described the MEK in 2009 as possessing “many of the typical characteristics of a cult.” Such characteristics, it wrote, include “authoritarian control, confiscation of assets, sexual control (including mandatory divorce and celibacy), emotional isolation, forced labor, sleep deprivation, physical abuse, and limited exit options.”

More recently, investigative reports published by The Intercept, British broadcaster Channel 4 and Al Jazeera English have depicted MEK “troll farms” where members create thousands of inauthentic accounts on a daily basis and promote hashtags and tweets, targeting anyone that favours diplomacy with Iran. Human Rights Watch has reported that MEK leaders force people to issue false confessions.

In 2006, the National Post published an extensive report about a Canadian family that got wrapped up in the group. And in 2003, Neda Hassani, a 26-year-old Carleton University student, became a martyr for the MEK when she set herself on fire in front of the French embassy in London to protest the arrest of its leader by police in France.

**‘They help create the illusion of legitimacy’**

Video and documents available online show several current parliamentarians have attended MEK functions or given speeches, including Conservative Senator Linda Frum, Conservative MP Michael Cooper, Conservative MP Candice Bergen, Liberal MP Judy Sgro and Liberal MP Michael Levitt.

As well, along with Harper, other former politicians have interacted with the MEK in recent years, including Harper’s former foreign affairs minister John Baird, former Conservative MP Paul Forseth, former Liberal minister of justice and attorney-general Irwin Cotler and David Kilgour, a former public prosecutor and MP.

The fact that current and former Canadian politicians attend MEK events is deeply problematic, argues Stephanie Carvin, who worked as a national security analyst with the government of Canada at the time the MEK was a listed terrorist entity.

Politicians attending MEK events “help create the illusion of legitimacy,” said Carvin, who is now an assistant professor of international relations at Carleton University. “It also creates the perception of influence.”

National Observer sought comment from the Canadian political figures that have directly engaged with the MEK in recent years. Of those contacted, Frum, Cooper, Cotler’s policy director and Kilgour responded.

Emails sent to the Liberal and Conservative caucuses, asking whether they were comfortable with MPs attending MEK events, were not answered.

Sylvain Leclerc, a media relations spokesperson for Global Affairs Canada said: “Canada closely follows political activity related to Iran. Canada supports free, inclusive and peaceful political activity and strongly condemns violence in all its forms.”

Shahram Golestaneh, an Iranian-Canadian activist who has been described as “the leader” of the MEK in Canada, initially agreed to an interview via email on July 15, but then subsequently did not respond to questions on July 16.

Those questions pertained to his role in the MEK or its affiliated groups, Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran or the Iran Democratic Association, which lists an Ottawa address and whose homepage espouses MEK literature and videos, as well as what its objectives are and which Canadian politicians it has had success lobbying.

Follow-up queries to Golestaneh on July 22 and August 1 also did not receive responses. On July 23 and July 31, further attempts to contact several other spokespeople for the organization through their website and social media accounts were left unanswered.

‘Engaging is not endorsing’

In 2017, Frum and Cotler were photographed together at an event organized by the Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran. Frum and Cotler have categorically denied any affiliation with or support of the MEK.

At the event, Frum delivered a speech, published on her website, in which she

appears to call Golestaneh (spelled Goledani in the online version) and other travelling delegations “true heroes.”

When contacted by National Observer, Frum wrote in an emailed response, “I am not affiliated with any lobby group. I believe it’s important to remain independent.”

“I have never attended events in support of the MEK,” she added. “Do I support Iranian regime change? Yes. Do I support or endorse the MEK or any other specific opposition party or group? No...I have never expressed support for anything other than freedom and human rights in Iran.”

When asked to explain the photographic evidence and her endorsement of Golestaneh, Frum said: “The event you are questioning was not in support of the MEK.”

In a separate email, she wrote, “Are you a journalist or an Iranian regime activist? Based on your line of questioning, your unwillingness to take repeated clarifications at face value, I presume it is the regime that is shaping your views.”

On Twitter, Frum has interacted with @heshmatalavi, the account for a purported journalist by the name of “Heshmat Alavi” who has published scores of opinion articles on Iran. A report by The Intercept last month discovered “Alavi” was in fact a fake persona managed by a trio of MEK members.

When asked why she followed MEK-identified accounts, and for comment on the Intercept’s findings, Frum responded: “‘Engaging’ on social media is not the same as endorsing.”

A ‘high-calibre’ delegation

In a video posted by an MEK-affiliated Twitter account last year, Michael Cooper, the Conservative justice critic and MP for St. Albert—Edmonton, is shown expressing his solidarity with the people of Iran who “every day risk their lives to stand up for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and to see an end to the brutal theocratic regime.”

In a phone interview, Cooper said he last attended MEK's summer rally in 2016 and that he hasn't been able to go again for scheduling reasons. He is drawn to attending their events, he said, because Iran is "the biggest exporter of terrorism and the greatest destabilizing force in the Middle East."

"What's been interesting in the last year or so is that the demonstrations (2017-18 street protests) have been taking place all over the country in areas that were once believed to be regime strongholds...it's encouraging to see."

Several MEK defectors based in Albania, Canada and Belgium told National Observer the MEK's internet unit was active during these public protests over inflation, unemployment and inequality.

When asked what he thought about MEK's "cult"-like practices, Cooper said: "they are one movement among many others that seek an end to the Iranian regime."

"What you'll find is that their Paris rally is a high-calibre delegation of world leaders, including Howard Dean," he said. Dean is the former chair of the U.S. Democratic National Committee. "I support their efforts along with all efforts on the part of Iranian dissidents to see the end of the regime."

## **A 'message of peace and justice'**

Cotler is the founder and chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights in Montreal, an emeritus professor of law at McGill University and a human rights lawyer.

Photos and video show Cotler appearing at events for Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran and the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

Cotler's policy director, Brandon Silver, said Cotler has not offered support or endorsement to the MEK, and "appearing or speaking at a venue would not imply endorsement of the host, it is the content and nature of this engagement that would be relevant."

"Indeed, Professor Cotler has in the past indicated to me that he would not



have a problem speaking at an event run by the Iranian authorities, as long as it was an opportunity that allowed him to speak on behalf of those unjustly imprisoned, tortured, and murdered, and to share his message of peace and justice for the people and publics of Iran,” he added.

Members of the Canadian Parliamentary Subcommittee on International Human Rights invite witnesses to highlight the domestic repression and rights abuses perpetrated by Iran’s government. In 2014, MEK leader Maryam Rajavi was invited to testify in Ottawa.

Cotler has co-sponsored Iran Accountability Week since its inception in 2012, but denies personally endorsing any of the invited witnesses.

‘Resilient’ freedom fighters

Of all former MPs who have engaged with the MEK in recent years, David Kilgour appears to be among the most directly involved. A retired MP and former lawyer, Kilgour currently sits as co-chair of Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran, which he said has “no membership or budget.”

“We do support Mrs. Rajavi,” Kilgour told National Observer. “I’ve read about her, met her, talked to her...everything she stands for in her 10-point plan — no nuclear weapons for Iran, equality for men and women, democracy — all these things presumably you and I and everyone else from the democratic world stand for.”

When asked for comment on recent media reports that detail its cultish practices, Kilgour said he had seen no evidence of authoritarian control or forced labour during recent escorted political delegation visits to an MEK compound, Camp Ashraf in Iraq.

“I was a public prosecutor for 10 years and I hope no one’s more opposed to the sort of thing you’re talking about than I am,” he said.

In notes he prepared and published online for an MEK international broadcast held at Sandy Hill Community Centre in Ottawa last December, Kilgour quotes heavily from Struan Stevenson, a former Scottish member of the European Parliament. “I believe Struan Stevenson is a completely honest man

who tries to write only what he knows and believes to be true,” he said.

Stevenson’s account relates how the new compound has been constructed by “hard-working and resilient freedom fighters” into “a small city, with shops, clinics, sports facilities, kitchens, bakeries, dormitory blocks, meeting halls, offices and studios. He said the MEK men and women are free to come and go as they please and journalists, politicians, lawyers and trades people visit frequently.

Kilgour suggested National Observer speak to his co-chair, Golestaneh, who he described as “the leader” of MEK in Canada.

‘Zero support’ inside Iran

Thomas Juneau, a former analyst for the Department of Defence who now teaches international affairs at the University of Ottawa, strongly refutes Kilgour’s account of the MEK.

It is “absolutely nonsense. And in most cases they (politicians who support or engage with it) know that is completely factually incorrect...it has zero support inside Iran,” he said.

The MEK being a “cult” is a fact that is uniformly accepted among non-partisan observers who have no skin in the game, he argued.

“It is a brutal, thuggish, corrupt group that is led in a completely dictatorial way by its leader,” he said.

“Supporting MEK as a democratic opposition doesn’t make sense when it’s not a democratic movement,” added Juneau, stating that he doesn’t see it being a serious player if the Islamic Republic of Iran ever falls. “Supporting it is not only pointless, but seriously counter productive.”

Canada-Iran relations are currently at loggerheads. The previous Conservative government under Harper cut diplomatic relations with Iran, shut its embassy in Tehran and kicked out Iranian diplomats from Canada.

The current Liberal government campaigned in 2015 on re-establishing dip-

lomatic relations but has been unable to do so.

Stéphane Shank, a media relations manager from the Privy Council Office, said the government has taken “the necessary steps to understand the possible threats to our democratic institutions, where they come from, and how they could affect our electoral processes.”

“Canada’s foreign policy is developed independently, grounded in an evidence-based approach, and above all, is centred on reflecting and advancing Canadian interests and values.”

It is not known whether any Canadian politicians are paid — outside of travel expenses — to attend MEK-affiliated conferences overseas, although many defectors who spoke to National Observer claimed they almost certainly are.

“They are masterminds of manipulation,” says Reza Sadeghi, a defector who used to work in the MEK’s fundraising section from Canada 30 years ago.

“Maryam Rajavi always talked about how many millions in dollars they paid to politicians to support us. Many gifts consisted of gold or Persian carpets, but it was mostly cash.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The White House Once Labeled Them Terrorists. Now They're Being Called Iran's Next Government

Jonathan Harounoff

August 13, 2019

As tensions between the United States and Iran continue to escalate, many in President Donald Trump's inner circle have called for swift regime change in Tehran — pledging support for a dissident Iranian opposition group currently headquartered in, of all places, rural Albania.

 HAARETZ

Despite its checkered history and only recent delisting as a terrorist organization, Mujahedeen Khalq — known as MEK — has garnered glowing endorsements from international policymakers who have described the group as a viable and democratic alternative to the “ayatollah regime.”

The MEK is not the only source of Iranian opposition to the Islamic Republic, of course. In recent years, Reza Pahlavi — the exiled crown prince of Iran's final monarch — has also emerged as a leading secular and democratic opponent to the regime

in Tehran. Pahlavi has called for nonviolent resistance and, in February 2019, launched an initiative called the Phoenix Project of Iran. According to the National Interest, this is “designed to bring the various strains of the opposition closer to a common vision for a post-clerical Iran.”

However, Pahlavi enjoys nowhere near as much U.S. support as the MEK. Ilan Berman, senior vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington, argues that this could be because while there are many opposition elements critical of the regime, the MEK is the only one to view itself as a viable alternative.

Last month, as the United States and Iran seemed to be edging closer to a full-on conflict, the MEK hosted a five-day conference at its Albanian base, which is known as Ashraf 3.

Trump’s personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, was the keynote speaker and was joined by other high-ranking luminaries, including former Democratic Sen. Joe Lieberman, Canada’s former Prime Minister Stephen Harper and British Conservative lawmaker Matthew Offord.

In a rousing speech, Giuliani lauded the MEK as a “government in exile” and a “group that we can support. It’s a group we should stop maligning and it’s a group that should make us comfortable having regime change.”

But Giuliani is not the only member of Trump’s coterie to be paid to speak at pro-MEK events: In June 2017, John Bolton headlined an MEK rally in Paris, shortly before joining Trump’s administration as national security adviser. (MEK expert and investigative journalist Joanne Stocker estimates that both men have been paid tens of thousands of dollars for their efforts.)

“I have said for over 10 years since coming to these events that the declared policy of the United States of America should be the overthrow of the mullahs’ regime in Iran,” Bolton told a rapturous crowd in 2017, adding that they would all be celebrating the collapse of the government before the end of the decade.

And since joining the Trump administration in April 2018, Bolton’s hawkish

attitude toward the Iranian government hasn't wavered. When Trump authorized, then canceled, a military strike on Iran in mid-June following the shooting down of a \$130 million U.S. drone over the Persian Gulf, The New York Times reported that Bolton was one of the most vocal proponents of military action.

## Deep pockets

The MEK's deep pockets have long been a source of intrigue in Washington. In addition to Bolton and Giuliani, other prominent politicians paid to speak in favor of the MEK at rallies and conferences include former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and several former heads of the CIA and FBI.

Active U.S. politicians, barred from accepting money directly from foreign entities while in office, have nevertheless allegedly received generous campaign donations. Joanne Stocker, an editor at media outlet The Defense Post who has been investigating the MEK for a decade, tells Haaretz that Rep. Brad Sherman (Democrat of California) received at least \$5,200 in campaign donations between 2004 and 2013, and that Rep. Judy Chu (Democrat of California), who was a vocal proponent of the MEK's delisting as a terrorist entity in 2012, pocketed at least \$27,500 between 2010 and 2013 in campaign contributions.

Stocker tells Haaretz that pro-MEK groups like the Organization of Iranian American Communities have played a crucial role in securing broad, bipartisan support in the United States for the opposition group by successfully portraying the group as a democratic, human rights-supporting alternative to the current regime. Stocker, whose findings are based on extensive interviews, public records and court filings, believes the money the MEK uses to pay its international supporters is coming from the Saudi government, which may see the dissident group as a strategic and ideological ally with a similarly antagonistic view toward the Tehran government.

This may be highlighted by the fact that Saudi officials and advocates regularly address MEK rallies. For instance, Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal, who is also a diplomat and politician, addressed several pro-MEK rallies in France in 2016 and 2017. More recently, Salman al-Ansari, the founder and president

of D.C.-based, pro-Saudi lobbying group SAPRAC, spoke at last month's MEK conference in Albania, declaring his commitment to the Iranian opposition in both Arabic and Farsi.

"I'm proud to be here with you and to fight against [Ayatollah Ali] Khomeini," Ansari said. "At the end of the day, the ruling mullahs in Iran will be overthrown."

## Evergreen support

The MEK has been able to sustain remarkably broad support from both Democrats and Republicans over the years — something I have spent the past six months probing. My investigation centered on the OIAC, an MEK-linked, all-volunteer advocacy group based in Washington that has allied with administration officials and congressional leaders of all political stripes in clamoring for regime change in Iran.

Former Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton, who was vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission and once publicly condemned the MEK in Congress, is now a firm supporter. Democratic Sen. Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Pelosi have also made cameo appearances at the OIAC's annual Nowruz (New Year) celebrations on Capitol Hill, reaffirming their party's support for the organization's agenda of securing a secular, democratic and nonnuclear Iran.

Dr. Majid Sadeghpour, who lives in Falls Church, Virginia, has been OIAC's political director since 2012. He tells me that his heart remains in the Iran he grew up in under the shah, but that he now despises the Islamic regime that recently celebrated its 40th birthday. "America's vibrant institutions embody democracy," he says, "which, unlike Iran's ayatollahs, strive for human rights and liberty for all."

By day, the 63-year-old Sadeghpour — thin as a rail, clean-shaven, bespectacled and with gray hair — administers medicines and health supplements behind the counter at his local pharmacy. Away from his day job, he is preparing for a revolution. For a new Iran.

For him, the future of Iran is in the tiny town of Manëz, western Albania, where the MEK is drawing up plans for the day the ayatollahs no longer rule Iran.

According to Sadeghpour, thousands of Iranian Americans living in more than 40 U.S. states, from Hawaii to Connecticut, share this vision. And, as Bolton and Giuliani have shown, so do some prominent American statesmen.

## The hypocrites

The MEK's origins can be traced back to the mid-1960s when a group of leftist, Marxist and Islamist graduate students from Tehran University joined together to oppose the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Headed by a charismatic revolutionary named Massoud Rajavi, the group briefly joined forces with the Islamists who would eventually oust the shah and bring Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to power in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

However, the MEK's alliance with Khomeini was short-lived. When MEK members, including Rajavi, were banned from running for office in the new theocracy, the group resorted to violence — including a bombing attack on Khomeini's party headquarters in Tehran that killed more than 70 leading Islamist officials.

Some of the MEK's leadership then fled to Europe, but most of the group's rank and file crossed the border into Iraq in 1986, midway through the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq's then-president, Saddam Hussein, who had recently invaded Iran to claim territorial sovereignty over strategic areas of the Euphrates River, offered them protection, funding, equipment and military training. The MEK pledged loyalty to Saddam in return, and its members were sent on martyrdom missions to capture strategic Iranian territory.

One such mission — known as Operation Eternal Light — was botched in July 1988, resulting in Iran's Revolutionary Guard detaining and executing more than 2,000 MEK members. Today, many Iranians still refer to the MEK as monafeghan, or hypocrites, for fighting alongside Saddam and taking up arms against fellow Iranians.



In 1997, the Clinton administration designated the MEK a foreign terrorist organization for its violent activities, including a wave of attacks on Iranian embassies worldwide in the early '90s and the assassination of U.S. colonels and officers who had been stationed in Iran in the '70s. Canada and the European Union followed suit in the early 2000s.

In 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq, Massoud Rajavi vanished, leading most analysts to assume he had been killed. The MEK never confirmed his death but his wife, Maryam Rajavi, has since assumed leadership of the movement.

Saddam's overthrow in 2003 spelled the end of the MEK's welcome in Iraq; the group could no longer rely on Iraqi protection and funding. Later that year, the Iraqi Governing Council passed a resolution that called for the total expulsion of all elements of the MEK from the country.

The U.S. military disarmed and rounded up more than 3,500 MEK fighters into the group's then-base, Camp Ashraf, to protect members from attacks by Iraqi security forces and Iran's Revolutionary Guard, while exploring resettlement options for the group outside of Iraq.

A decade later, in September 2012, the Americans delisted the group as a foreign terrorist organization, allowing the Obama administration to more easily negotiate the MEK's resettlement to Albania a year later.

Overwhelming pressure had come from an elite group of former CIA and FBI directors, including Porter Goss and James Woolsey, and Gen. James Jones (President Barack Obama's first national security adviser), while even renowned journalists like Carl Bernstein argued that the MEK had positively refashioned itself, and that its terrorist designation might be interpreted as an invitation for Iraqi and Iranian agents to attack MEK members who had not committed acts of violence for decades.

"The United States has a duty to 3,500 people whose fate they simply left behind with the departure of the American military forces" from Iraq, said Bernstein in a 2012 speech at a pro-MEK symposium in Manhattan's Waldorf Astoria. Bernstein later disclosed to Pro Publica that he was paid \$12,000 for

his appearance, but was not there “as an advocate” but as someone “who believes in basic human rights and their inalienable status.”

Since the MEK’s move to Albania, Iranian historian Ervand Abrahamian tells Haaretz in a telephone interview, the group has focused less on combat training and more on bolstering its public image on social media, and also carrying out cyberattacks on critics and defectors. An investigation by The Intercept in June found that “Heshmat Alavi” — a supposed anti-regime Iranian activist who had written for Forbes, The Hill and other outlets — was in fact a persona invented by the MEK, resurfacing concerns over the group’s antidemocratic and anti-liberal tendencies. The group’s sophisticated cyber operations and social media presence have also provoked discussions over the true extent and breadth of the MEK’s support, both abroad and in Iran.

The controversies didn’t end there. The reaction by Albanians to having the MEK in their midst did not seem favorable after an Albanian police “threat assessment” from early 2018 — obtained by Britain’s Channel 4 later that year — concluded that MEK members had been “deeply indoctrinated, been part of military structures and had participated in acts of war and terror.”

The MEK’s move from Iraq to Albania in 2013 also led to a rapid increase in defections, with former members going public about the realities of life under the MEK in Iraq and Albania.

A former MEK intelligence officer, Massoud Khodabandeh, tells Haaretz in an email interview that the group was no longer the highly organized and influential student-led movement of the ’70s that opposed the shah. By the ’80s, Khodabandeh says, the MEK had evolved almost unrecognizably into a violent, anti-ayatollah and pro-Saddam guerrilla organization that had no clear objectives other than pledging unwavering loyalty to the Rajavis.

Another defector, Masoud Banisadr, spoke about gender segregation and how families were torn apart at MEK camps. Children were forcibly separated from their parents, celibacy was enforced and love was criminalized, he alleged — unless that love was directed toward the Rajavis. Members had to divorce their spouses because “we were ordered to surrender our soul, heart and mind to [Massoud] Rajavi,” Banisadr told Vice News in 2014. “The idea

was that we were in a war to take back Iran, so you cannot have a family until the war is won,” he said. In 1990, as couples under MEK control in Iraq were forced to divorce, wedding rings were allegedly replaced with pendant necklaces adorned with Massoud Rajavi’s face. Operatives were also required to attend weekly “cleansing” sessions where they would confess their sexual thoughts.

The MEK did not respond to multiple requests for comment sent to its European-based affiliate, the National Council of Resistance of Iran.

## **Ideological alignment**

I first met Majid Sadeghpour last September, at the Sheraton Hotel near New York’s Times Square. We were there for the OIAC’s flagship “Iran Uprising” summit. Security was extra tight that day, Sadeghpour later told me, not only because 25 Iranians had been killed at a military parade in southwest Iran earlier that morning, but because the OIAC believes regime spies have infiltrated past summits, monitoring the activities of Stateside dissidents. In July 2018, Reuters reported that an Iranian diplomat was arrested on suspicion of plotting a bomb attack on a “Free Iran” rally attended by OIAC members in Paris.

The only difference Sadeghpour sees between Iran’s pro-government agents and groups like ISIS is that “in Iran, they’re hiding behind a diplomatic veil.”

More than 1,500 Iranian-American delegates attended the New York summit, cheering on Giuliani (who made an in-person appearance) and a tribute video that marked the passing of Sen. John McCain.

Many Iranian Americans — even those with family still in Iran who were impacted by Trump’s January 2017 travel ban on several Muslim-majority countries — told me they never felt ideologically closer to the White House. “Both Iranians and the U.S. administration see that a prosperous future is one where the current regime in Iran is no longer in power,” says Ideen Saiedian, 25, a slim, blond-haired account executive at Oracle and self-described human rights advocate for the OIAC.

Another delegate, Navid Tavana, also in his mid-twenties, was similarly enthusiastic about this newfound partnership between Iranians and U.S. officials. “I can’t recall ever seeing executives who are working so closely with the president and being so vocal about their support for a change in the Iranian regime,” Tavana says.

But the biggest star of the summit was neither a Republican nor Democrat — nor even, for that matter, an American. It was the MEK’s exiled leader, Maryam Rajavi, who spoke to the delegates via satellite from Albania.

When she appeared on the large screen, the room fell silent. Most of the delegates stood up in deference, their heads looking upward at the screen. “You have organized a gathering that glows with unyielding resolve to secure a free Iran,” Rajavi told the delegates in Farsi.

For them, 65-year-old Rajavi is not just the leader of the most organized resistance group against the Tehran regime; she is president-elect of a post-theocratic Iran. When hawkish U.S. politicians talk about the future of Iran and a post-ayatollahs government, many are talking about her.

“Maryam is the only one with a plan to ensure a free and democratic Iran,” Sadeghpour tells me, referring to her 10-point plan that promises a future Iran with free and fair elections, a separation of church and state, no capital punishment and gender equality.

But when Sadeghpour speaks of regime change, he does not favor foreign intervention. “The Europeans and the U.S. should help weaken the aggression of the Iranian military machinery through sanctions and economic pressure,” he says, “but the people of Iran will bring about a new government.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Pro-MEK Propaganda Paid for By Your Tax Dollars

Daniel Larison

August 13, 2019

Jordan Michael Smith reports on the transformation of Voice of America Persian into a pro-Trump, hard-line propaganda outlet:

Since then, the network has become, as Sajjadi puts it, “a mouthpiece of Trump — only Trump and nothing but Trump.” Manzarpour describes the situation as “blatant propaganda.” He said, “There is no objectivity or factuality.”

The American  
Conservative

For example, the MEK is covered heavily and favorably, despite having almost no support inside Iran, a history of terroristic violence, and a well-founded reputation as a cult. A VOA employee, who asked to speak anonymously for fear of reprisal, said, “VOA Persian, for the first time in decades, has been acting as media arm of MEK and is giving wall-to-wall live coverage of their gatherings and events.” [bold mine-DL] And VOA Persian published multiple ar-

ticles by Heshmat Alavi, a pro-MEK persona exposed by The Intercept this June as having been the product of a multiperson propaganda outfit housed in an MEK compound in Albania. (VOA Persian later said it would remove the articles.)

The VOA has broadcast puff pieces on Reza Pahlavi, the son of the Shah, whom Iran hawks see as a viable opposition leader. Hard-line Iran hawks are frequent guests on the network, often on the receiving end of friendly interviews. These guests include current Trump administration officials like Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, national security adviser John Bolton, Trump's special envoy for Venezuela Elliott Abrams, as well as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, an inveterate Iran hawk. Pundits like Michael Ledee have appeared, as have personnel from three heavily neoconservative Washington-based think tanks: the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, the Heritage Foundation, and the Hudson Institute.

The cheerleading for the MEK by a government-funded media outlet is very disturbing, and it shows that VOA Persian has abandoned real reporting and replaced it with pushing a regime change agenda. It is disgusting that a totalitarian cult that has American blood on its hands receives such glowing coverage from a network funded by our government. It is bad enough when some newspapers choose to publish pro-MEK "sponsored content," but this is even worse. Our tax dollars are going towards the promotion of an awful organization that abuses its own members and was listed as a terrorist organization until just a few years ago.

This seems to be part of the broader effort to rehabilitate the cult as an "alternative" to the Iranian government despite its hideous record and lack of support inside Iran. Considering the support that the MEK has received in the past and continues to receive from some high-profile associates of the president, including the current National Security Advisor, it is unfortunately not that much of a surprise that VOA Persian has become increasingly pro-MEK at the same time that it has become pro-Trump. Insofar as the change at the network has been driven by the desire "to curry favor with the Trump administration," they clearly think that boosting the MEK and promoting a regime change message are the way to win that favor.

Because it has become nothing more than a font of propaganda, it is failing in its basic mission of providing accurate and reliable information about the U.S. and U.S.-Iranian relations:

Azadeh Moaveni, an Iran expert at the Crisis Group, says that VOA's decline worsens the possibilities for engagement between the U.S. and Iran. "It's pro-Trump in a way that disregards the way Trump's policies are hurting Iranians, whether through sanctions or anything else," she told The Intercept. "To the extent that it might have served as a medium through which Iranians learned about the U.S. and better understood its policies, its present condition as a naked propaganda mouthpiece doesn't help relations."

The article also details how VOA Persian employees harass and smear journalists and activists online because they don't fall in line behind administration Iran policy in a manner similar to the behavior of the now-defunct Iran Disinformation Project supported by the State Department:

The online tirade directed at Mortazavi is part of a pattern: Journalists at VOA Persian have been lashing out at Americans they deem unsupportive of President Donald Trump's Iran policy, in apparent violation of VOA's declared standards.

Journalists at VOA Persian have been lashing out at Americans they deem unsupportive of Trump's Iran policy. The public attacks are the most visible manifestation of a transformation that's been underway since November 2016. VOA Persian and many of its staffers have become rabidly pro-Trump, abandoning their stated mission of providing balanced news to Iranians.

Smearing journalists and activists that prefer engagement to regime change and war has been the modus operandi of Iran hawks for a long while, but in the Trump era that has taken the form of conducting the smear campaign while receiving funds from the U.S. government. The people that are providing accurate reporting and analysis are coming under attack because they won't recite the administration's propaganda lines. At the same time, an outlet that is supposed to be providing accurate news has devolved into little more than a loudspeaker for a deranged cult.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Nobody Can Be “Comfortable” with Regime Change Involving MEK

Massoud and Anne Khodabandeh

August 22, 2019

Lobe  
Log

In 2017, John Bolton promised the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK)—wrongly, it turned out—that they would be celebrating in Tehran before the Iranian Revolution’s 40th anniversary in February 2019. This July, at the MEK’s five-day conference in Albania, keynote speaker Rudy Giuliani still insisted the MEK is a “government in exile” and claimed the MEK is “a group that should make us comfortable having regime change”.

For context, promoting a group which is universally despised by Iranians inside and outside the country as traitors already stretches credulity. There is no evidence that Iranians are calling for severe sanctions against themselves. Nor are they calling for regime change. The MEK’s only audience in this respect are a warmongering cabal of Americans, Saudis, Israelis, and British, who like to hear what they want to hear. The rest of the world just isn’t that comfort-



able with this bizarre, terrorist cult.

Lately, even Europe has distanced itself from lending succour to the group. The MEK no longer has free access to the European Parliament where its activists would harass the MEPs and their staff. This year the MEK was barred from holding its annual Villepinte rally in France and was also banned from rallying by Germany. As a result of this, MEK leader Maryam Rajavi has de-camped from Paris to Albania and the MEK announced that Albania is the group's new headquarters.

The move from Iraq to Albania ought to have allowed unprecedented access to Western journalists keen to investigate the honey pot around which the anti-Iran cabal buzz with excitement. They were soon disappointed, as the MEK built a de facto extra-territorial enclave in Manëz and posted armed guards to keep out unwanted attention. But although the group were physically hidden from view, they were very exposed through their cyber activities.

Although it had been known for some time that the MEK operates a click farm from Albania, it was Murteza Hussain in *The Intercept* who revealed how the MEK uses fake social media accounts to curate a false narrative about Iran to influence US policy. The Heshmat Alavi scandal focused media attention on what is really happening inside the MEK behind the slickly marketed brand image that Giuliani so admires. This endeavour to scrutinise the MEK has been aided by a series of photographs which were leaked from inside the MEK's camp in Albania and published in Iran. The photos are very revealing, but in ways that the MEK probably didn't intend or realise when they were taken. Since the MEK so zealously hides its inner world from public scrutiny, these photos offer us an unguarded glimpse into the operational and organisational life of the cult.

The fact that the photos were taken at all is significant. At first glance they could be showing a session for seniors at the local library or community centre. But we see the women are wearing military uniforms and the men are all wearing similar shirts. Some are wearing ties. This is something the MEK don't ever do unless in a public facing role. This indicates the images have been deliberately staged for a particular external audience. Certainly they were not meant for internal consumption, but neither is this for the wider

public or else they would be on the MEK's own websites. Based on information about the MEK already in the public domain, we can assume these photos were commissioned by Maryam Rajavi as a marketing ploy to 'sell' the MEK brand to financiers and backers.

There is clearly a deliberate effort to show that the MEK are "professional" workers in this computer room. Everyone is posed looking intently at a screen. Nobody is "off duty" in the pictures; yawning, stretching, drinking coffee, the normal activities of any workers. There is no evidence of relaxed, friendly chat between co-workers, everyone looks very serious. There are no cups of coffee or snacks on the desks. No pictures of family, husbands, wives, children, pets even. No plants or flowers. In spite of the rows of desks being squashed together closely, everyone looks very isolated.

There might be nothing wrong with that. After all, employers want to see their workers busy. But organisational photographs are also about marketing a brand, which includes marketing the core values of an entity. A group which claims, as the MEK does, that it is funded by public donations to struggle for democracy and human rights would surely want to create an image in the mind of the public about transparency, effectiveness, and positivity. By way of contrast, see how Human Rights Watch advertises its work culture. Even a quick Google image search on 'call center worker' reveals pictures of relaxed and smiling workers rather than people who look like battery hens. This is not the image any normal company or government office would use to promote their workplace.

In the MEK's advertising photos the workers are gender segregated. Men sit in one room, women in another. The women all wear hijab. There is no pluralism here. The use of garden chairs and workers using glasses unsuited to screen work reveals that this management doesn't care at all about the safety, comfort or wellbeing of the workers. They are using a mixture of outdated monitors and laptops. The cables are frayed and tangled.

There is no indication that the workers are happy at their workstations or enjoying their work. Why would they be with the picture of their leader bearing down on them, as in all dictatorships, lest they forget why they are there and who is in charge? (The picture of a solitary Maryam Rajavi is a clear acknowl-

edgement that her husband Massoud Rajavi is dead.)

The MEK's cultic system means that decisions are imposed from the top down. This means that those decisions are only as intelligent as the leadership. What Rajavi doesn't understand is that these photos show beyond any words that the MEK doesn't share our values. The leader is selling unthinking, unquestioning, obedient slaves, people who won't act or speak unless ordered to do so. And that would only be ordered if it were productive for the MEK, regardless of the needs or desires of the worker.

What these images portray are conditions of modern slavery. These are elderly people who are unable to escape this cult and are coerced into performing work for which they receive no recompense. They exist on cruelly basic accommodation and sustenance, whereby even asking for new underwear puts the petitioner under question about their loyalty to the leader and the cause. They cannot leave because in Albania they have nowhere to go, no identity documents or work permits, no money, and they do not speak the local language. And also because the Trump administration wants the MEK to be there.

So, when Giuliani says we should be "comfortable" with this group, right-minded people the world over can honestly and unequivocally answer, "No, we are not comfortable ignoring this harsh reality just because the MEK amplifies an anti-Iran message to the world, and no, we don't believe the MEK have any kind of future in Iran".

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Iran's Opposition Groups are Preparing for the Regime's Collapse. Is Anyone Ready?

Jonathan Broder

August 27, 2019

In July 13, President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, Rudi Giuliani, addressed an Iranian opposition group called the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) at the group's tightly guarded encampment in rural Albania, where some 3,400 members have been preparing for the overthrow of the clerical regime in Tehran.

Newsweek

Calling the MEK Iran's "government-in-exile," Giuliani assured MEK members that the Trump administration regards the group as an acceptable replacement for the current regime. "It gives us confidence that if we make those efforts to overthrow that horrible regime, sooner rather than later, we will not only save lives but we will be able to entrust the transition of Iran to a very responsible group of people," the former New York City mayor told his cheering audience.

Like other former U.S. officials, Giuliani has been

## Iran's Opposition Groups are Preparing for the Regime's Collapse. Is Anyone Ready?

BY JONATHAN BRODER ON 08/27/19 AT 5:08 PM EDT



Opposition leader Maryam Rajvi holding Iran's pre-revolutionary flag  
IMAGE BY GLENGE; SOURCE: ZAKARIA ABDELKAFI/AFPIGETTY

a frequent—and highly paid speaker—at MEK events over the past several years. So has John Bolton, Trump’s hawkish national security adviser, who has earned \$180,000 from his MEK speeches according to Joanne Stocker, an editor at *The Defense Post* and an expert on the MEK. Bolton stopped addressing the group last year when he took up his White House post, which precludes such appearances. But in his last speech to the MEK at a Paris rally in 2017, Bolton enthusiastically endorsed the group’s claim to be the most attractive alternative to the Iranian regime. “There is a viable opposition to the rule of the ayatollahs and that opposition is centered in this room today,” Bolton said. His financial disclosure showed he earned \$40,000 for that speech.

The MEK, whose name means the “People’s Holy Warriors,” is the oldest, best organized and best known of several Iranian opposition movements waiting in the wings. But there are others. One group are the monarchists, led by the son of the deposed shah, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, who hopes

to coordinate the different opposition groups and create a provisional government until democratic elections can be held. There are also several armed groups representing Iran's oppressed ethnic and religious minorities, who favor a federal-style government that will give their regions greater autonomy. Earlier this year, the Trump administration said it would not rule out the MEK as a viable replacement for the current regime. But at the same time, senior officials also stress that Trump is not seeking regime change. Instead, these officials say, the administration is focusing on Trump's campaign of economic sanctions against Iran aimed at forcing the regime to negotiate what U.S. officials call "behavioral changes." They include a verifiable end to Iran's nuclear weapons program, a halt to its ballistic missile development and a stop to its support for proxy militias in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that have expanded Iran's influence throughout the Middle East. Iran has rejected the administration's demands, describing them as tantamount to regime change.

Regime change or no regime change, the opposition groups remain deeply divided, which undermines their chances of ever taking power, Iran experts say. Over the years, several opposition groups have tried repeatedly to form a united front against Tehran, but their attempts have failed because of clashing histories, agendas and personalities.

Opposition to Iran's clerical regime, in the form of street protests and armed attacks on government officials and installations, has been around since the country's 1979 Islamic revolution. But something is different now. What distinguishes the most recent protests from those that erupted in 2009, 2017 and 2018 are both the severity of Iran's economic woes and the regime's reluctance to crack down hard on the demonstrators for fear of sparking another revolution. "These days, they're cautious," Abdullah Mohtadi, the leader of the Iranian Kurdish Komala Party, one of the country's principal ethnic opposition groups, told Newsweek. "They know how fragile the system is."

Administration officials say that Iran's leaders can either negotiate the behavioral changes Trump is demanding or watch their country's economy crumble. Eventually, they insist, the Iranian regime will bend to the president's will. So far, Iran continues to defy Trump with a campaign of threats and harassment against shipping in the Persian Gulf that has drawn U.S. and British naval

and air reinforcements to the region. Meanwhile, a recent Swiss intelligence assessment reportedly says Iranian leaders will wait out the U.S. elections in November 2020 in the hope Trump is defeated—and a Democratic administration lifts the sanctions under a return to the 2015 nuclear deal.

Still, many analysts say the current tensions could easily escalate into an armed conflict and the collapse of the Tehran regime. That prospect has raised the question of what kind of Iranian government might come next. And that conversation inevitably turns to Iran's opposition groups.

## **The Mystery of the MEK**

The MEK has been the leading opposition voice against the Islamic Republic for years. For the past decade, MEK leaders and their supporters have presented the group as a secular, democratic and nonviolent organization with widespread popular support inside Iran.

It is also the most controversial group. Many former U.S. officials and Iran experts question the MEK's democratic credentials, as well as the depth of its support base inside Iran. Indeed, virtually every claim made by the MEK draws denials and counter-narratives.

Founded in 1965 by Iranian students who opposed the U.S.-installed monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the MEK espoused an odd hybrid of Marxism and Islam. It was the first opposition group to take up arms against the shah and his supporters in the west. In the 1970s, according to U.S. intelligence, the MEK assassinated three U.S. Army colonels, murdered another three American contractors and bombed the facilities of numerous U.S. companies, earning it a place on Washington's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

The MEK also backed Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who led the Islamic revolution that deposed the shah in 1979. The group supported the takeover of the U.S. embassy, but it broke with Khomeini over his decision to release the American hostages. In 1981, after launching an abortive uprising against the Khomeini regime, the MEK was forced underground while its top leader, Massoud Rajavi, fled to Paris to avoid arrest.

But the Iraq-Iran war, which had begun in 1980, provided the MEK with another opportunity to fight the regime. The group aligned with Saddam Hussein and sent some 7,000 MEK members to Iraq for military training. Equipped by Saddam, the MEK fought numerous battles against Iranian forces during the war. In 1988, the group launched an armored invasion to topple the regime but suffered a major defeat, losing more than 3,000 soldiers, though MEK officials say the number was 1,300. The invasion also prompted Iran to execute thousands of MEK political prisoners. Once the war ended later that year, Saddam prevented the group from conducting further cross-border attacks.

Many independent scholars say the MEK's alliance with Saddam in that long and bloody war turned the group into traitors in the eyes of most Iranians. In the 1990s, the Rajavis instituted a number of cult-like measures to prevent defections. According to a 2005 Human Rights Watch report based on interviews with several defectors, members were required, among other things, to divorce their spouses and send their children abroad for adoption, lest family obligations divert their attention from the struggle against the Islamic Republic.

After U.S. forces toppled Saddam and occupied Iraq in 2003, they disarmed the MEK and placed its remaining 3,400 MEK members under U.S. protection. That same year, Massoud Rajavi mysteriously disappeared, and his wife Maryam assumed sole leadership of the group.

In 2009, she launched a multi-million-dollar campaign from her Paris headquarters to get the MEK removed from Washington's terrorist list. Despite its official status as a foreign terrorist organization, the MEK operated openly in Washington from offices in the National Press Club, warmly embraced by Iran hawks. The group hosted lavish receptions on Capitol Hill and began paying as much as \$50,000 to prominent U.S. political and military figures to deliver speeches that stressed what the group said was its commitment to a secular, democratic Iran.

In addition to Bolton and Giuliani, the list of the MEK's paid speakers included former White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, former national security adviser Gen. James Jones, former White House terrorism adviser



Fran Townsend, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former FBI director Louis Freeh, former CIA Director Porter Goss, former deputy CIA Director John Sano, former Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Richard Myers, Gen. Wesley Clark, Gen. Anthony Zinni, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, former senators Robert Torricelli and Evan Bayh, and Reps. John Lewis and Patrick Kennedy, among others.

“Some people do it just for the money; others do it because they hate the Islamic Republic of Iran,” said Barbara Slavin, who heads the Future of Iran project at the Atlantic Council, a foreign policy think tank in Washington. “They embrace the old adage that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, and they know this is a group that gives Iran heartburn. To top it off, they pay well.”

The question of how the MEK could afford such generous speaking fees was partially answered when Newsweek first reported that the post-war search for Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction uncovered documents showing Saddam Hussein had given the group vouchers for the sale of more than 38 million barrels of oil to overseas middlemen for the four years preceding the U.S. invasion. A report by Charles Duelfer, the chief U.S. weapons inspector, estimated the MEK earned as much as \$16 million from the sales of the vouchers. (After Saddam’s fall, many experts have speculated that Saudi Arabia, Iran’s arch rival, took over funding for the group.)

Meanwhile, the MEK became known as a valuable intelligence asset. In 2002, the MEK was credited with exposing Iran’s then-secret uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, which led to United Nations inspections. Over a five-year period starting in 2007, MEK assassins—financed, trained and armed by Israel’s Mossad intelligence service—killed a half dozen Iranian nuclear scientists, U.S. officials told NBC News.

In 2011, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq killed some 140 MEK members and deeply embarrassed the U.S. military, which was responsible for their protection. To prevent further slaughter, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton took the group off the terrorist list in 2012, a move that paved the way for the evacuation of Camp Ashraf’s MEK members to Albania.

But had anything really changed?

Daniel Benjamin, the State Department coordinator for counterterrorism at the time, told Newsweek the delisting was done “at the discretion of the secretary out of humanitarian concern because no country would take them otherwise, and not because of any changed thinking within the MEK. We simply didn’t want any more blood on our hands.”

“The MEK has done a great job in gussing themselves up as democrats,” said Benjamin, now director of The Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College. “They talk the talk, but there’s no evidence whatsoever that they’ve changed in any way. And there is zero question about their support inside Iran itself —they have no statistically significant group of supporters in Iran.”

Officials of the MEK and its political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), vehemently deny this version of the group’s history, including any responsibility for the assassination of Americans.

“The Iranian regime has been engaged in this misinformation campaign for four decades,” Ali Safavi, director of the group’s Washington office told Newsweek. “They have invested huge sums of money in it and developed a sophisticated network of talking heads and lobbies in the U.S. and Europe to demonize the Iranian opposition as having no support inside Iran and being undemocratic.”

Today, he said, the NCRI “brings together several different groups and about 500 well-known opposition personalities who are committed to the establishment of democratic, secular and non-nuclear republic.” Its funding, he says, comes solely from wealthy members of the Iranian diaspora community.

But other opposition groups say the MEK has rebuffed their overtures for coordination. “They’re deaf to any proposals other than their own beliefs,” said the leader of one opposition group, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive opposition politics.

## **A Royal Figurehead Emerges**

As the Trump administration tightens the economic screws on the Islamic

Republic, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi has been speaking out against the regime in Tehran and calling for opponents to band together under his leadership and vision for a democratic Iran.

Pahlavi, 58, was only 17 when the Iranian revolution drove his family into exile. But over the past four decades, he has kept a close watch on developments in Iran, where he says discontent with government corruption and economic mismanagement has brought the regime to the brink of collapse. “The atmosphere [in Iran] seems to be close to a flash point,” he told Radio Farda, the U.S. government’s Persian-language broadcast service, in February. But though Pahlavi lives just outside Washington, he’s been an unfamiliar figure in foreign policy circles. Critics have said he lacks charisma and resolve. In 1980, he issued a proclamation declaring himself shah but later retracted it. In the 1980s, U.S. intelligence reportedly approached Pahlavi with a proposal to land a monarchist force on Iran’s Kish island in the Persian Gulf with U.S. naval and air support. Pahlavi’s first question allegedly focused on the exit strategy.

But since late last year, Pahlavi has set out to raise his profile by meeting with think tanks to explain the role he could play as the regime’s disparate opposition groups prepare for its downfall. Pahlavi says he sees himself as a figurehead who can guide those groups in producing a common plan for a political transition. He already has taken a step in that direction with his Phoenix Project, an effort to bring together exiled Iranian scientists, scholars and experts to address the problems any democratic successor government in Iran will face. He has said he had no personal ambition to rule Iran.

Pahlavi’s supporters include several monarchist groups made up of Iranian exiles in the United States and Europe, as well as an unknown number in Iran, some of whom called for a return of the monarchy during anti-government demonstrations in 2017.

Over the past few years, several Europe-based TV stations have been broadcasting pro-monarchy programs into Iran in an effort to create a mood of pre-revolution nostalgia. But Pahlavi remains unpopular among Iran’s ethnic minorities, who haven’t forgotten the monarchy’s Persian chauvinism. And some Iranian Americans have urged the crown prince to distance himself

from his late father's authoritarian rule as a prerequisite for any leadership role.

Patrick Clawson, the Washington Institute's director of research, suggested Pahlavi would prefer a role as a ceremonial monarch with no responsibility for governing along the lines of Britain's constitutional monarchy. "He wants to be Queen Elizabeth," Clawson told the Atlantic Council's Slavin.

## The Fight On The Periphery

Among all the Iranian opposition groups, the ones that are doing the most actual fighting against the regime are those representing the country's ethnic and religious minorities—Kurds and Azeris in the northwest, Arabs in the southwest, and Balochis in the southeast, all of whom demand autonomy for their regions.

According to Naysan Rafat, an Iran expert at the International Crisis Group, these groups have been conducting frequent but small-scale attacks on government targets since the revolution. The government portrays them as terrorists, supported by regional rivals.

For the past few years, Iranian Kurdistan's Komala Party has taken the lead in trying to unify these different groups behind the idea of replacing Iran's clerical regime with a decentralized federal government whose constitution will safeguard the rights of the country's ethnic minorities.

"What is certain is that this regime will collapse sooner or later," the Komala Party's Mohtadi said. "We want to avoid the possibility that a collapse will lead to the break-up of the country into different ethnic regions."

Mohtadi is urging the Trump administration to establish contact with the opposition groups to plan for what comes next. Without such preparations, he warned, the regime's collapse could be followed by a seizure of power by Iran's Revolutionary Guards—or the country's disintegration into chaos. "The Trump administration has pressured the Iranian regime economically and politically," Mohtadi allowed, "but in terms of reaching out to the Iranian opposition, I haven't seen anything serious."

## Waiting For A Spark

In fact, the Trump administration has not met with any Iranian opposition figures, deliberately distancing itself from the groups for now. “The future of Iran will be decided by the Iranian people,” Brian Hook, the administration’s special representative for Iran, told Newsweek in an interview. “We do not pick winners and losers on that issue.”

Of course, that could change overnight. White House aides say Bolton is still trying to convince the president to adopt an explicit policy of regime change in Iran, which would increase the value of opposition groups. Analysts say that is particularly the case for the MEK, given the group’s organization, funding and high visibility in Washington.

Some supporters believe the MEK already has moved to the head of the line with the administration’s decision not to rule out the group as a viable alternative to the regime in Tehran.

But for now, Trump’s economic sanctions remain the principal element of his Iran policy. “If we want to get to a point where Iran’s proxies are weaker and the regime doesn’t have the resources that it needs to destabilize the Middle East, it will require economic pressure,” Hook said. “There is no other way to accomplish that goal.”

For the Iranian opposition groups, this state of no peace—and no war—means that there is no leadership vacuum in Iran to fill. And as the tensions between Tehran and Washington continue to simmer, all these groups can hope for is a spark that will finally put Iran’s political future in play.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## My Day With the MEK

The Balkanista

September 13, 2019

The People’s Mujahedin of Iran- a ‘controversial’ political-militant organisation have ended up living in a compound just miles from Tirana, Albania. One day I was invited to attend a “human rights conference” there. Not knowing much about them and as a curious journalist, I accepted and set off, not having any idea of what to expect.



Located around 30 minutes drive from Tirana, the MEK compound is on the outskirts of the village of Manza. Rumour has it that the locals are not overly happy about their presence there, but the fact that the compound provides work for a number of them is enough to keep them at bay.

At the entrance to the camp was a carpark where a number of private guards with automatic weapons stood around chainsmoking with their guns

slung over their shoulders. Two large gold-coloured lions flanked the gateway where a couple of MEK members sit, stopping anyone that tries to enter.

As the minibus pulled into the entrance, the private guards in their brown uniforms approached the vehicle with mirrors on the end of long metal poles. They spoke with the driver before using the mirrors to check the underneath of the vehicle for, what I assume, was bombs or similar devices. After getting the all-clear, we passed through the gate and disembarked in a small car park.

Ahead of us was along a road that disappeared over the top of the hillside. Iranian flags lined the route and a large, stone archway sat in the middle of the road with an even bigger flag hanging from it. To the right of the arch was a small tent where a different private security firm had set up scanners, metal detectors, and a station for searching everyone that wished to enter, Segregated into male and female stations, our bags were searched, we were patted down and scanned, and also made to pass through a scanner.

The security guard confiscated my lipstick, face powder, cigarettes, and lighter and put them in a plastic bag, advising me I could collect them afterwards. They tried to confiscate my mobile phone as well, but I argued that having a one-month-old daughter at home, I needed to be contactable. A male MEK member was called over and after pleading my case, I was allowed to take my phone inside on the condition I switched off the internet (I didn't).

It was at this point that I began to feel nervous. The level of security was incredibly high, the searches were more thorough than at an airport, and I was concerned at the attempt to take my phone, as well as the temporary confiscation of something so seemingly harmless as a lipstick.

As I looked around, I also noticed the dress code that applied to everyone except the staff of the two separate private security firms.

I was greeted by a number of smiling, incredibly friendly women that shook my hand, kissed my cheeks and thanked me for attending. The majority of them were dressed in navy blue suits with burgundy hijabs, with no makeup and modest shoes. I noticed a small number of women who appeared to be much older than the others and assuming positions of more responsibility,

wearing head to toe olive green- a suit with a matching hijab. The men were dressed in suits with shirts and no tie- they all seemed to have moustaches. Not one person was under 50 years old.

From the security checkpoint, we were herded into minibusses dependent on nationality and who invited us, and we started our descent into the “city”.

As we passed over the top of the hill, rows and rows of white, single-story cabins appeared below us. Each road we took had its own street name and each row of housing was complete with plants and flowers planted outside and even bicycles propped up, ready for use. The place was immaculate- little box houses on pristine streets and a small artificial river running through the centre. On what appears to be the main boulevard, Iranian flags lined the way, with a large memorial to those MEK members who lost their lives at one end, and what appears to be a sort of city centre at the other.

We pulled off the main boulevard and disembarked outside what looked like a large aircraft hangar. Guarding several entrances were more private security guards and more men with moustaches. As we file into the building, I had no idea what was waiting for me inside.

The room was vast- similar to an industrial warehouse in size and dimensions. Inside were perhaps 3000 people in seats stretching as far as the eye could see. To the left of me was a stage, cordoned off and supervised by security guards. This stage was kitted out with an expensive-looking set including large screens with graphics of video footage of the MEK struggle interspersed with images of their leader Maryam Rajavi and the Iranian flag. A podium stood on the stage, next to a flagpole and flag, and in front of the words “FREE IRAN”.

Upbeat and patriotic sounding music pumped from the speakers and filled the room, drowning out the sound of delegates as they make their way to their seats. In the centre of the room were two columns of seating, male MEK members on one side, female MEK members on the other, completely segregated and each in their strict dress code, including hijabs for women. Again, no one was under the age of 50.



On the far right hand and left hand sides of these seating zones, sat the international delegates, segregated by nationality. Everyone was handed a headset and told to tune in to a particular frequency that would pick up the translations coming live from a line of translation booths on the right hand side of the room.

At the front of the room, the VIPs were sat in rows with tables in front of them, displaying the name and country of each delegate. I noticed the US, UK, France, Germany, and Saudi Arabia were all represented by between one and five individuals. They included politicians, ex-politicians and ex-security and military personnel. I was told that there were representatives from 47 countries present.

Large booms swung over head, each with a camera attached to it filming the crowd from a variety of angles. This was an expensive set up, reminiscent of a large scale TV studio.

The number of people in the room was quite staggering and to see the rows of people seated at the far end, I had to squint. Besides from the thousands that were seated, there were perhaps a hundred uniformed and hijabi wearing women scuttling around, seating people and handing out headsets. They were under the direction of a few men in suits and were amongst over 100 security guards.

As I waited to be seated, the chanting started and thousands of Iranian flags started being waved enthusiastically as the crowd got to their feet. The chanting and flag waving occurred for several minutes, before they sat back down again- a pattern that repeated countless times throughout the event.

On my own at this point, I enquired as to where I should sit. Confusion ensued as I explain that I am English yet living in Albania and I was told to wait whilst they discussed what to do with me.

I was then approached by an older male MEK member holding a walkie-talkie who asked me who I was and what I was doing. I explained again and made the mistake of saying I am a journalist whilst flashing my press card. At this point, he became angry and said, “who the hell told you to be here?” I replied

that I had been invited and that some of the ladies had told me to wait here whilst they decided where to seat me. He replied angrily “these ladies know nothing, I am in charge here”.

At this point, I became unhappy at being shouted at and I asked him to lower his voice and not to treat a guest in this manner. He walked off and eventually I was seated by a woman in a hijab, in the section for Albanians.

It was then, as I looked around I noticed that there were no other journalists present as I could not see any TV crews, no other people with press cards, no journalists I recognised, and I realised I hadn't seen any media vans or cars in the car park. There was only the expensive video cameras and a couple of photographers who I believed were MEK members.

### **Then the show began.**

MEK leader, Maryam Rajavi took to the stage amidst triumphant music, glitter cannons spitting out gold confetti into the audience, and the euphoric chants, flag-waving, and fist-pumping in perfect synchronicity of the uniformed, segregated, Iranian audience members.

Dressed in turquoise silk with a matching hijab, Rajavi smiled as she spoke, pausing only to enjoy the chanting and adoration from her followers. She captivated the crowd as she spoke of women's rights, gender equality, democracy, human rights, and an end to the mullahs and ayatollah. To see the way that the crowd reacted to her was really something fascinating- they hung on every word, and jumped to their feet many times to chant and wave their flags ecstatically.

Following Rajavi's rousing speech, other speakers took to the floor. They included Trump's lawyer and ex- Mayor of New York, Rudy Giuliani (who has attended 11 such conferences, reportedly for a hefty fee) , former Democratic senator Joe Lieberman, Columbian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, former US Marine Corps Commander General James Conway, Lincoln Bloomfield, and British MP Matthew Offord.

They referred to “the regime of terror”, the “murderers in Tehran”, and called for the immediate overthrow of the current Iranian government. MEK were

called “freedom fighters” and hailed as the only solution to the current situation in Iran.

Guiliani also said that “European governments must stop supporting regimes that fund terrorism” calling for an end to any trade with Iran, stating that it funds “mass murderers”.

He also commented on the way that the compound had sprung up in just two years adding “if we tried to do this in New York, it would take 15 years and launch 14 corruption investigations.”

Addressing the allegations that MEK is a cult, he stated “maybe [these people] they forgot about honour and decency, human rights. This is a decent organisation. A group we can support.”

Each speech was broken up by periods of coordinated chanting and flag-waving with each outburst as frenetic and enthusiastic as the one before.

I sat there for around two or three hours, not really sure what was going on or what the purpose of the event was. Feeling a little on edge, I got up from my seat and made my way to the exit. As I walked towards where I had disembarked the minibus, the woman who invited me called my name and came running over to me and presented me with a box of sweets and fruit. She asked me who I worked for and what I wrote (which was odd because I had never told her) and invited me to come back to the compound another time to discuss their work more.

I said my goodbyes and headed back to the entrance, passed the armed guards and moustachioed MEK members, and went back to Tirana.

Over the next few days, my contact and I exchanged a few messages where I said I would be interested in “one day” returning to find out more. She then proceeded to call me around 15 times, even when I told her I was not available (I didn’t answer) and even from different phone numbers. I then politely but firmly declined any invitations and that was the last I heard from my friend at MEK.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will attend a meeting linked to a terror cult that has murdered 6 Americans

Mitch Prothero

September 24, 2019

**U**S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo plans to attend an event at the UN General Assembly tomorrow that is linked to a notorious Iranian cult which has murdered at least six American civilians and spent over 20 years protected by Saddam Hussein's regime.

**BUSINESS  
INSIDER**

The Mujahedin-e-Khalq (or People's Mujahedin of Iran) "is an organisation that fancies itself as the official Iranian opposition in exile," said David Patrikarakos, an analyst and author of *Nuclear Iran: The Birth of an Atomic State*.

"In truth, it's a cult-like group that was for years on the State Department's list of terror organisations and has little support in Iran due to the fact that it fought with [Iraqi leader] Saddam's forces during the Iran-Iraq War."



The meeting, dubbed the “2019 Iran Summit,” will feature Pompeo and Mark Wallace, a longtime US advocate of MEK. Former US senator Joseph I. Lieberman, who has previously spoken at MEK events, will also attend the Pompeo-Wallace event.

Officially, MEK will hold a separate event, according to the Washington Post, putting a small degree of separation between Pompeo and MEK itself.

When asked about the meeting’s links to MEK, a State Department official “dismissed the concerns about the MEK’s participation in Wallace’s event, [telling the Washington Post], “Have you looked at the people attending the U.N.?”

MEK is currently based in an Albanian compound and does not report the sources of its funding. It has a long history of violence against civilians, hostility towards Israel in rhetoric that borders on anti-Semitic, and sponsorship of attacks against the West.

Despite this, the group has managed to purchase its way to credibility in some US political circles by offering huge speaking fees to US lawmakers willing to

share a stage with violent militants. A MEK front group called the National Council of Resistance of Iran is already using Pompeo's name in its propaganda.

The MEK supported the overthrow of the US-backed regime of the Shah in the 1970s conducting scores of terror attacks against US military and commercial targets inside Iran, as well as supporting the 1979 takeover of the US embassy.

It later broke with its revolutionary comrades and defected to Iraq, and the patronage of its president, Saddam Hussein.

A US State Department analysis concluded that the group had killed six Americans, including military officers and civilians doing business in pre-revolutionary Iran, as well as thousands of Iranian civilians in terror attacks.

This history of aligning with two of America's most hated enemies in the Middle East — Iraq and Iran — along with its pursuit of a terror campaign inside Iran that killed thousands of civilians, a conclusion reached by the US State Department, led to the group being designated a terror organization by the US government until 2012.

How did a group widely considered among the most bizarre and violent in the region become acceptable company for current US government officials? Money.

After the US invasion of Iraq and defeat of Saddam in 2003, the group immediately began throwing hundreds of thousands of dollars at anti-Iran politicians in Washington, usually in the form of speaking fees to address the group's rallies and events.

Former National Security Advisor John Bolton, former NYC mayor and current lawyer to the president Rudy Giuliani, former senator Joseph I. Lieberman, and former Vermont governor Howard Dean as well as a slew of lesser-known figures have all addressed the group and publicly taken up their cause. MEK is known for paying very large speaking fees.

This attention — and American desperation for a dissident group to support against the current Iranian regime — led to the group being delisted as a terrorist organization in 2012.

Even if you set aside its history of murdering Americans and supporting despotic regimes, it is unlikely that the group will ever become a credible political partner of the US.

That’s because in Iran, MEK is regarded as a bunch of traitors who fought alongside Saddam Hussein and have a history of murdering Iranian civilians in terror attacks.

“The fact that the Secretary of State is openly meeting with them will only serve to provoke the Iranians with little gain for the US or its interests,” said Patrikarakos. He pointed out that the group is widely hated even by Iranians who otherwise oppose the current regime.

“Indeed, working with them discredits the West in the eyes of normal Iranians who otherwise aren’t crazy about the Islamic Republic,” he added.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Former AG Michael Mukasey set to lobby for Iranian dissident group

Yue Stella Yu

October 2, 2019

As U.S.-Iran tensions escalate, Iran's domestic opposition group is courting allies in the U.S in hope to replace the current authoritarian Iranian regime.

Last week, another former high-ranking official joined the camp.

Former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, who served under President George W. Bush, registered last week as a foreign agent lobbying pro bono for the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a major Iranian dissident group pushing to topple the country's current administration. Mukasey's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Earlier this week, Mukasey received attention for defending President Donald Trump in an op-ed, pointing to the Justice Department's statement that



declined investigations into the president’s July call with Ukraine.

The council is the political arm of Iranian opposition group Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MEK. Responsible for killing Iranian and American citizens in the past, the group was a U.S.-designated terrorist group before its delisting in 2012 following a multi-million dollar lobbying campaign.

The group also had close ties with Iraq President Saddam Hussein, who in 1986 sponsored MEK with weapons, funding and a military base in hope for help against the Iranian government.

Although Mukasey officially registered his ties to the group just last week, he had previously met with the group several times between 2015 and 2018, Foreign Agents Registration Act records in OpenSecrets’ Foreign Lobby Watch database show. Mukasey is among a list of high-ranking former officials who gave paid speeches at conferences in support of the MEK, and was investigated, but never sanctioned, by the Treasury Department for potential violations of law for accepting speaking fees.

Mukasey spoke last year in Paris at the “Free Iran” conference — a gathering of Iranian opposition groups — in favor of a regime change in Iran, promising that he would never rest while supporting the effort. “We hope that the mullahs will topple,” Mukasey said, “but it’s gonna take more effort.”

The former attorney general joined lobbying firm Debevoise & Plimpton after he stepped down as attorney general in 2009. Since 2011, Mukasey and his family members have given more than \$50,000 to mostly Republicans and their affiliated PACs, records show. Much of the money went to hawkish lawmakers including Sens. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) and former Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.).

All three senators spoke vocally against the Iranian government in the past. In 2017, Tillis was part of a U.S. delegation led by Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) to Albania to meet with MEK’s leader Maryam Rajavi. She later thanked the Blunt-led delegation for the Senate’s effort to protect MEK members in Iraq.

Cotton, a longtime critic of the Iranian government, pushed the Trump ad-

ministration in June to launch a “retaliatory strike” against Iran after the U.S. blamed the country for a series of attacks. McCain backed Trump’s decision to shelve the Iran nuclear deal long before the president withdrew from the agreement, arguing that Iran has “literally been getting away with murder.”

Mukasey’s registration comes at a time when the U.S.-Iran tensions continue to build since Trump’s withdrawal in 2018 from the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal. The already-strained relationship took a downturn after multiple attacks and U.S. military movements near the Persian Gulf.

As the bilateral disagreement intensifies, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif recently warned that the Middle Eastern country will defend itself with an “all-out war” if the U.S. launches a strike against it. Last Saturday, the U.S. Air Force pulled its longtime Qatar-based Middle East command center back to South Carolina for the first time, the Washington Post reported, saying Iran-related incidents sped up the decision.

Amid rising distrust, the National Council of Resistance of Iran claimed last week that it has evidence proving the Iranian government dictated the attack on Saudi oil facilities, further fueling the conflicts.

Raising its profile in Washington, D.C., over the past few years, the group often participates in congressional briefings, receptions and other events, FARA filings show. They also frequently run opinion pieces in conservative media outlets such as The Washington Times, the Washington Free Beacon and Fox News.

The council has paid American lobbying firm Rosemont Associates \$1.4 million since 2013 to lobby the government. Senator-turned-MEK-lawyer Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.) — lobbying on behalf of the group — received backlash in 2002 for his support for Iranian opposition groups. While senator, Torricelli met with the council twice in 2001 discussing human rights issues and Iranian missile attacks, records show.

Mukasey’s registration is only the most recent revelation in a network of current and former government officials and ambassadors with ties to the high-profile opposition group.

Former National Security Advisor John Bolton, well-known for his aggressive foreign policy views on Iran and other countries, is a longtime critic of the Iranian regime. He advocated for the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, and proposed to bomb Iran to stop nuclear proliferation in an op-ed.

For over a decade, Bolton publicly backed the MEK as a replacement for the current Iranian administration. His personal financial disclosures revealed that he was paid \$40,000 in 2016 to conduct a speech to the group.

Between 2015 and 2018, the group met multiple times with Rudy Giuliani, former New York City Mayor and now Trump’s attorney, records show. Representing foreign clients while offering legal services to the president, Giuliani has invited scrutiny. The attorney, with rich connections with Ukraine, pushed the foreign government to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden and his son, Hunter Biden in the most recent Trump-Ukraine controversy.

Giuliani spoke publicly on several occasions in support of overturning the Iranian regime. “The mullahs must go, the ayatollah must go,” said Giuliani at last year’s “Free Iran” conference, “and they must be replaced by a democratic government which Madam Rajavi represents.”

Torricelli, who has long lobbied on behalf of the council, published a Politico op-ed in 2016 arguing that Giuliani’s ties to the group should not be concerning.

Officials of the council met Giuliani in July 2015 to discuss Iran’s nuclear program, days after Iran reached an agreement with six other countries in Vienna to scale back its nuclear commitments in exchange for sanctions relief. Since Trump pulled from the deal, Iran has ramped up uranium production, potentially setting the country on a path to breaching the agreement as the U.S.-Iran tensions worsen.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trying to Exploit Iran’s Diverse Ethnic Population to Advance a War Agenda

Muhammad Sahimi

October 16, 2019

Lobe  
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On September 25, during the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI)—a pro-Israel, anti-Iran lobby group—held a “summit” in New York that was attended by, among others, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Ron Dermer, and Sigal Mandelker, the outgoing Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, as well as diplomats from Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. As usual, tough rhetoric was uttered by all the speakers, and threats were made.

The day before the summit, another meeting was held that had allegedly been organized by Mark Wallace, the CEO of UANI, although it is widely believed that UANI was behind the meeting. The participants in the meeting were supposedly representatives of various Iranian opposition groups in

MENU

## Trying To Exploit Iran's Diverse Ethnic Population To Advance A War Agenda

OCTOBER 16, 2019 GUEST CONTRIBUTOR / 24 COMMENTS



*Secretary of State Mike Pompeo speaking at the 2019 UANI conference (State Department via Wikimedia Commons)*

exile, as well as ethnic secessionist groups. The meeting was, however, dominated by the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), a group that until 2011 was listed by the U.S. State Department as a terrorist organization and is despised by all Iranians due to its alliance with the regime of Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War and other acts viewed by virtually all Iranians as treason. Also present were the National Council of Resistance of Iran, MEK's political arm, and the Organization of Iranian American Communities, another MEK front group. A fourth group, the U.S. Foundation for Liberty and Human

Rights, appears to be linked with MEK, as the content of its website uses the same rhetoric as the MEK. Representatives of six ethnic groups also attended the meeting, none of which has any significant support inside Iran as best one can tell.

One of the groups participating in the gathering was the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA). Ahwaz, or Ahvaz, is the provincial capital of Khuzestan, the oil-rich province in southwestern Iran near the border with Iraq. ASMLA claims to represent the minority Iranian Arabs in Khuzestan who are supposedly suppressed by Tehran. The group, founded in 1999, has carried out several terrorist attacks in Iran over the past fifteen years, including in January 2006, in May 2015, in June 2016, in January 2017, and in October 2018.

“This is the first time in history, since the Iranian revolution in 1978 and 1979, that such a broad cross-section of the leaders and delegates from Iranian dissident ... groups have gathered in a convention for Iran’s future.” Wallace boasted despite the fact that those same “leaders” are either little known or are virtually universally despised in Iran.

This is not the first time that the U.S. far right has tried to exploit Iran’s diverse ethnic population in order to stir trouble in the country and advance its anti-Iran agenda. In fact, this practice has a long history that goes back to practically the 1979 revolution and the hostage crisis of 1979-1981. Since April 1980, when Washington cut diplomatic relations with Iran, successive U.S. administrations and the U.S. far right have seen exploiting ethnic grievances in Iran as a key route toward destabilizing the country.

The Clinton administration imposed a package of sanctions against Iran in 1996 that the Bush administration renewed in 2001 and again, indefinitely, in 2006. After preventing the European trio of Britain, France, and Germany from reaching an agreement with Iran over its nuclear program in summer of 2005, the Bush administration launched its efforts to exploit Iran’s ethnic minorities and the dissident groups that supposedly represent them, in order to either break up Iran into multiple weak states, or, at the very least, to stir up trouble and destabilize the country.

That strategy has a long history in the Middle East. Washington, for example—acting at the behest of the Shah of Iran—backed a Kurdish insurgency in Iraq until 1975. It has been best exemplified in the ways in which Israel has applied it to some of its Arab neighbors. In February 1982, three months before Israel invaded Lebanon in support of the Christian Falange militia, the Likud strategist Oded Yinon published an article [in Hebrew, whose translation was published by Israel Shahak, the Israeli academic and civil-rights advocate] in which he called on Israel's leadership to adopt a policy of fragmenting the Arab world into a mosaic of ethnic and confessional groupings. "Every kind of inter-Arab confrontation would prove to be advantageous to Israel," he argued, urging that Israel must reconfigure its geo-political environment through the Balkanization of the surrounding Arab states into smaller and weaker states.

Building on Yinon's analysis ten years later, neoconservative historian Bernard Lewis—who would become a key informal adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney in the run-up and immediate aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq—wrote in an essay in the journal *Foreign Affairs*:

Another possibility, which could even be precipitated by [Islamic] fundamentalism, is what as of late has become fashionable to call 'Lebanonization.' Most of the states of the Middle East – Egypt is an obvious exception – are of recent and artificial construction and are vulnerable to such a process. If the central power is sufficiently weakened, there is no real civil society to hold the polity together, no real sense of common national identity or overriding allegiance to the nation-state. The state then disintegrates – as happened in Lebanon – into a chaos of squabbling, feuding, fighting sects, tribes, regions and parties. If things go badly and central governments falter and collapse, the same could happen, not only in the countries of the existing Middle East, but also in the newly independent Soviet republics...

In their infamous "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," the policy document written in 1996 for Benjamin Netanyahu, the then-newly elected Prime Minister of Israel, Richard Perle et al. suggested that Israel should "work closely with Turkey and Jordan to contain, destabilize, and roll-back some of its most dangerous threats [meaning Iran and Iraq]." David Wurmser, one of the authors of the same report who served on Cheney's

national security staff from 2003 to 2007, went further, writing in a lengthier report that Syria and Iraq could easily fragment into separate ethno-sectarian segments, “a development that would enhance the security of Israel and the West.”

These ideas were clearly picked up by the Bush administration and later applied to Iran. “In the past six months, Israel and the United States have also been working together in support of a Kurdish resistance group known as the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan [known as PJAK or PEJAK],” Seymour Hersh reported in November 2006. “The group has been conducting clandestine cross-border forays into Iran, I was told by a government consultant with close ties to the Pentagon civilian leadership, as part of an effort to explore alternative means of applying pressure on Iran.”

### **In February 2007, the Telegraph of London reported that:**

CIA officials are understood to be helping opposition militias among the numerous ethnic minority groups clustered in Iran’s border regions. In the past year there has been a wave of unrest in ethnic minority border areas of Iran, with bombing and assassination campaigns against soldiers and government officials... Funding for their separatist causes comes directly from the CIA’s classified budget but is now ‘no great secret,’ according to one former high-ranking CIA official in Washington.

In the same month, Cheney himself traveled to Pakistan and met with its then-president, General Pervez Musharraf. Pakistani government sources said at the time that the secret campaign against Iran by Jundallah was on the agenda when the two met. Jundallah was a Baluch terrorist group that for years staged terrorist attacks in Iran from its bases in Pakistan. In an interview later that month, Cheney referred to the Jundallah terrorists as “guerrillas” in an apparent effort to lend them legitimacy.

In April 2007, ABC News reported that, according to Pakistani and U.S. intelligence officials, Jundallah had been secretly encouraged and advised by U.S. officials since 2005.

In an interview with National Public Radio in June 2008, Hersh explained



how the Bush Administration's policy of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" led it to support Jundallah and MEK. The next month, Hersh quoted Robert Baer, a former CIA clandestine officer who had worked for nearly two decades in South Asia and the Middle East, as saying, "The Baluchis [a small ethnic minority group residing in Iran's and Pakistan's provinces of Baluchistan] are Sunni fundamentalists who hate the regime in Tehran, but you can also describe them as Al Qaeda. These are guys who cut off the heads of nonbelievers—in this case, it's Shiite Iranians. The irony is that we're once again working with Sunni fundamentalists, just as we did in Afghanistan in the nineteen-eighties." Baer repeated those assertions in the fall of 2008 at a symposium co-organized by this author on U.S.-Iran relations at the University of Southern California.

In the same article, Hersh also stated that the MEK received arms and intelligence, directly or indirectly, from the U.S., and that PJAK, "which has also been reported to be covertly supported by the United States," operated against Iran from bases in northern Iraq for at least three years. PJAK used Iraqi Kurdistan as its base to carry out multiple raids into Iran that killed many civilians, as well as soldiers and policemen. At the time, the Bush administration denied helping PJAK, despite the fact that the group's chief, Rahman Haj-Ahmadi, had traveled to Washington around the same time, reportedly to gain financial and military support for his militia. In 2009, the Obama administration declared PJAK a terrorist organization.

PJAK is still active in the border area between Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. When in December of 2017 there were scattered demonstrations in several Iranian cities against the terrible state of the Iranian economy, PJAK issued a statement asking people to rise up. It carried out terrorist attacks inside Iran on 27 July 2019 that killed and injured scores of people.

In December 2009, Selig Harrison reported in the New York Times that the Bush administration had provided support to Jundallah, as well some Kurdish groups operating in western Iran. According to his report, that assistance was sent through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency, while the Kurdish groups received their support through Israel's Mossad.

The Bush administration was not the only one that was trying to exploit the

dissatisfaction of some of Iran's ethnic groups to destabilize the country. Israel and Saudi Arabia were also participants. In January 2012, Mark Perry reported how Mossad agents, using U.S. passports and posing as CIA agents, tried to recruit members of Jundallah to fight their covert war against Iran.

Jundallah's leader, Abdolmajid Rigi, was captured by Iran's security forces and executed in June 2010. The Obama administration put Jundallah on the terrorist list in November 2010. The group then split into Pakistani and Iranian branches. The former attacks Shiites in Pakistan, while the Iranian branch, known as Jaish ul-Adl, continues to carry out terrorist attacks and kidnappings in Sistan and Baluchistan province in southeastern Iran, near the border with Pakistan. It is widely believed in Iran that Jaish ul-Adl is supported by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.

The Kurds and Baluchis are not the only ethnic groups that the Bush administration and its allies tried to exploit. In a July 2008 article, Hersh also mentioned possible U.S. support for separatists in Khuzestan province. As already pointed out, over the past 15 years, Iranian-Arab separatists have carried out bombing and terrorist attacks in Khuzestan, the latest of which took place in October 2018, when they attacked during a military parade. An armed group, Ahvaziya, claimed responsibility for the attacks. Ahvaziya is part of the ASMLA group that participated in the Washington meeting of Iranian separatist groups.

Iran has accused Saudi Arabia of funding, arming and training the group. After the attacks, Abdulkhalegh Abdulla, a former adviser to the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, wrote in a tweet that the attack was not terrorism because it was against Iran's military, and that the attacks were part of what Mohammad bin Salman, the crown prince and de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, had threatened in May 2017, namely, that Saudi Arabia is "not waiting until there becomes a battle in Saudi Arabia," and so it "will work so that it becomes a battle for them in Iran." His tweet created deep anger in Iran.

As the author recently reported, the Trump administration has decided to continue what the Bush administration began. Before he was appointed as Trump's national security adviser, in his "manifesto" for getting the U.S. out of the nuclear agreement with Iran, John Bolton advocated U.S. support "for

Kurdish national aspirations, including Kurds in Iran” and providing “assistance to Balochis, Khuzestan Arabs, Kurds, and others...” After his appointment, Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Brian Hook—who is the State Department’s Special Representative for Iran and directs its “Iran Action Group”—met with some of the leaders of Iran’s Kurdish groups. Last June, Abdullah Mohtadi and Mustafa Hijri—who lead, respectively, the Iranian Communist Kurdish group Komala and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran [KDPI]—travelled to Washington, with Mohtadi reportedly meeting with Pompeo and Hijri meeting with State Department officials. Komala’s office in Washington has registered with the Justice Department as a lobbying group to “establish solid and durable relations” with the Trump administration.

Both groups have carried out terrorist attacks inside Iran, and, under the guise of calling for a federal system, both have separatist tendencies. The separatist nature of the KDPI became clear when, back in 2012, Hijri asked the U.S. to declare Iran’s Kurdistan province a “no-fly zone,” so that his forces could attack government forces freely and eventually secede from Iran. Hijri has also called for “regime change” in Iran, and has declared the Islamic Republic “a common enemy” of the Kurds and Israel, asking the Jewish state for support.

The attempt by UANI, a group that reportedly receives a lot of its funding from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, to provoke ethnic strife in Iran may well lead to more bloodshed, but it will likely ultimately fail. Iranians of diverse backgrounds have lived together side-by-side and have preserved their nation for thousands of years. Iran’s true opposition inside the country—the reformists, religious-nationalists, secular leftists, labor groups, human rights activists, and others—and its supporters in the diaspora reject discrimination against minorities, ethnic tensions, economic sanctions, military threats, and foreign intervention. In the democratic Iran that the true opposition will eventually achieve, all Iranians, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or gender, will be equal.

Muhammad Sahimi is a Professor at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Giuliani's work for Iranian group with bloody past could lead to more legal woes

Julia Ainsley, Andrew W. Lehren and Rich Schapiro

October 17, 2019

In the spring of 2017, former U.S. attorney general Michael Mukasey met with representatives of the Iranian dissident group Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MEK), a State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization until 2012.

Mukasey wasn't alone. Joining him at the meeting was another high-profile American political figure: Rudy Giuliani.

For nearly a decade, the former law partners have pushed the agenda of the MEK, giving paid speeches and writing newspaper op-eds expressing support for a group linked to the deaths of six Americans in the 1970s.

But it wasn't until late last month that Mukasey registered as a foreign agent lobbying pro bono for MEK's political arm. Giuliani still hasn't, raising the



possibility that the Justice Department could target him in an illegal lobbying probe, experts say.

“This is the kind of scenario that very commonly leads them to launch an investigation,” said Josh Rosenstein, a Washington-based lawyer who advises clients on compliance with federal lobbying laws.

If Giuliani and Mukasey were “working together or in parallel,” Rosenstein added, “then it’s a huge problem for Giuliani.”

Mukasey’s move to register as a lobbyist for the MEK’s political affiliate comes as Giuliani, the former New York City mayor-turned-personal lawyer to President Donald Trump, is facing growing legal peril connected to his international business activities.

Giuliani’s overseas dealings, primarily in Ukraine, are under fresh scrutiny after two of his associates were charged last week in a scheme to funnel foreign money to U.S. politicians.

The New York Times has reported that Giuliani’s business dealings are under federal investigation and prosecutors may be looking at his exposure for failing to file as a foreign agent.

Legal experts say Giuliani’s work on behalf of the MEK and its political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, also raises questions about whether he may have run afoul of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA. The law requires American citizens to disclose to the Justice Department any lobbying or public relations work on behalf of a foreign entity, regardless of whether they’re paid for the representation.

A review of the group’s government filings shows that Giuliani met with MEK officials at least once every year since 2014. A range of issues were discussed, including “Iran’s nuclear weapons as well as Iran’s terrorism in the region, including Iraq and Syria” in 2014, the plight of Iranian dissidents living in Iraq in 2015, and the protests in Iran in 2018.

During that period, he has appeared at MEK-related events in Poland, Alba-

nia, Paris and Washington. FARA experts say Giuliani's speech in Washington in May 2018 and U.S.-based writings in support of the group are particularly problematic.

"This certainly walks like a FARA issue and talks like a FARA issue," said Matthew Sanderson, a defense lawyer who specializes in foreign lobbying cases.

He said the Justice Department will likely try to "develop facts to determine whether these efforts to influence public opinion in the U.S. were at the request or direction of MEK, a foreign interest."

"This is a particularly unusual situation because Mr. Giuliani was acting as the president's counsel, all while acting in ways that suggest he was simultaneously representing certain foreign interests," Sanderson said.

In an interview with NBC News, Giuliani said he has no reason to register as a foreign agent because, unlike Mukasey, he's not planning to speak to U.S. government officials about the MEK.

"I'm not doing what he's doing," Giuliani said. "He's not registering for any previous activity. He's registering because he's asking for a specific meeting with the government."

Giuliani would not elaborate on the reason for the meeting. Mukasey declined comment.

Representatives for the group's political arm did not return requests for comment.

Formed in the 1960s as a Marxist-Islamist movement, the MEK has a bloody history.

The group, whose name translates as "People's Holy Warriors of Iran," is accused of killing six Americans before the 1979 Iranian revolution and assassinating Iranian diplomats in the subsequent years.

A longtime ally of the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, the MEK was placed on the State Department's terror blacklist in 1997. The group enlisted an A-list cast of former American political and law enforcement leaders as part of its effort to remove itself from the terrorist list and enhance its reputation in the West.

The strategy worked. In 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a decision to remove the group from the list.

Daniel Benjamin, a State Department counterterrorism coordinator from 2009 to 2012, has focused extensively on the network of American politicians who have been paid by MEK, including Giuliani and Mukasey.

"I found it pretty distasteful that they were shilling for this group even if it was delisted," said Benjamin, now a professor at Dartmouth College. "This is a group that has American blood on its hands, and it's never owned up to that."

Benjamin said the group has long attracted anti-Iran hard-liners who recruit like-minded peers.

"Look at those who have gone on their gravy train and then go to their events and say MEK is going to bring democracy and peace to Iran," Benjamin said. "Basically these guys bring aboard their pals. Especially among the hardest line anti-Iran folks, this is the place to go. Though plenty of people become much more hard line once their pockets are filled with MEK money."

"The big question," Benjamin added, "is where does all this money come from?"

Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, described the organization as a fringe group with mysterious benefactors that garners scant support in its home country.

"Their population in Iran hovers between negligible and nill," Sadjadpour said.

Still, the MEK's roster of supporters includes an array of prominent Americans: former FBI Director Louis Freeh; former Democratic governors and presidential candidates Howard Dean and Bill Richardson; Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton; and former Obama national security adviser James L. Jones.

In speeches and media interviews, Giuliani and the others have insisted the MEK is now a democratic-minded opposition group committed to overturning the mullah-led government in Tehran. They say their support for the group is also based on humanitarian motives — to ensure the safety of the Iranian dissidents living in Iraq who face the threat of attacks.

Giuliani's MEK advocacy dates to at least 2010. In December of that year, he and Mukasey were among a group of prominent Republicans who traveled to a rally in Paris where they called on the Obama administration to remove MEK from the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations.

"For your organization to be described as a terrorist organization is just really a disgrace," Giuliani declared before a crowd of Iranian exiles, according to an article in *The Washington Post*.

Mukasey urged the White House to offer "all possible technical and covert support to those fighting to end oppression in Iran."

"What it has done and what it is doing is nothing less than an embarrassment," he told the crowd, according to *The Post*.

The following year, Giuliani and Mukasey co-wrote an op-ed in the *National Review* with two other MEK supporters defending the organization.

In the 2011 piece, headlined "MEK is not a terrorist group," Giuliani and the others argued against suggestions that the authors were providing material support to a terror group. The MEK has "provided valuable intelligence to the United States to Iranian nuclear plans," they wrote.

In his FARA filing, dated Sept. 26, Mukasey wrote that he's not being compensated for his MEK advocacy.



“The registrant has agreed to communicate with executive branch and legislative officials in the United States government on behalf of the foreign principal and its members on an unpaid basis,” the filing says. “However, the foreign principal will reimburse the registrant for direct expenses such as filing costs and travel.”

The filing lists Sept. 20, 2019, as the date of the agreement with MEK.

Sanderson, the defense lawyer who focuses on government lobbying, said the listing of that date could pose problems for Mukasey if he started doing lobbying work for MEK before then.

“Filing a late registration, especially if you’re not accurate in your description, could result in charges,” Sanderson said.

But Sanderson added that filing late is still better than not filing at all. “If you approach the government and proactively say, ‘I’m registering,’ even if it’s late, you’re in a much better position than if the government comes to your door.”

Giuliani would not say how much the group pays him for his appearances. He said there’s no reason why the Justice Department would target him for activities that dozens of other former U.S. politicians and military figures are participating in.

“If I have to register, so do three former heads of the joint chiefs of staff and eight very prominent Democrats and eight very prominent Republicans,” Giuliani said.

In an interview with NBC News’ Andrea Mitchell in Poland this past February, Giuliani said he worked to get the MEK off the terror list because “there was no evidence of any kind of terrorist activity for over 20 years, if any, and they were basically revolutionaries who overthrew the shah.”

“They believe in democracy, in human rights, rights of women,” said Giuliani, who was appearing at an MEK event.

In the interview, he also defending advocating for the MEK while also working as the president's personal lawyer.

“I’m a private lawyer, so private lawyers have private clients,” Giuliani said. “This has been a client of mine for years. Maybe if I was taking a new position. Maybe if i was taking a bold new different position. I’m just repeating what I said 11 years ago, 10 years ago.”

Mukasey told The New York Times in 2011 that he had been paid his standard speaking fee — \$15,000 to \$20,000, according to the Web site of his speakers’ agency — to deliver talks at MEK-related events.

He insisted that his decision to advocate on behalf of the group was not driven by money. “There’s no way I would compromise my standing by expressing views I don’t believe in,” Mukasey told The Times.

Federal prosecutors have brought few FARA cases over the years. But the law garnered renewed attention during the special counsel’s investigation into Russian election interference.

Two Trump associates, Paul Manafort and Rick Gates, were charged with failing to register as foreign agents.

Giuliani’s contacts with the MEK extended into this past summer. In July, he traveled to Albania to meet with the group’s president, Maryam Rajavi.

An article from the MEK’s official website said Giuliani “emphasized that America stands on the side of the Iranian people and supports their struggle for freedom.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Albanian State Police Parrots US: MEK Considered ‘Iranian Opposition Movement’

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

October 23, 2019

In a statement today, the Albanian State Police and the Anti-Terrorism Directorate claim to have uncovered a “terrorist network directed by the Iranian regime” in Albania. The network allegedly consists of 4 Iranian citizens forming an “active terrorist cell of an external operations unit of the Iranian Quds Forces, which are part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard.” No arrests have been made, and it is unclear whether international arrest warrants have been issued.

In a response, former opposition MP Edi Paloka claimed that the sudden declaration was an attempt of the Rama government to deviate attention from the failure to open EU accession negotiations.

This is not the first time the Rama government has uncovered Iranian “terrorist” plots. In December 2018, the Albanian government expelled two Irani-

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an diplomats from Albania, including the Iranian Ambassador for reasons of “damaging its national security.” The alleged reason was a planned attack on an Albania–Israel football match. The expulsion was publicly praised by US President Donald Trump and Saudi Arabia.

According to the police declaration of today, the uncovered terrorist cell is responsible, among others, for the March 2018 plan to commit a terrorist act during the celebration of Novruz, frequented by high-level members of the Iranian opposition organization Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK).

In an interview, Baba Edmond Brahimaj confirmed that two persons had tried to enter the World Headquarters (Kryegjyshata) of the Bektashi Order during Novruz 2018. It is unclear whether the two persons who were arrested back then and released because of lack of evidence are among the four suspects mentioned today in the police statement.

By referring to the MEK as an “Iranian opposition organization” and an “Iranian opposition movement,” the Albanian State Police echoes the public statements of Prime Minister Edi Rama during his recent speech at the UN’s General Assembly:

Albania is especially worried by the destabilizing behavior of Iran in the Middle East, but also its activities that cause problems with regard to the Iranian opposition, the community of the Iranian opposition, which we have welcome with generosity in our country after extraordinary massacres, which they have been subjected to in other countries. We had to react to several illegal activities of Iran and security interests [...].

The reference “Iranian opposition movement” is a recent change in the government’s language. When the great majority of the MEK members were transferred to Albania from a refugee camp in Iraq in 2016, Prime Minister Rama made no mention of the political context, but instead referred to the operation as “humanitarian” in a letter to Parliament:

Each member of the MEK organization who arrived in Albania has a residency permit and healthcare card. Each of the persons who arrived so far in our country has been accepted on a humanitarian basis and will be treated

according to the legal framework in force. [...]

So far, none of the citizens who are member of MEK has applied for Albanian citizenship. I want to inform you that the Albanian government has taken all necessary measures, in close cooperation with our foreign partners, to be apt at dealing with this important humanitarian operation.

There is no mention in the letter of the political activities that the MEK would be allowed to develop once inside their Albania compound in Manza, near Tirana. Indeed, the designation “Iranian opposition” appears to derive directly from the US government; the EU, for example, does not refer to the MEK as “Iranian opposition.” Under the Trump presidency, the MEK has become a centerpiece of US Iran policy, with countless US officials making the trip to Albania to meet MEK leader Maryam Rajavi. This includes personal Trump lawyer Rudi Giuliani (eyewitness report of his speech here), former advisor Newt Gingrich, as well as former FBI director Louis J. Freeh, late US Senator John McCain, and a delegation of US Senators Thom Tillis, Roy Blunt, and John Cornyn.

By designating the MEK as “Iranian opposition,” the US government attempts to pave the way to a possible regime change in Iran in which the MEK would play a possible role. Since Trump’s election, Maryam Rajavi has publicly called for an “uprising” in Iran.

In return, the Iranian government has accused the Albanian government of hosting “terrorists,” while there have been reports of human rights abuses in the Albanian MEK camp.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Is France Moving Against the MEK?

Eldar Mamedov

November 6, 2019

Lobe  
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On October 30, a volley of tweets attributed to Alexis Kohler, chief of staff of the French President Emmanuel Macron, announced that France, taking into account the “negative consequences” of the presence of the National Council of Resistance (NCRI) on the French soil, will restrict its activities in the country. On November 5, however, the Élysée Palace disowned the tweets as fake, and the Twitter handle supposedly belonging to Kohler was suspended.

The incident raises a number of questions: Who was behind these tweets? What did they seek to achieve? Why did it take almost one week to take Kohler’s fake profile down? And what does it say about the French cyber-warfare capabilities? That aside, the news itself may not necessarily be groundless.

NCRI is an umbrella for the Mujahedeen-e Khalk,

## Is France Moving Against The MEK?

NOVEMBER 6, 2019 ELDAR MAMEDOV · 3 COMMENTS



*Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and French President Emmanuel Macron*

or MEK, also known as MKO, and People's Mujahedeen Organization of Iran (PMOI), an organization of Iranian dissidents in exile that seeks to overthrow the Islamic Republic. It was on the European Union list of terrorist organizations until 2009 and on the U.S. list until 2012. Its presence in France harks back to 1981. The French government granted asylum to MEK's then-leader Massoud Rajavi, exiled from Iran after losing a bloody power struggle against Ayatollah Khomeini, his former ally and the leader of the Iranian revolution of 1979. Ever since, the MEK's presence in France was a source of friction in relations between Paris and Tehran.

Every year the group organized rallies in the Paris suburb of Villepinte, attended by a wide array of well-known and reportedly well-paid speakers, mostly former and current officials from the United States, European and Arab states. These speakers included, among others, former U.S. national security adviser John Bolton (before he assumed that position) and former New York City mayor and personal lawyer to President Donald Trump Rudy

Giuliani. Their role was to provide legitimacy to the MEK and its “president-elect” Maryam Rajavi as the alternative to the current Islamic regime in Iran.

In July 2018, just as the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani was to embark on a trip to Paris to work on saving the faltering nuclear agreement, known as Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action, or JCPOA, reports emerged about a bomb plot against the MEK gathering, allegedly hatched by the agents of Iranian intelligence. The case was never conclusively resolved. There remains some possibility that the “plot” was in reality a false flag operation concocted by the MEK and its foreign allies designed to sabotage diplomacy between the EU and Iran at a critical time. Reportedly, French intelligence has not entirely discarded the latter theory. Certainly, such a plot would only benefit those who seek to push the EU to join Trump’s “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran.

This helps explain why the French authorities did not allow the annual MEK gathering in summer of 2019, ostensibly for “security concerns.” It is likely that the real motivation behind the decision, however, was the desire of Paris to explore diplomatic opportunities in its relations with Tehran. In the race to save the nuclear agreement, French President Emmanuel Macron emerged as the most energetic of the Western leaders, engaging with both Iran and United States in pursuit of de-escalation and new negotiations. In this context, the last thing Paris needed was some incident involving MEK on French territory.

There is another reason why Paris would want to curtail MEK activities: its efforts to release two French academics currently in Iranian jails – Fariba Adelkhah and Roland Marchal. French sources point to a precedent in 1986, when the French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac struck a deal with Tehran for the release of French hostages held prisoners by the Hezbollah in Lebanon. As a price, the MEK was forced to leave France and relocated to Iraq then. Similar dynamics may be at play now.

If asked to leave, the destination for remaining MEK cadres in France would be Albania, which already hosts around 3,000 members, following the U.S. and U.N.-brokered resettlement from their former base in Iraq. A complete



eviction from France would be a serious setback for the MEK. Its continued relevance was fully premised on its ability to visibly project power and connections on both sides of the Atlantic and in the Persian Gulf. Annual public rallies were a medium to build up the lobby for the group. Being forced to trade Paris for Tirana, a capital of an impoverished Balkan nation, geographically far removed from both main Western capitals and Iran itself, is a patent downgrade. To this should be added the waning fortunes of the MEK's champions in the U.S.: Bolton was fired, Giuliani is too busy dealing with his own legal troubles to continue lobbying for the MEK, and Trump himself is fighting for political survival amid the specter of an impending impeachment.

True, the MEK is still capable of performing such stunts as recent gatherings in the French Senate and the European Parliament (EP) in Strasbourg. The EP in particular is an attractive platform for the MEK, since, unlike national parliaments, it represents MPs from 28 member states. Thus, a bigger diversity of views and sensitivities is present and more outlets for MEK efforts are available. But even there, its influence is on the wane. The MEK's success to win recruits for its cause hinged on its ability to be all things to all people: for example, women rights defenders to the left, and promoters of better relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia to the right. However, the group committed a major strategic blunder by funding Vox, the Spanish extreme right party. This led some of the MEK's supporters on the left to sever ties. Moreover, the MEK never managed to gain any foothold in official EP bodies dealing with Iran – its foreign affairs committee and its delegation for relations with Iran. In any case, small acts in parliaments reflect the group's desperate attempts to remain relevant, and are no match for ambitious rallies the MEK was able to organize in previous years in France.

Throughout its history, the MEK showed remarkable resilience, and due to its chameleonic nature and deep pockets, managed to navigate the turbulent waters of Middle Eastern politics. It may be premature to write an obituary for the MEK just yet. But the French steps to curtail its activities, particularly if and when they'll eventually lead to the group's expulsion from France, are definitely contributing to its decline.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Saudi Arabia Is Not Prepared To Play Nice With Iran

Arash Reisinezhad

November 9, 2019

**K**ey point: Saudi Arabia wants to roll back Iranian influence in the Middle East, by any means necessary.

On July 9, 2016, Prince Turki bin Faisal, former Saudi intelligence head, unprecedentedly attended a rally for the notorious Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen Khalq (MEK) and called for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran. His remarks were immediately followed on July 30 by a meeting between the head of the MEK, Maryam Rajavi, and the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, in Paris. Earlier before, in late March, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), which has not taken up arms against Iran for roughly twenty years, suddenly waged a vicious insurgency against Tehran, leading to bloody skirmishes between the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iranian Kurdish peshmerga in northwestern Iran. These sequential

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events herald a new era in confrontation between Tehran and Riyadh.

The growing escalation between Tehran and Riyadh has been sometimes mentioned in the context of a new geopolitical “Great Game.” Both countries have been engaged in a decades-long strategic contest for regional supremacy in an area stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean and Arabian seas. The two powers are backing different sides in Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon and finally Yemen.

In the pre-9/11 era, Saudi Arabia used to regionally contain Iran and its foreign policy of “exporting the revolution” by siding with the Baath regime of Baghdad and later with Kabul’s Taliban. Despite grave ideological differences, Riyadh’s leaders backed Saddam Hussein in the bloody eight-year war with Iran. Rooted in King Faisal’s financial support for the extension of Wahhabism in Pakistan and then backing the Afghan mujahideen during the Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979–89), the Saudis had also a key role in establishing the fundamentalist Taliban in Kabul. By the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia’s achievements in containing Iran reached their peak.

9/11 and President Bush’s ensuing global war on terror overthrew the regimes in Kabul and Baghdad. With the downfall of the Baath and Taliban, Riyadh lost its traditional strategic trump cards in containing the alleged Iranian threat. In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the power vacuum in Iraq disentangled Iran from its direct regional threats. To contain Iran’s growing power in the region, Riyadh and its regional allies exaggerated Tehran’s imminent regional hegemony in the Middle East. Late in 2004, King Abdullah of Jordan coined a controversial phrase that still dominates the heart of Middle East geopolitics: the Shia Crescent. “If pro-Iran parties or politicians dominate the new Iraqi government,” the Washington Post paraphrased, “a new ‘crescent’ of dominant Shia movements or governments stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon could emerge to alter the traditional balance of power between the two main Islamic sects and pose new challenges to U.S. interests and allies.” For Riyadh, Iran considered the alleged Shia Crescent as a bedrock of its newfound regional power, shattering down a long-term dominant regional order and posing an existential threat for the security of the region’s Arab regimes.

The controversial Iranian nuclear program also added insult to injury. A Persian Shia power, possibly equipped with nuclear bombs, would change the region's power arrangement at the expense of the Arab-Sunni regime, Riyadh argued. Urging the White House to "cut off the head of the snake," Riyadh welcomed tightening U.S.-led international sanctions over Iran. Nonetheless, Saudi leaders avoided direct confrontation with hard-liners in Tehran. Despite Ahmadinejad's harsh rhetoric against Israel and the West, Saudi Arabia remained "passive," heavily relying on U.S. policy.

The emergence of the Arab Spring set a benchmark for a final transformation in Saudi Arabia's regional policy. The Tahrir Revolution and President Obama's implicit support for the Egyptian revolutionaries deprived Riyadh of one of its old allies in Cairo. The destabilizing waves of the Arab Spring also reached Bahrain, urging the Shia majority there to challenge the Saudi-backed monarchy. Although the Saudi-backed military brutally crushed the peaceful movement there, the legitimacy of the authoritarian monarchy was substantially diminished. In the course of suppressing the Bahraini movement, Saudi leaders framed the revolutionaries as an Iranian fifth column to delegitimize Bahrainis' rightful demands to stop sociopolitical and economic discrimination.

Saudi Arabia's reaction, however, did not limit its anti-Iran campaign just to intensify its long-standing language of "Iranophobia." In light of a hesitant Obama administration, the rise of Iran brought about the ascendancy of a major shift in Saudi Arabia's regional policy towards Iran, from containment to rollback.

The outbreak of the anti-Assad insurgency in Syria gave a unique opportunity for Riyadh and its allies to tie down Iran along the east coast of the Mediterranean. With direct support of Riyadh, as well as Doha and Ankara, Syria became engulfed in a bloody civil war. At the same time, Saudi Arabia, as the leader of the Sunni camp, struggled to build a Sunni coalition with Egypt and Turkey to counterbalance the alleged Shia threat in Yemen. The Saudi army began conducting military operations against Houthi rebels in Yemen, using brute force to confront alleged Iranian threat. The final outcome was Riyadh painting its regional confrontation with Iran with the same brush of sectarianism.

More substantively, Riyadh took a new approach in its confrontation with Iran by making ties with militant groups in order to roll back Iran. It seems that Saudi Arabia's aggressive new policy involves confronting regional-domestic threats by making connections with political-military groups beyond its territory. Saudi Arabia's new policy is now based on engaging with Iran in a series of proxy wars to undermine and rollback Tehran's regional power. Blatantly wrestling with Iran over the region, young Saudi leaders confront the alleged Iranian threat both externally and internally.

Riyadh's external policy to roll back Iran is based on support for jihadi-Salafi groups, challenging the region's Tehran-backed regimes. As it heavily backed Syrian rebels, ranging from Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS to Jaysh al-Islam and the Free Syrian Army, Saudi Arabia considered the Damascus regime to be Iran's strategic trump card. At the same time, Riyadh has been attempting to widen the Shia-Sunni chasm by supporting Sunni elements in Iraq. By influencing Syria and Iraq, Riyadh seeks to pressure Tehran to tread lightly in other parts of the region, such as Yemen. Upping the pressure on Iran's sphere of influence and western border would do just that.

Internally, Saudi Arabia's aggressive new policy attempts to pose threats to Iran by activating several opposition groups, including the MEK as well as ethnic militant groups in Iran's Kurdistan and Baluchistan. This is the internal aspect of Saudi Arabia's new roll-back policy.

With Prince Turki's appearance at the July 9 conference of the exiled MEK, and his call for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic, Riyadh took a major step in its new roll-back policy. Founded in 1965, the MEK was a militant opposition group during the shah's reign, with an eclectic ideology combining Marxism and Islamism. It also carried out a number of attacks against U.S. soldiers stationed in Iran, and years later it was put on the U.S. State Department's terrorist list. In the aftermath of the revolution, the MEK was brushed aside by the revolutionary regime, and has been listed as a terrorist organization by Tehran since the 1980s. It had fought against Iran during Saddam Hussein's invasion, and later helped Saddam suppress an uprising by Iraqi Shia and Kurds. At the MEK meeting in Paris, Faisal lambasted the Islamic Republic, and particularly its founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, for its "exporting" of the Islamic Revolution. It is a major manifestation

of Riyadh's new roll-back policy, prompting the Saudi leaders to drop the ambiguity and pursue the policy of regime change in Iran with greater transparency.

Such a tectonic shift in Saudi policy was followed by another controversial meeting in Paris, between Maryam Rajavi, the head of the MEK, and Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority. The PLO-MEK connections were not a nuanced issue. Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, MEK guerrillas trained in "Fatahland" military bases in southern Lebanon to challenge the Pahlavi regime in Tehran. Interestingly, both groups fought on the side of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War. However, Abbas's meeting was immediately seen as in line with Saudi Arabia's offensive policies in the region. As a major funder of the Palestinian Authority, Riyadh had facilitated the meeting. It was a symbolic insult to Iran. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has helped Palestinian resistance groups more than any other Arab country. Iranian officials harshly criticized the meeting. Hossein Sheikholeslam, an adviser to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, said that the MEK is supported by the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and called Abbas a "puppet of America." He went further, calling Abbas a CIA agent and claiming that "Mahmoud Abbas has had secret ties with terrorist groups and Israelis, and now these relations are being disclosed."

Saudi leaders also stepped up their campaign against Iran by supporting ethnic militant groups in Iran. In the wake of growing hostility between Tehran and Riyadh, Mustafa Hijri, the secretary-general of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, announced that his party would send its peshmerga and political cadres to Iranian Kurdistan. Tehran soon responded by claiming that regional countries, especially Israel and Saudi Arabia, were behind the resurgence of Kurdish activity. Tel Aviv's connections with the Kurds have had a long history. Israelis have been training Kurdish peshmerga since the Iraqi Kurdish insurgency, led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, in 1961. In the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, the KDPI, whose headquarters have been based in Iraqi Kurdistan, received financial backing from Tel Aviv. Hinting that the Iranian Kurds need Israeli support, Mustafa Hijri said, "We [Israel and the Kurds] have common enemies."

Saudi Arabia siding with the KDPI was, however, a new turn. Frustrated of

preventing the rise of Shia in Iraq, Riyadh officials have recently expressed their willingness to establish an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq. In an unprecedented joint meeting with Israeli diplomat Dore Gold, General Anwar Majid Eshki declared this new turn. An independent Kurdish Republic adjacent to Iran would endanger Iran's national integrity and deliver a heavy blow for its allies in Damascus and Baghdad. The spillover of the growing threat of Kurdish secessionism has also amplified, with Saudi Arabia backing Iranian Kurdish militants. Despite Saudi Arabia's denial of any patronage, Iranian officials harshly warned Riyadh. "The Saudi consulate in Erbil has set up a training base there and established two offices near our borders," former IRGC commander Mohsen Rezai told Iranian state television in July. Indeed, a number of Saudi media outlets, like Al Arabiya, have covered KDPI terrorist activities to an unprecedented extent.

Just like leaders in Riyadh, the KDPI were among the major Iranian opponents of a nuclear settlement between Iran and the P5+1. In the wake of the nuclear talks, Hijri visited Washington, where he met with conservative congressmen and think-tank analysts to oppose a deal with Iran. In an interview with GlobalPost, Hijri argued that "If sanctions are lifted, Iran will get resources to continue support for terrorists and dictatorships that sponsor terrorists such as [Syria's] Bashar al Assad. They will get more resources to make more turbulence in the Middle East." These comments echoed the Saudis' and Israelis fears'.

Urged by Riyadh, the KDPI embarked on a new campaign, calling for the overthrow of the regime of Tehran and the disintegration of the Iranian state. In June, Hijri wrote an article in the Jerusalem Post, calling on the international community to work with Iran's ethnic minorities to achieve presumptive regional peace and stability. He also declared that the KDPI had joined with other minorities of Arab, Azeri, Baloch and Turkmen organizations to form the so-called "Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran." Lastly, he concluded that "we believe there is a strategic convergence between the interests of nations inside Iran and the region's main actors [i.e., Saudi Arabia and Israel] that can bring a new order to the Middle East in which we can find a basis for enduring security and lasting peace." Claiming that Iran is "vulnerable," Hijri declared that the KDPI had changed its goal from autonomy within a federal Iran to regime change since, according to Hijri,

“the Islamic Republic should cease to exist, otherwise the middle East will never be peace [sic].” It suited Saudi Arabia’s new offensive policy and harsh language against Iran.

Tehran officials accused Riyadh of support for the KDPI. Since mid-June, more skirmishes between KDPI peshmerga and the IRGC have broken out, heralding the beginning of a new era in regional competition between Riyadh and Tehran.

Besides, Riyadh has been accused of supporting militant Baluchi groups, particularly Jundallah, in southeastern Iran. Waging violent struggles against the central regime of Iran, the Salafi-jihadi Jundallah has been financially backed by Saudis, according to Admiral Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran. Along with MEK and ethnic militant groups, Riyadh has also supported several exiled Iranian figures who are working under the guise of human rights. They have advocated any steps, even all-out war with Iran, to overthrow the regime in Tehran.

Amid a bloody confrontation with Iran, Saudi Arabia’s establishment of a new front of both external and internal proxies ushers in its roll-back policy. Nevertheless, for Saudi Arabia to employ Wahhabi, Salafi proxies would be a totally strategic misstep. Despite its imitation of Iran’s foreign policy by investing in militant proxies, Saudi Arabia’s newfound aggression toward Iran may collapse and therefore not achieve its desired results. Why?

First, Iran’s policy in making connections with political, militant groups in the region is rooted in its historical insecurity. Iran’s lack of natural defensive borders, combined with the fact that it is the only country in the region that is both Shia and Persian-speaking, have cursed the country with its “strategic loneliness.” Coined first by Mohiaddin Mesbahi, director of Middle East Studies at Florida International University, the term suggests that “Iran by design and by default has been strategically ‘lonely’ and deprived of meaningful alliances.” Iran’s strategic loneliness reaffirms the country’s historical problems with defending its frontiers. The very logic of geography and history show that Iran’s final deterrence capabilities are heavily predicated on its ability to project power externally. From this perspective, building strategic connections with Shia militant groups has been a strategic tool for Iran to



compensate for its historical strategic loneliness. For more than three decades, these ties have been the centerpiece of Iran’s strategy to achieve its national security aspirations and to contain foreign threats.

On the contrary way, Saudi Arabia has not suffered from long-term strategic loneliness. The country has not been the target major foreign invasions. Since the dawn of Islam, the country and its sacred cities of Mecca and Medina have been at the center of the Islamic world—a fact that has given the country a symbolic security. Indeed, history, culture and geography have protected the country from regional threats. This means building networks with militant groups beyond its borders lacks roots in Saudi Arabia history and geography.

More substantially, building and maintaining connections with militant groups is heavily predicated on a revolutionary ideology to urge external guerrillas. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has been a revisionist state, challenging the dominant order of the region with its ideology. Framed around the nodal point of “independence,” Iran’s anticolonial ideology has generated a centripetal dynamic in the region, making the country a sanctuary for a host of militants that challenged conservative regional powers.

Conversely, Riyadh has been a leading conservative regime in the region. Since the late 1960s, Riyadh’s leaders, especially King Faisal, gradually shaped the country’s policy of exporting Wahhabism. Until now, the ideology of Wahhabism has captured the minds of militant rebels in the Muslim world ranging from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Heavily financed by Saudi Arabia’s petrodollars, Wahhabi mosques and imams abroad, including in western Europe, preach a radical narrative of Islam, planting the seeds of Islamic fundamentalism around the globe. Nonetheless, Wahhabi and jihadi-Salafist groups never see Riyadh as their ideological hub in the same way that Iran’s proxies see Tehran. This is mainly due to the significance given to “independence” in their discourse. While independence and liberation from Western values and presence in Islamic countries has been at the center of jihadism, its patron’s strong connections with the United States and the West have devalued Saudi Arabia’s prestige among its proxies. That is why these groups, from ISIS, Nusra and Jaysh al-Islam to MEK and KDPI, consider Saudi Arabia as merely a financial bank for waging their terrorist

struggles. This means that the country lacks strong soft power in comparison to its mortal enemy, Iran.

The lack of soft power among its proxies would also pose threats to Saudi Arabia's national security. Iran's strategic allies, Shia proxies from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean, have not endangered Iran regime. Conversely, Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi, Salafi-jihadi groups, like Al Qaeda and ISIS, have competed with Riyadh's claim of leading the Sunni world. With this historical background in mind, it would not be surprising if other Saudi proxies could target the country. In an interview with Fars News Agency on July 10, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, former deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, said that he had previously told the Saudis that "it is impossible to use terrorists as a tool to make the region insecure and at the same time expect calm within the kingdom."

In the coming months, Saudi Arabia's aggressive new policy towards Iran will escalate. Riyadh will keep using any possible means to put pressure on Iran. Its aggressive policy will eventually cause irreversible losses both in the region and in the kingdom itself. As history has shown, this this policy will backfire in long run—as it did for Saddam Hussein. The Baath regime of Baghdad invested heavily in Iranian opposition groups and ethnic, secessionist militant groups. The final result was the end of the Iraqi regime. Fires are raging in the Middle East, a region wherein "history repeats itself, first as tragedy, the second time as farce."

Arash Reisinezhad is a research fellow at the Middle East Center and an adjunct professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations, School of International and Public Affairs, Florida International University. This article first appeared in 2016.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The Iranian opposition fighters who mustn't think about sex

Linda Pressly, Albana Kasapi

November 11, 2019

For six years, Albania has been home to one of Iran's main opposition groups, the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK. But hundreds of members have walked out - some complaining about the organisation's rigid rules enforcing celibacy, and control over contact with family. Now, dozens languish in the Albanian capital, Tirana, unable to return to Iran or get on with their lives.



"I didn't speak to my wife and son for over 37 years - they thought I'd died. But I told them, 'No, I'm alive, I'm living in Albania...' They cried."

That first contact by phone with his family after so many years was difficult for Gholam Mirzai, too. He is 60, and absconded two years ago from the MEK's military-style encampment outside Tirana.

Now he scrapes by in the city, full of regrets and ac-

cused by his former Mujahideen comrades of spying for their sworn enemy, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The MEK has a turbulent and bloody history. As Islamist-Marxist radicals, its members backed the 1979 Iranian revolution that toppled the Shah. But relations with a triumphant Ayatollah Khomeini soon soured. When the government cracked down hard, the Mujahideen had to run for their lives.

Neighbouring Iraq offered sanctuary, and from their desert citadel during the Iran/Iraq war (1980-1988), the MEK fought on the side of Saddam Hussein against their homeland.

Gholam Mirzai was serving in the Iranian military when he was captured by Saddam Hussein's forces at the start of that conflict. He spent eight years as a prisoner of war in Iraq. But in time, Iranian prisoners like Mirzai were encouraged to join forces with their compatriots. And that is what he did.

Mirzai is now a "disassociate" - one of hundreds of former MEK members who have left the organisation since they moved to Albania. With the help of funds from family, some have paid people smugglers to take them elsewhere in Europe, and perhaps two have made it back to Iran. But dozens remain in Tirana, stateless and officially unable to work.

So how did the battle-hardened members of the MEK - formerly a proscribed terrorist organisation in the United States and Europe - find their way to this corner of Europe?

In 2003, the allied invasion of Iraq made life perilous for the MEK. The organisation's protector, Saddam Hussein, was suddenly gone, and the Mujahideen were repeatedly attacked - hundreds were killed and injured. Fearing an even worse humanitarian disaster, the Americans approached the Albanian government in 2013 and persuaded it to receive some 3,000 MEK members in Tirana.

"We offered them shelter from attacks and abuse, and the possibility to lead a normal life in a country where they are not harassed, attacked or brutalised," says Lulzim Basha, leader of the Democratic Party, which was in government at the time, and is now in opposition.

In Albania, politics are deeply polarised - everything is contested. But, almost uniquely, the presence of the MEK isn't - publicly, both governing and opposition parties support their Iranian guests.

For the MEK, Albania was a completely new environment. Gholam Mirzai was astonished that even children had mobile phones. And because some of the Mujahideen were initially accommodated in apartment buildings on the edge of the capital, the organisation's grip on its members was looser than it had been previously. In Iraq, it had controlled every aspect of their lives, but here, temporarily, there was a chance to exercise a degree of freedom.

"There was some rough ground behind the flats where the commanders told us we should take daily exercise," remembers Hassan Heyrany, another "disassociate".

Heyrany and his colleagues used the cover of trees and bushes to sneak around to the internet cafe close by and make contact with their families.

"When we were in Iraq, if you wanted to phone home, the MEK called you weak - we had no relationship with our families," he says. "But when we came to Tirana, we found the internet for personal use."

Towards the end of 2017, though, the MEK moved out to new headquarters. The camp is built on a gently sloping hill in the Albanian countryside, about 30km (19 miles) from the capital. Behind the imposing, iron gates, there is an impressive marble arch topped with golden lions. A tree-lined boulevard runs up to a memorial dedicated to the thousands of people who have lost their lives in the MEK's struggle against the Iranian government.

Uninvited journalists are not welcome here. But in July this year, thousands attended the MEK's Free Iran event at the camp. Politicians from around the globe, influential Albanians and people from the nearby village of Manze, joined thousands of MEK members and their leader, Maryam Rajavi, in the glitzy auditorium. US President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, addressed the crowd.

"These are people who are dedicated to freedom," he said, referring to the

uniformly dressed and gender-segregated MEK members present in the hall.

“And if you think that’s a cult, then there’s something wrong with you,” he added, bringing the house down.

Powerful politicians like Giuliani support the MEK’s goal of regime change in Iran. The movement’s manifesto includes a commitment to human rights, gender equality and participatory democracy for Iran.

But Hassan Heyrany does not buy it any more. Last year he left the MEK, rejecting what he saw as the leadership’s oppressive control of his private life. Heyrany had joined the Mujahideen in his 20s, attracted by its commitment to political pluralism.

“It was very attractive. But if you believe in democracy, you cannot suppress the soul of your members,” he says.

The nadir of Heyrany’s life with the MEK was an evening meeting he was obliged to attend.

“We had a little notebook, and if we had any sexual moments we should write them down. For example, “Today, in the morning, I had an erection.””

Romantic relationships and marriage are prohibited by the MEK. It was not always like that - parents and their children used to join the Mujahideen. But after the bloody defeat of one MEK offensive by the Iranians, the leadership argued it had happened because the Mujahideen were distracted by personal relationships. Mass divorce followed. Children were sent away - often to foster homes in Europe - and single MEK members pledged to stay that way.

In that notebook, Heyrany says they also had to write any personal daydreams.

“For example, “When I saw a baby on television, I had a feeling that I wished to have a child or a family of my own.””

And the Mujahideen had to read from their notebooks in front of their commander and comrades at the daily meeting.

“That’s very hard for a person,” Heyrany says.

Now he likens the MEK camp in Manze to Animal Farm, George Orwell’s critique of the Stalinist era in the USSR. “It’s a cult,” he says simply.

A diplomatic source in Tirana described the MEK as “a unique cultural group - not a cult, but cult-like.”

The BBC was not able to put any of this to the MEK, because the organisation refused to be interviewed. But in Albania, a nation that endured a punishing, closed, Communist regime for decades there is some sympathy for the MEK leadership’s position - at least on the prohibition of personal relationships.

“In extreme situations, you make extreme choices,” says Diana Culi, a writer, women’s activist and former MP for the governing Socialist Party.

“They have vowed to fight all their lives for the liberation of their country from a totalitarian regime. Sometimes we have difficulty accepting strong belief in a cause. This is personal sacrifice, and it’s a mentality I understand.”

Even so, some Albanians worry that the MEK’s presence threatens national security.

Two Iranian diplomats were expelled following allegations about violent plots against the Mujahideen, and the European Union has accused Tehran of being behind conspiracies to assassinate regime opponents, including MEK members, on Dutch, Danish and French soil. (The Iranian Embassy in Tirana declined the BBC’s request for an interview.) A highly-placed source in the Socialist Party is also concerned that the intelligence services lack the capacity to monitor more than 2,500 MEK members with military training.

“No-one with a brain would’ve accepted them here,” he says.

A diplomat says some of the “disassociates” are certainly working for Iran. Gholam Mirzai and Hassan Heyrany have themselves been accused by the MEK of being agents for Tehran. It is a charge they deny.

Now both men are focused on the future. With help from family in Iran, Heyrany is opening a coffee shop, and he is dating an Albanian. At 40, he is younger than most of his fellow cadres and he remains optimistic.

Gholam Mirzai's situation is more precarious. His health is not good - he walks with a limp after being caught in one of the bombardments of the MEK camp in Iraq - and he is short of money.

He is tormented by the mistakes he has made in his life - and something he found out when he first got in touch with his family.

When Mirzai left to go to war against Iraq in 1980, he had a one-month-old son. After the Iran/Iraq war ended, his wife and other members of his family came to the MEK camp in Iraq to look for Mirzai. But the MEK sent them away, and told him nothing about their visit.

This 60-year-old man never knew he was a much-missed father and husband until he made that first call home after 37 years.

“They didn't tell me that my family came searching for me in Iraq. They didn't tell me anything about my wife and son,” he says.

“All of these years I thought about my wife and son. Maybe they died in the war... I just didn't know.”

The son he has not seen in the flesh since he was a tiny baby is nearly 40 now. And Mirzai proudly displays a picture of this grown-up man on his WhatsApp id. But renewed contact has been painful too.

“I was responsible for this situation - the separation. I can't sleep too much at night because I think about them. I'm always nervous, angry. I am ashamed of myself,” Mirzai says.

Shame is not easy to live with. And he has only one desire now.

“I want to go back to Iran, to live with my wife and son. That is my wish.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## MEK defectors raise doubts over alleged Iranian ‘terror cell’ in Albania

Suddaf Chaudry

December 11, 2019

Police said cell planned attacks on exiled Iranian opposition group. Others wonder if Albania is being drawn into US and Israeli fight with Iran

Albanian police recently announced that they had discovered a terror ring, run by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which had planned attacks on an exiled Iranian opposition group living in Albania.

“A terrorist cell of the foreign operations unit of Iranian Quds was discovered lately by Albanian intelligence institutions,” Police Director General Ardi Veliu said at a press conference in late October.

The goal of the ring, Veliu said, was to strike the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an exiled Iranian opposition group which has been based in Albania for the past three years.



Names of group members were also released, including Alireza Naghashzadeh, whom Veliu identified as the cell's operations chief and a member of the Quds Force, the arm of the revolutionary guards which conducts foreign operations.

The ring, he added, had been identified by sources inside it.

But no arrests have been made and Albania has yet to request international arrest warrants for the alleged attackers, leaving local journalists and Iranian dissidents with lingering doubts.

Gjergj Erebara, a journalist with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, said the press conference - which he attended - was unusual, to say the least.

“Albanian police gave no proof to substantiate its claims. They said they have discovered the “terrorist cell”, but they didn't make any arrests,” Erebara said.

Hassan Heyrani, a former high-ranking MEK member who defected from the group in 2017, said he believes the story that the police presented is fabricated.

“If it was true, why hasn't Interpol arrested them? Albania is a very poor country where corruption is rife, police can be bought,” he said.

MEE repeatedly asked the Albanian police for further details about the alleged ring, but a spokesperson declined to comment. The Iranian Embassy in Tirana refused to comment.

Without further detail, some observers say they have been left wondering if the announcement is a sign that the Balkan country is being drawn further into America's – and Israel's - fight to overthrow the Iranian government.

## **From Iran to Albania**

Established in 1965 as an Islamist-socialist movement, the MEK rose up against the rule of the Shah of Iran during the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but soon ran afoul of new leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Facing a deadly crackdown, the MEK launched attacks on government officials and security forces and eventually was forced to flee the country, first to France and then eventually to Iraq.

The group, whose activities have been described as cultish, with a goal of overthrowing the Iranian government using violence and indoctrination, was designated for more than a decade by both the US and the UK as a terrorist organisation.

But in recent years, and as both countries delisted the group, the MEK has become a favourite of anti-Iran hawks in the US and Europe who see it as a weapon against the government in Tehran.

Between 2014 and 2016, at the bequest of the US, at least 2,700 MEK members were resettled in Albania after the group came under attack at Camp Ashraf, the Iraqi refugee camp where they had been living since the mid-1980s.

These days, the group lives in a fortified camp in the country's northwest, heavily protected by Albanian authorities.

## **Covert playground**

Analysts say the group's presence in Albania has raised alarm bells in Tehran and there have been reports that prominent members of the group have been under surveillance globally.

Ruslan Trad, an independent researcher focused on Iranian influence in the Balkans and co-founder of De Re Militari, said he believes Albania is now "a subject of espionage games" between Israel, Iran and the US.

Trad said Iran's presence in Albania must be understood in the context of Tehran's activities over the past two decades in the Balkans where it has been quietly establishing a foothold, triggering the concerns of western governments that the conflict with Iran had arrived in their backyard.

A 2012 attack killing five Israeli tourists, a bus driver and the bomber outside

the airport in the Bulgarian city of Burgas, which Bulgarian intelligence eventually attributed to Hezbollah, was seen by many analysts as part of the covert war between Iran and Israel. Hezbollah denied its involvement.

Since then, however, Trad said he believes the Balkans have become an attractive location for Hezbollah, according to locally based Hezbollah members and sympathisers he has interviewed.

“Hezbollah is using Kosovo and Macedonia as a logistic centre and transit path, and Bulgaria as a hub,” he explained. He believes Hezbollah is heavily linked to Balkan mafia circles.

In turn, the activity has seen the Israelis step up their own operations in the Balkans, he said: “The Albanian authorities are probably cooperating with them.”

## **US-Albanian ties**

Heyrani, the former MEK member who defected, said he believes the main reason Albania has been so supportive of the MEK is a result of the close relations between Albania and the US.

“Albania is under American control and also MEK is supported by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC),” he said, referring to the appearance of MEK members in an AIPAC-funded TV commercial against the Iran nuclear deal in 2015.

Under Donald Trump’s administration, hawkish support for the MEK has continued, including from now-former security advisor John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Bolton praised Albanian President Edi Rama at the end of last year for expelling the Iranian ambassador in Tirana in direct relation to an alleged terror plot targeting MEK members.

Trump wrote a letter acknowledging Albania’s “steadfast efforts to stand up to Iran and to counter its destabilising activities and efforts to silence dissi-

dents around the globe”.

The continued support and safety measures that the Albanian government provides the MEK - now with the added questions about the alleged terror cell - has led many dissidents who have left the group to be concerned about their futures.

MEE spoke to several MEK defectors, several on condition of anonymity, who said they were distressed about what would come next for them, given the government’s stance.

“We just want a normal life, to get married and have a family. We have no citizenship, no passports, no land rights. We came here on humanitarian grounds, but we are treated like criminals,” Heyrani said. “I have no choice but to live here. I can’t go back to Iran. They do not accept us.”

Heyrani said that recently his image was splashed on Albanian television where he was described as an enemy of the state.

“They have no evidence, just like the alleged terror plot,” he said. “But here in Albania that is not important.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).

2020



## Iran opposition lobbied Giuliani, CEO of United Against Nuclear Iran

Julian Pecquet

January 6, 2020

The main group pushing for regime change in Iran lobbied the head of the hawkish United Against Nuclear Iran on the sidelines of his organization's annual event in New York last fall, new lobbying filings show.

The disclosure raises new questions about ties between United Against Nuclear Iran CEO Mark Wallace and the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a Paris-based umbrella group dominated by the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq. The council also met twice with President Donald Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani around the time of the UN General Assembly, drawing renewed attention to Giuliani's unregistered advocacy on behalf of the group.

The council's US office disclosed meeting Sept. 23 with Wallace to discuss "developments in Iran" — the first time the group has reported meeting with

## Iran opposition lobbied Giuliani, CEO of United Against Nuclear Iran

New lobbying disclosures raise new questions about the ties between the hawkish organization United Against Nuclear Iran to the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq.



Rudy Giuliani, former Mayor of New York City, speaks at an event in Astraf-3 camp, which is a base for the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK) in Manza, Albania, July 13, 2019. - REUTERS/Florian Goga

the United Against Nuclear Iran CEO since registering to lobby in May 2013. The next day, Wallace hosted a gathering of Iranian opposition groups dominated by the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, raising criticism from some Iran watchers distrustful of a group that the State Department designated a terrorist organization until 2012.

United Against Nuclear Iran sought to distance itself from the event at the time, saying Wallace had convened it in his personal capacity on the eve of the group's official annual summit Sept. 25. Al-Monitor, however, reported at the time that the program for the event was listed as United Against Nuclear Iran, something the group said was in error.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran and United Against Nuclear Iran share similar views on Iran. Both applauded last week's US airstrike that killed



Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani, with United Against Nuclear Iran calling it a “significant blow” to Iran’s military power while the council labeled it a “fatal blow” to the regime in Tehran.

United Against Nuclear Iran did not respond to a request for comment for this story.

The US office of the National Council of Resistance of Iran also disclosed meeting with Giuliani, the keynote speaker at Wallace’s event, to discuss “the human rights situation in Iran” and “developments in Iran” on Sept. 23 and Sept. 25. The group previously disclosed lobbying Giuliani in September 2018.

Giuliani has long been plagued by accusations that he is taking money from the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq and affiliated groups without properly registering as a foreign lobbyist. He told Bloomberg last year that he was paid by a US organization of Iranian-Americans rather than the France-based National Council of Resistance of Iran to speak at the council’s rallies. Such “grasstops” lobbying of influential figures who have the ear of government officials is fairly common, legal experts say, and would only require an intermediary to register as a lobbyist if he or she is shown to be acting on behalf of a foreign principal rather than simply providing a favor.

The filing of the US office of the National Council of Resistance of Iran is also notable for revealing that Washington law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld is serving as legal counsel to the council’s US office. In a statement to the Justice Department’s Foreign Agents Registration Act unit, the firm argues that the donors to the National Council of Resistance of Iran should be kept anonymous to avoid retaliation by Iran.

Akin Gump notably lobbies for the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Iran’s biggest rivals in the Gulf. Neither Akin Gump nor the National Council of Resistance of Iran replied to a request for comment about how long the firm had represented the council as legal counsel.

Akin Gump previously lobbied on behalf of the Iranian American Community of Northern California — which has been linked to the National

Council of Resistance of Iran — to get the State Department to delist the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq. The firm reported \$620,000 in lobbying-related payments for those efforts in 2011 and 2012.

The council's US office reported receiving more than \$123,000 from June 1, 2019, through Nov. 30, 2019, from about 100 donors. The group reported spending more than \$120,000 during that timeframe.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## After Soleimani's Assassination, There Will Be No Regime Change in Tehran

Massoud Khodabandeh

January 7, 2020

RESPONSIBLE  
STATECRAFT

Anyone who believes that President Trump's order to illegally assassinate Quds Force leader Qassem Soleimani, Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and several more Iraqis, was an act of strength has not been properly paying attention. This is the latest in a series of stupid policy errors by this administration which have not only strengthened the hand of America's enemies but have also now ensured that the rest of the world, with the exceptions of Israel and Saudi Arabia, now at best views the U.S. with mistrust, or at the very worst hate America more than any other country on earth. This is a remarkable achievement for a man who promised to end the "endless wars" and "drain the swamp."

Trump started his presidency with the ambition of overturning the Obama administration's achievements. However, he inherited a foreign policy al-



ready predicated on waging war and which was soon re-staffed and promoted by Republican warmongers. In this context, withdrawing unilaterally from the Iran nuclear deal might have appeared to be a strong-arm tactic to Trump, but to America's allies in Europe it looked like a betrayal, and a slap in the face. Still, none were willing to come out on the side of Iran at that time. Even Russia and China were holding back at that stage. So, what were the steps in between which culminated in late December in an unprecedented four days of joint naval manoeuvres between Iran, China, and Russia in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman? What happened to embolden this trio to flex military muscle in the Middle East?

A review of these steps reveals that the blinkered aim of the Trump administration's foreign policy to manufacture regime change against Iran by any means possible including all-out war has in fact resulted in the opposite result. Regime change is now in its coffin and the assassination of Soleimani is the last nail hammered in.

Instead of promoting freedom and democracy in the Middle East, American interference is destroying every possibility of ordinary people rising up and demanding change from their own governments. In Syria, the people rose up against President Bashar al-Assad because of genuine grievances against that regime. The outcome of U.S. support for Sunni extremists in Syria has been a swing from people supporting the American aim of ousting Assad to rallying behind their own terrible government to save them from the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. With an irony that can be lost on no one, authoritarian Russia and the theocracy in Iran are now allies of Syria in that struggle. In another reckless act of overturning Obama's legacy, the new Trump administration halted Hillary Clinton's plan to de-radicalise the Mojahedin-e

Khalq (MEK) in Albania. Since then, American anti-Iran politicians have stuffed the MEK down the throats of the international community as the regime change opposition that will bring freedom and democracy to Iran. Since Iranians hate the MEK more than the current Islamic Republic, this has been a gift to the hard-liners in Iran. To quell every protest or demonstration since then, Iran's security forces have only to claim that MEK are involved in inciting violence for the ordinary people to go home and announce their abhorrence of the MEK.

American actions are consolidating people around their own hated governments instead of helping them express their legitimate demands. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's response to the anti-government protests in Iran in November was to repeat false information published by the MEK about the death toll. When Pompeo retweets MEK propaganda it destroys any trust among Iranians that the U.S. has their interests in mind.

In another remarkable example of how Pompeo has frittered away American power and influence, just weeks ago, disgruntled Iraqi citizens were in the streets demonstrating against Iranian interference in their country. Instead of supporting them, Pompeo oversaw the U.S. bombing of Iraqi militia forces that were fighting against ISIS. The Iraqi people cannot take the U.S. side over this no matter how anti-Iran they are. If America had done nothing, said nothing, Iraqi people would still be in the street demonstrating against their own government. Instead, different Iraqis attacked the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Now, in a pivotal act of hubris, the illegal assassination of Soleimani and Iraqi militia leaders at an international airport not only allows Iran to describe the U.S. as a terrorist state, but has brought Iranians of every belief together to rally together to mourn a national hero, the man who saved Iran from ISIS.

But it would be a mistake to believe that the U.S.'s Middle East foreign policy mistakes only impacted that region. In 1981, France gifted the CIA some land to host the MEK outside Paris from where they could plan their armed resistance to the new regime. Although France did not use the MEK politically as America did, their presence was tolerated. Until, that is, MEK activities began to impact European security and democracy.

In 2017, John Bolton, just before he became Trump's National Security Advisor, promised the MEK they would celebrate in Tehran before the 40th anniversary of the Iranian Revolution in February 2019. That did not happen, of course. But events subsequent to this promise certainly indicated there were already plans afoot to use the MEK to undermine European policy toward Iran. A bomb plot against the MEK in France was discovered by security forces in France and Belgium to have been a false-flag operation by the MEK used to blame and demonize Iran. After numerous acts of violence and confirmation that the MEK had funded Spain's far-right Vox party in its EU election bid, several European countries, including Germany and the Netherlands as well as France and Belgium moved to expel MEK leaders, including leader Maryam Rajavi, to Albania.

In Albania, the MEK have caused multiple headaches for the government and the opposition there. The worst result of which has been the EU's refusal to allow Albania to join the union. After kicking out the MEK, no European country would allow them to enter through the back door again.

Significantly, what these policy steps over time have revealed to America's foes and her friends alike is that the U.S. cannot be trusted. The Trump administration has shown a reckless disregard for normal behavior in the international scene. It acts with callous cruelty and indifference against enemies and allies alike.

The unwanted assassination of Soleimani will result in tectonic shifts in the world order. No matter how hard mainstream media in the West works to normalize America's actions, security and military experts the world over will have their own ideas about what the future holds.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Pompeo Limits U.S. Links to Iranian Group Linked to Giuliani

Nick Wadhams

February 16, 2020

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo ordered U.S. diplomats to limit any contact with Iranian opposition groups, including one that once hired Rudy Giuliani and paid thousands of dollars to former National Security Adviser John Bolton to speak at one of its rallies.

The directive about Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, its offshoot, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, and five other groups was delivered in a cable sent to all U.S. diplomatic outposts on Tuesday and obtained by Bloomberg News. It says meetings with the groups could jeopardize U.S. diplomacy with Iran.

“Direct U.S. government engagement with these groups could prove counterproductive to our policy goal of seeking a comprehensive deal with the Iranian regime that addresses its destabilizing behavior,”

**Bloomberg**

the cable said. Exiled Iranian opposition groups “try to engage U.S. officials regularly to gain at least the appearance of tacit support and enhance their visibility and clout.”

The cable struck a dissonant note, coming less than a week after the U.S. killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, a move widely seen as shutting down any chance of diplomacy for the time being. It also highlights conflicting strategies the administration is trying to balance: Maintaining a “maximum pressure” campaign against the Islamic Republic while also trying to leave the door open for a deal.

The State Department didn’t respond to a request for comment on the cable. But it provoked displeasure from some Iran hawks, who argued the U.S. should be encouraging contacts with such groups, not discouraging them. “It’s negligent that there isn’t a strategy in place to leverage various groups opposed to the Iranian government,” said Christian Whiton, senior fellow at the Center for the National Interest and a former senior State Department adviser under President Donald Trump and George W. Bush. “The enemy of my enemy is my friend, at least while we have a mutual interest.

MEK, which was previously on a U.S. terrorism list, paid Bolton to give speeches on its behalf and once employed Giuliani, personal lawyer.

In September, former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, who had petitioned to get MEK off the terrorism list, submitted a regulatory filing declaring that he was doing lobbying work for the National Council of Resistance of Iran on an “unpaid basis,” though it will reimburse his expenses. Iran has so far resisted Trump’s offers to meet and negotiate a deal that would replace the 2015 nuclear agreement that he abandoned in 2018.

Along with MEK, the cable cites five other groups, including the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of al-Ahwaz and the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan. It says diplomatic posts shouldn’t meet in person with the Arab Struggle Movement or Komala because “Iran’s regime appears to assess that the United States and/or Israel support this group of militant Kurds.”

Cut Ties With MEK – Pompeo Ordered American Officials

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Pompeo orders diplomats not to meet with Iranian opposition groups amid tensions

Kylie Atwood

January 8, 2020

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sent a cable to all US missions overseas ordering diplomats not to meet with Iranian opposition groups without specific approval because it could further exacerbate tensions with the Iranian regime.

“Many exiled Iranian opposition groups try to engage U.S. officials regularly to gain at least the appearance of tacit support and enhance their visibility and clout,” Pompeo said, according to a copy of the cable obtained by CNN. He noted that many of these groups “have previously or are currently using violent means in support of their political aims.”

“Direct U.S. government engagement with these groups could prove counterproductive to our policy goal of seeking a comprehensive deal with the Iranian regime that addresses its destabilizing behavior.”



## Pompeo orders diplomats not to meet with Iranian opposition groups amid tensions



By Kylie Atwood, CNN

Updated 7:47 PM ET, Tue. January 7, 2020



Pompeo wrote.

The cable's existence, first reported by Bloomberg, is coming to light in the aftermath of the deadly US drone strike that President Donald Trump ordered last week to kill Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani.

Pompeo sent the instructions early this week and his indirect reference to attempts at diplomatic outreach to Iran comes as the Trump administration has refused to issue a visa to Iran's top diplomat, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

In recent days, Trump administration officials have not laid out any specific steps they are taking to engage in diplomacy with Iran, though they have said they are willing to do so. Iran, over the last year, has not acted upon any of Trump's comments that he is willing to meet Iranian leadership, but Zarif said publicly he was willing to discuss prisoner exchanges.

The cable lists a number of Iranian opposition groups, including Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, known as the MEK, and five other Iranian opposition groups that are off limits without specific approval. John Bolton, Trump's former national security adviser, has previously said the MEK is a "viable opposition" to the current Iranian regime.

Last month Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal attorney, met with Iranian opposition groups that are linked to the MEK. Bolton and Giuliani have also given paid speeches on the group's behalf. During one of those speeches last year, Giuliani called for regime change in Iran.

The MEK, which was previously on a US terrorism list, paid Bolton to give speeches on its behalf and once employed Giuliani.

Pompeo warned in the cable that it would be "counterproductive" to engage these groups. He said some of them have histories of using violence to achieve political objectives and that some of them seek to overthrow the Iranian regime.

Given the escalating tensions with Iran in the wake of the strike on Soleimani, the cable appears to be an attempt to demonstrate that the Trump administration wants to avoid the perception that it is conspiring with opposition groups to push for regime change.

In the cable, Pompeo cited the administration's willingness to seek a "comprehensive deal" with Iran that covers a range of Iranian activities including "its destabilizing behavior, including its nuclear program, missile program, support for terrorism, and malign regional behavior."

The State Department has not replied to a request for comment on the cable. It's not clear which Iranian officials the US administration would engage. In an NPR interview aired Tuesday, Zarif said he had requested the visa 25 days ago but the US State Department told him it "didn't have enough time to issue a visa."

In an interview with CNN's Fred Pleitgen, Zarif said he wasn't concerned

about the Trump administration barring him entry to the US. When asked about his reaction to being denied the visa, Zarif answered with a laugh, “Well, what are they afraid of?”

Pompeo, speaking at the State Department on Tuesday, said that “we don’t comment on visa matters for those traveling to the United States,” and added that “we will always comply with our obligations” under the UN charter.

US officials are not completely disengaging with groups who oppose the Iranian regime. On Tuesday Brian Hook, the State Department special representative for Iran, met with leadership from the Simon Wiesenthal Center leadership, a Jewish human rights organization.

Members of the center praised the Trump administration for the Soleimani strike and one of them urged additional killings of Iranian leaders.

“The entire leadership of Iran denies the existence of the Holocaust and we have to worry about how we treat them. If they are going to kill American soldiers, we have an obligation to do what President Obama did to Osama bin Laden, what the President of Czechoslovakia did to Reinhard Heydrich, that should be done to the Iranian leaders,” Rabbi Marvin Hier, the founder of the center, said on Tuesday.

CNN’s Nicole Gaouette contributed to this report.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump has been getting advice on Iran from officials and allies linked to a shadowy Iranian dissident group that celebrated Soleimani's death

Tom Porter

January 8, 2020

In the wake of the US assassination of Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani, an obscure group of Iranian dissidents once classified as a terrorist organisation by the US celebrated the news.

“In Tehran, Isfahan, Qom and Qaemshahr, among numerous other cities, MEK supporters were celebrating Soleimani’s death by throwing parties and handing out pastries,” the People’s Mujahideen of Iran tweeted, with pictures of jubilant supporters.

The MEK — officially the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or the People’s Mujahideen of Iran in English — has waged war against the Islamist regime in Iran since it seized power in 1979. Formerly based in Iraq, the group is believed to have killed thousands of Iranians in terror attacks.

But far away from the battlefields of the Middle

**BUSINESS  
INSIDER**

East, the MEK has also waged a campaign for influence in glossy functions at diplomatic events in western capitals, successfully cultivating powerful allies in western governments.

Among them are current and former officials in the top echelons of the Trump administration — including those who Trump regularly turns to advice on Iran, such as personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani.

Soleimani was “directly responsible for killing some of my MEK people,” Giuliani told *The Daily Beast* in an interview on Monday, making no attempt to disguise his closeness to the group.

“We don’t like him very much.”

And its not just Giuliani who has longstanding ties to the MEK.

In September, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo attended an event on the fringes of the United Nations assembly in New York alongside the MEK.

Hawkish national security adviser John Bolton, who departed the administration in September after reportedly pushing for Trump to launch strikes against Iran, also had links to the MEK. Bolton has attended the group’s conferences, and long served as its most powerful advocate in Washington DC.

Eli Clifton, an expert on US foreign policy at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, told *Business Insider* that the MEK had long advocated the assassination of Iranian regime officials.

“The MEK clearly endorses the assassination of Iranian government officials and employees. In 2012, NBC News reported that the MEK was directly involved in the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists,” Clifton wrote in an email Wednesday.

A cult-like group of Marxist Islamic radicals behind scores of terror attacks

The MEK emerged in opposition to the then ruler of Iran, the Shah, in the late 1960s, inspired by a blend of Marxist ideology and Islamic theology.

When Islamist rivals seized control of the country after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the MEK fled to neighboring Iraq, where it fought against Iran alongside then-president Saddam Hussein's forces.

Defectors have claimed that the group seeks to brainwash members — forcing them to confess to sexual fantasies in bizarre public shaming rituals and to send away their children to be brought up by others. It has been described by several ex-members as a cult.

Several thousand MEK members live in a compound in Albania, where they reportedly spend their days on social media distributing anti-Iranian propaganda.

In Paris, where the MEK's official headquarters is located, the group holds glitzy functions as it seeks to cultivate influential western officials. It has hired Iran hawks in Washington to speak at its events, paying them large speaking fees. It was eventually de-listed as a terror group by the US in 2012 following a long lobbying campaign.

Despite the rigid control it exerts over members, it has sought to portray itself as the only viable democratic alternative to the current Iranian regime.

“When the president's personal attorney and former national security adviser have effectively endorsed the MEK as a legitimate opposition group and a viable government exile for Iran, it certainly raises serious questions about the extent to which the MEK is influencing the administration's Iran policy,” Clifton told Business Insider.

The group's activities in Europe have attracted the ire of Iran, with French officials in October 2018 accusing Iranian intelligence of being behind a plot to bomb a rally held by the MEK's political arm in Paris. The rally was attended by Giuliani and Newt Gingrich, former House speaker and Trump ally. And with the US now taking the hardline stance towards Iran it has long advocated, it will be likely seeking to consolidate its influence in Washington DC.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Rudy Giuliani is working with Iranian ‘cult’ -- and forcing the US to deal with the ‘consequences’: MSNBC host

Sarah K. Burris

January 08, 2020

President Donald Trump’s attorney Rudy Giuliani has been accused of conducting his own “shadow diplomacy” with both Ukraine and Venezuela, despite not being a registered foreign agent. But as MSNBC host Chris Hayes pointed out, it’s another of Giuliani’s clients that could get him in trouble now.

RAWSTORY

“One reason the threat of catastrophe in the Middle East remains present, at the moment, is because the president is surrounded by people who have been quite openly pushing for a full military confrontation with Iran for a while,” said Hayes.

One, Hayes said, is his most infamous adviser: Mr. Giuliani.

While Giuliani hasn’t been appointed to any government office or confirmed by the U.S. Senate, somehow he’s running his own government projects.



“Aside from his various meetings with various Ukrainian figures to manufacturer dirt on Joe Biden, has represented Turkish interests and then pushed for policies favorable to President Erdoğan,” Hayes continued. “And he has a longstanding relationship with a fringe Iranian dissident group known as the MEK a group rooted in Marxism and Islamism that’s often described as a cult and his primary goal is to overthrow the Iranian regime.”

The MEK is currently headquartered in Albania and most of the members are exiles from the country.

“They have paid tons of money to American political figures to curry favor, including John Bolton, Howard Dean, Ed Rendell and, of course, Rudy Giuliani. When contacted by the Daily Beast on Monday, Giuliani cited the MEK as a reason he supported the assassination of Qassem Suleimani saying he was, ‘Directly responsible for killing some of my MEK people.’ This would be a little like favoring action against the U.S. because you had friends in the Branch Davidians.”

Hayes said that the group is so “toxic” that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sent out a cable on Tuesday to all U.S. diplomatic posts telling them not to meet with Giuliani’s client.

Giuliani, however, doesn’t work for the State Department, “so he can do whatever he wants,” Hayes said. “And we all get to deal with the consequences.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump Admin Walks Back Anti-MEK Memo

Betsy Swan, Erin Banco, Asawin Suebsaeng

January 13, 2020

The State Department ordered employees days ago not to meet with an Iranian dissident outfit close to Rudy Giuliani and other Trumpworld figures. Now, the memo is being over-ridden.

DAILY BEAST

At whiplash speed, the State Department is walking back an order barring American diplomats from meeting with controversial Iranian dissident groups—including one close with Trump World allies and previously designated as a terror group, the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK). The initial memo, greenlit by a career State Department employee, angered Congressional Iran hawks. And the Department's move to change its guidance has drawn cheers from them.

The first memo, first reported by Bloomberg and reviewed by The Daily Beast, included sober warn-

NATIONAL SECURITY

## Trump Admin Walks Back Anti-MEK Memo

[CUT-AND-RUN]

The State Department ordered employees days ago not to meet with an Iranian dissident outfit close to Rudy Giuliani and other Trumpworld figures. Now, the memo is being overridden.

Betsy Swan, Erin Bonco, Asawin Sussasaeng

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ings against meeting with the MEK, pointing to its terrorist past and saying most everyday Iranians have a low view of the group. The memo also warned about interactions with the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, highlighting its attacks on Iranian military targets; and directed diplomats to get permission from State Department headquarters before meeting with members of an Azeri separatist group. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sent out the memo on January 7, and it cautioned that meetings with these groups could undermine U.S. efforts to reach a deal with Tehran. Joey Hood, a senior career State Department official, approved the memo, according to the document The Daily Beast reviewed.

But now, the memo is being overridden. The Daily Beast obtained a cable, sent to U.S. diplomats Sunday night, superseding the week-old directive.

“Posts should welcome opportunities to meet with and learn from members of the Iranian diaspora community,” said the cable, which explicitly noted it “supersedes” the January 7 missive. “After 40 years of repression and violence at the hands of the Ayatollahs, the Iranian people’s pride in their histo-

ry has not diminished nor has their resolve to celebrate it in the face of the Islamic republic's abuses.”

The cable went on to say that U.S. diplomats should consider hosting members of the diaspora for “Persian cultural events,” while noting that “not all Iranian opposition groups’ interests and objectives align with U.S. policy priorities.”

“While it is up to the Iranian people to determine the future course of their nation, the United States will continue to stand with them and echo their calls for justice and accountability,” the cable said.

While the new memo did not mention MEK or the other groups, it said diplomats should simply “use good judgement when receiving invitations or meeting with opposition groups” and should raise questions and concerns with senior State officials—an apparent revocation of the order that they only take such meetings with Foggy Bottom’s explicit approval. State Department spokespersons did not respond to multiple requests for comment on the cable.

Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani—who the MEK hired to help it get off the U.S. list of foreign terrorist groups and who recently called the group “my MEK people”—welcomed the reversal. “[The MEK] is very supportive of a free... Iraq. It’s run by a great woman who is committed to ending suppression of women and in a non-nuclear Iran,” the president’s personal lawyer messaged *The Daily Beast*. “They were of great assistance to us during [the] Iraq invasion and are supported by a very non-partisan group of American former and present public officials.”

The MEK is close with several other hawkish Trumpworld figures, including retired Gen. Jack Keane and former National Security Adviser John Bolton. Former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, Giuliani’s longtime friend and former law partner, is a pro bono adviser to the group’s political wing.

“They’re undermining the president’s policy when nobody’s watching.”  
— Hill staffer

The group has a controversial past. For, among other things, its alleged role in assassinating three U.S. Army officers and three more civilian contractors, the MEK found itself on the American government's official list of foreign terrorist organizations. It's also been accused of acting as a death squad for the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. A 2009 Rand Corporation paper described the MEK's "near-religious devotion to [its leaders], public self-deprecation sessions, mandatory divorce, celibacy, enforced separation from family and friends, and gender segregation." The group and its allies vehemently deny all these charges.

The fast-paced walk-back came after the initial State Department memo drew ire from Congressional Iran hawks. One noted that the memo went out to diplomats just days after a U.S. strike killed Soleimani, and as senior political officials at the State Department were presumably bracing for Tehran's retaliation.

"It's a pretty significant 180 for State," said Christian Whiton, formerly a senior advisor to the Department under Presidents Trump and George W. Bush. "Even if it's worded diplomatically, it's not that common to have something issued and then rescinded almost immediately. And I think it just goes to show that the original statement was something done at a junior level that didn't have support or buy-in from senior political officials."

It was the second time in recent months that Hood, the career official who greenlit the memo, angered Hill hawks. In Congressional testimony on December 4, he had a tense exchange with Sen. Ted Cruz about funding for the Lebanese government and whether that money went to Hezbollah. A transcript of the hearing indicates that Hood laughed in response to a question from Cruz; the episode left raw nerves.

"They're undermining the president's policy when nobody's watching," said a Hill staffer for member pushing for a tougher policy toward Iran.

Others, meanwhile, pointed to the reversal as the latest struggle by the Trump administration to clearly explain its stance on conflict with Iran. A Congressional staffer working on Iran policy and who favored the reversal noted that it comes as the administration has sent mixed messages on the legal basis for

the Soleimani strike and the number of U.S. embassies threatened by Iranian-allied Shiite militias.

“I think there’s a lot of fog of war-type messages that have come out,” said the staffer, who spoke anonymously to discuss the sensitive matter. “I think there’s still a lot of fog of war.”

The State Department reversal, as reflected in the cable, comes as Pompeo and other U.S. officials, including Defense Secretary Mark Esper, have struggled to publicly articulate the U.S.’ next steps after killing Soleimani and to reconcile their accounts of the intelligence that precipitated that strike.

For years, the Trump administration had maintained a campaign of “maximum pressure,” leveling crippling sanctions on Iran’s economy in an effort to re-open talks with Tehran on a nuclear deal. Since the Soleimani strike, Trump administration officials have struggled to define the administration’s Iran policy. Some have said the maximum pressure campaign always included a military option. Others say the U.S. has long communicated to the Iranians that if Tehran killed Americans, there would be military consequences.

“U.S. diplomats should not be meeting with MEK. They represent a dangerous cult. We should avoid all the mistakes of the Iraq war including being hoodwinked by purported diaspora opposition with no links at home.”

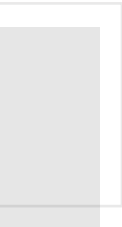
— former Obama administration official Jarret Blanc

Now, it seems, the State Department is shifting its thinking on how to approach Iran on a diplomatic level following the Soleimani strike. In the hours immediately following the assassination, U.S. officials, in an attempt to de-escalate, described the hit as a warning and insisted that America was still interested in working with Iran on conversations about the nuclear deal. The U.S. special representative for Iran Brian Hook appeared on BBC World, saying that killing Soleimani was designed to “advance the cause of peace.” Sunday’s cable, meanwhile, will cheer Iran hawks—and frustrate Obama administration alums.

“There are at least two problems with this reversal,” said Jarrett Blanc, a former Obama administration official who worked on Iran policy. “The first

is that the policy is wrong. U.S. diplomats should not be meeting with MEK or its affiliates. They represent a dangerous cult. We should avoid all the mistakes of the Iraq war including being hoodwinked by purported diaspora opposition with no links at home. The second problem is that it reflects the total incompetence and chaos of this administration’s policy making —to send out an instruction and less than a week later countermand it. They just don’t know what they are doing.”

For years in the United States, lobbyists and advocates for the MEK have operated an aggressive, sustained, and successful campaign to have the group removed from the State Department’s terror list, a move that was finalized in the Obama era. The organization’s stateside backers also include Democratic figures such as retired Gen. Wesley Clark and Howard Dean, as well as attorneys Victoria Toensing and Joseph diGenova, two informal legal advisers to Trump.



■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Albania becomes a frontline in the proxy battle between Iran and the US

Elis Gjevori

January 16, 2020

**B**y hosting the People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK) on behalf of the US, despite the group being labelled a terrorist organisation by Iran, Albania has drawn the ire of Supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

The acting Albanian foreign minister Gent Cakaj announced on his Facebook account that an additional two Iranian diplomats would be expelled from Albania. This follows a decision in 2018 which expelled the Iranian ambassador and has made Albania a frontline in a clash between the United States and Iran.

The decision to expel the Iranian diplomats seems likely a result of the comments made by Iran's powerful Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the aftermath of Qasem Soleimani's assassination at the hands of the US in which he said: "In a very small

TRT WORLD





European country but an evil country in Europe, there are American elements with some Iranian traitors, they got together to conspire against the Islamic Republic.”

In 2014, under US pressure, Albania took in more than 4,000 members of the People’s Mujahedin of Iran (MEK) a secretive group formerly based Iraq.

“Albania is hosting one of the most dangerous terrorist organisations on behalf of the United States,” says Dr Olsi Jazexhi, an Albanian academic and expert who has been tracking MEK activities in Albania.

“The Americans imposed them [MEK] on Albania and since Albania is a very fragile state they had to accept. The same thing was done by Prime Minister Edi Rama who is still hosting MEK in Albania,” Jazexhi tells TRT World.

Considered a terrorist group by Iran, the MEK was also listed as a terrorist organisation by the US State Department until 2012.

The Obama administration re-designated the group and formalised a relationship that the US had been cultivating covertly, protecting the group in Iraq at a US military base, then under American occupation.

“The reason for the MEK being brought to Albania is the general ignorance of Albanian politicians who do not understand the danger of international

terrorism and the implications that this terrorism has on nation-states” added Jazexhi.

The MEK is a militant political organisation that subscribes to an unusual mixture of Marxist and Islamic ideology.

It has been accused of killing of American military personnel, bombing American companies and targeting innocent Iranian civilians during a campaign of terror over several decades.

A report by the US media outlet NBC News suggested that the group is being financed by Israeli intelligence and was also behind a string of assassinations targeting Iran’s nuclear scientists between 2007 and 2015.

“The MEK is deeply despised in Iran, they fought for Saddam Hussein against Iran for eight years. Then they spied for the Americans and the Israelis, they are mercenaries and a cult group,” said Seyed Mohammad Marandi, Professor of English Literature and Orientalism at the University of Tehran.

Former members of the MEK have spoken out about the oppressive cult-like rules enforced in the organisation, including marriages that have to be arranged by the leadership. There have been reports that the organisation has at times asked its followers to divorce en masse and locked up and even killed members who have criticised the dogma of Maryam Rajavi, the current head of the MEK.

“No one in Iran has any sympathy or respect for them [MEK], they are traitors to the country. They are tools of Western powers. Thousands of them are working as an online army in Albania,” said Marandi speaking to TRT World.

Earlier this year The Intercept, an online investigative publication reported on how the MEK had created a fake online persona called Heshmat Alavi in order to spread propaganda against the Iranian government, including advocating for regime change.

The so-called writer Alavi was managed in part from Albania and had fooled

many American publications who had published the fake persona's writing.

“Using different aliases on the internet, on Facebook as well as Twitter” they have managed to create a digital army, says Marandi, adding: “These social platforms do not block their activities because it is done in coordination with the US government and also they carry out spying activities in Iran.”

The US assassination of Iranian general Soleimani and the subsequent retaliation by Tehran in a series of rocket attacks on US bases underscores the dangerous manoeuvrings between the two powers and the potential to suck in other countries, including the small Balkan state of Albania.

“Albania has become the most dangerous country in the world for Iran after the United States and Israel,” says Jazexhi.

“While the United States and Israel are in open conflict with Iran, Albania by hosting MEK has become a major centre of anti-Iranian propaganda in the world.

The MEK doesn't lack powerful friends in Washington and in particular enjoys close ties with the hawkish Trump administration. In 2017 the group paid National Security Adviser John Bolton and Trump's personal lawyer Rudi Giuliani for speaking engagements.

With powerful friends like this, Albanian politicians don't “dare to do anything” says Jazexhi even though “the majority of Albanians are appalled by what the government is doing.”

The MEK could also be acting against the Albanian penal code says Jazexhi.

“The Albanian penal code states very clearly that if a person or a group of people incites to fight against a foreign country or incites people or asks people to participate in a conflict in a foreign country they could be persecuted for this,” adds Jazexhi.

MEK actions in an impoverished country like Albania, which is still struggling to emerge from a communist dictatorship, doesn't bode well for its long

term stability or rule of law. Iraq has become a battleground of influence between the US and Iran, a faraway conflict for many Albanians.

“When you host terrorists and you aid terrorists than you should be afraid of suffering the consequences. These are not normal people,” says Marandi. “The Albanian government is foolish to cooperate in such a way with the Americans.”

Albanian President Ilir Meta shot back at comments made by Khamenei saying: “Albania is not a devilish country, but a democratic one.” However, Meta made no mention of the lack of democratic structures within the MEK and the human rights violations it has been accused of.

“MEK with its paramilitary camps that they have in Manza, Albania has created a state within a state,” says Jazexhi and as tensions between Iran and the US continue to heat up the role that the MEK is playing in Albania could also make it another theatre of conflict.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump's Iran Man Met With a Former Terror Group's Rep After Soleimani Strike

Lachlan Markay

February 11, 2020

The Trump administration's top official overseeing Iran policy met with a representative of a controversial Iranian dissident group weeks after a U.S. strike killed Iran's top military leader.

Brian Hook, a senior adviser to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the U.S. Special Representative for Iran, met on January 31 with Robert G. Joseph, a former senior State official who now represents the National Council of Resistance of Iran, according to a foreign agent filing that Joseph submitted to the Justice Department this week. The NCRI is the political arm of the People's Mujahedin of Iran—commonly known by Farsi acronym, MEK—a group that seeks regime change in Iran and was on the U.S. government's official list of foreign terrorist organizations until 2012.

DAILY BEAST

# Trump's Iran Man Met With a Former Terror Group's Rep After Soleimani Strike

FACE TIME

A representative for Iran's most controversial dissident outfit scored a meeting with Trump's Iran point man weeks after the U.S. killed the group's longtime adversary.



Lachlan Markay  
Reporter

Updated Feb. 11, 2020 8:03PM ET  
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Joseph's meeting with Hook came just a few weeks after a U.S. airstrike killed Gen. Qassem Soleimani, Iran's top military commander. The MEK had long seen Soleimani as one of Iran's foremost villains. In a blog post hailing his death, the NCRI described him as "an infamous symbol of the regime's intimidation and murder."

Soleimani was "directly responsible for killing some of my MEK people," Rudy Giuliani, a long-time ally of the group, told *The Daily Beast* in January. "We don't like him very much."

Yet, in the wake of that strike, Pompeo circulated a memo barring American officials from meeting with representatives of the MEK, citing its controversial history—it allegedly played a role in the assassination of three U.S. Army officers and three more civilian contractors—and poor public standing in Iran.

Neither Hook nor the State Department press office responded to requests for additional information on the meeting. Joseph also did not respond to a request for comment.

The meeting with Hook was one of three of U.S. government contacts reported in Joseph’s semi-annual filing under the Foreign Agent Registration Act, but the only one that took place after the Soleimani strike. Joseph also reported meeting with Hook in September, and the following month with Tim Morrison, a former White House National Security Council official who oversaw policy in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. Morrison declined to comment on the meeting.

Joseph’s FARA filing does not include any details on what was discussed at each of those meetings. In general, he told the Justice Department, he worked to “provide advice to NCRI officials on a range of issues, including: how best to counter false narratives about NCRI; how to improve the reach and effectiveness of the NCRI work on Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism, regional aggression and its nuclear program; and how to advance the cause of building a free and democratic Iran.”

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Joseph is a longtime NCRI ally, and signed up to lobby directly for the group in January 2019. He told DOJ at the time that he planned to "interact with Albanian officials, U.S. Embassy, State Department staff, White House, and any other U.S. personnel as required, as well as UN officials." He's being paid \$15,000 per month for his services.

Prior to his private sector work, Joseph oversaw nuclear nonproliferation and arms control policies as a senior official in George W. Bush's State Department. He took a hard line on Iran in that position, according to contemporaneous reports.

More recently, at an NCRI event in March 2019, Joseph expressed his hope that Tehran's government would soon fall. "The efforts that are being made by...many in this room, I am confident, will result in the rebirth of the great Persian nation and light replacing the darkness," he said. "The darkness that is brought to us by the brutal, repressive dictatorship of the Mullahs."

—with additional reporting by Erin Banco

■ Access the article from [here](#).





## Convenient Bedfellows: Why The MEK Backs Spanish Far-Right In Tactical Relationship

Catherine Shakdam

February 12, 2020

“Both the far right and Islamist extremists benefit when their professed enemies engage in a terror attack or do anything that confirms their narratives. They want to see more rifts and more chaos in society. When communities are scared, when they’re driven apart, they’re vulnerable to the extremist narratives.”

**CITIZEN TRUTH**

News resurfaced this February of political collusion between the infamous Iranian MEK group (Mojahedin-e-Khalq), also known as the MKO, a cult-type organisation centered around the quasi-worship of its two leaders: Maryam Rajavi and her spouse Masoud Rajavi, and Spain’s latest far-right outfit: Vox.

As Vox made its entry into Spain’s political life by winning a seat in Andalusia at the regional parliamentary elections in April of last year, questions were raised as to the origin of the party’s funding



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS OPINION

## Convenient Bedfellows: Why The MEK Backs Spanish Far-Right In Tactical Relationship

Catherine Shohdam February 12, 2020



as well as its political associations, if any, to other far-right movements. Little could anyone have imagined that the group, which advocates a fiercely Islamophobic front, would benefit from the financial largesse of one very vocal Islamist group: the Iranian MEK.

While Spain's right-wing has previously been relatively light on anti-Islam rhetoric, preferring to rail against secessionists in Catalonia and elsewhere, Vox has no such compunction. One of the party's earliest controversies was a wildly Islamophobic video conjuring a future in which Muslims had imposed sharia in southern Spain, turning the Cathedral of Córdoba back into a mosque and forcing women to cover up.

Documents leaked to the Spanish newspaper El País show that almost 1 million euros donated to Vox between its founding in December 2013 and the European Parliament elections in May 2014 came via supporters of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an alias of the MEK.

## The Terror Connection

Made infamous in the late 1970s for its anti-Shah, anti-America narrative, the MEK reinvented itself a terrorist organization after it was cast out of Iranian political life (1980) by late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini on account of its radicalist views. Following a series of bloody terror attacks in Iran, the MEK found refuge in Iraq, under the protection of then-strongman Saddam Hussein.

To secure its position and benefit from Iraq's protection, the MEK fought alongside the Iraqi army against their own countrymen during the Iraq-Iran war, arguing that it sought to reform the Islamic Republic into a vibrant democracy, made to the image of its political leadership – was born the cult of the Rajavi.

Today the MEK has seen its crimes against U.S. interests expunged on the basis of its desire to see Iran's Ayatollahs come undone.

Anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-American, MEK fighters killed scores of the Shah's police in often suicidal street battles during the 1970s. The group targeted U.S.-owned hotels, airlines and oil companies, and was responsible for the deaths of six Americans in Iran. It was actually the MEK which first etched their hatred of America into Iranians' political subconscious through its militants' cries of: "Death to America by blood and bonfire on the lips of every Muslim is the cry of the Iranian people," and "May America be annihilated."

A favorite among Trump hardliners, the MEK has worked terribly hard since the fall of Saddam Hussein to reinvent itself as a friend of the West one must admit with great success. Following a lavish lobbying campaign to reverse its designation as a terrorist organisation – despite reports implicating the group in assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists as recently as 2012, the MEK was de-listed by the UK in 2009 and by the U.S. in 2012.

Under Maryam Rajavi's influence – her husband has not been seen in public since 2003 – the MEK has won considerable support from sections of the U.S. and European right, eager for allies in the fight against Tehran.

While the MEK presents itself as a reformist group, in that it seeks to adopt and develop a modern revolutionary interpretation of Islam – in sharp contrast to the rigor of Iran’s traditional clergy, the group has often been described as a mix between Marxism and populist Islam – qualities which are an anathema to European far-right political movements.

And yet, we know now that the two have found some interesting common ground: if not on the basis of their respective ideologies, in their need for reciprocal rage. And though at first glance Islamists and far-right extremists may wish each other’s demise, they also need each other’s hatred to justify and even rationalize their respective existence.

## United In Their Extremism

In truth, to see the two join together is not that much of an intellectual stretch, rather an alliance of convenience at a time when extremism is seeking to define the global narrative.

This is the argument Julia Ebner, a research fellow at the London-based Institute for Strategic Dialogue, makes in her book *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far Right Extremism* – that both ends of the political and social spectrum desperately need each other in order to push their narratives, and so why not fund each other?

As she puts it, Islamist extremists claim that the West is at war with Islam, and far-right groups claim that Muslims are at war with the West. This makes Islamist extremists and the far right rhetorical allies.

Speaking in an interview Ebner notes: “Both the far right and Islamist extremists benefit when their professed enemies engage in a terror attack or do anything that confirms their narratives. They want to see more rifts and more chaos in society. When communities are scared, when they’re driven apart, they’re vulnerable to the extremist narratives.”

And, “So in a really fundamental way, each side has good reasons to celebrate when something horrible happens. If ISIS blows up a shopping center in some Western town, the far right points to that and says, ‘You see, we were

right all along. Muslims are at war with the West.’ Likewise, right-wing terrorism or rhetoric gives Islamist extremists more fodder to sell their narrative about the West being hostile to all of Islam.”

## **A Story Of Political Codependency**

“From the day it was founded in December 2013 – the same day that it registered as a political party with the Spanish Ministry of Interior – Vox started to receive Iranian funds,” said Joaquín Gil, one of the El País journalists who first reported on NCRI-linked funding of Vox.

Gil went on to explain that donations came from dozens of individual sources, from several countries including the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and Italy in amounts ranging from 60 to 35,000 euros, totaling almost 972,000 euros, in the period from December 2013 to April 2014, shortly before the European parliamentary elections.

According to Gil, Vidal-Quadras, a leading member of Vox had “asked his friends at NCRI ... to instruct its followers to make a series of money transfers.” Vidal-Quadras has since confirmed that the MEK/NCRI had in fact organized the fundraising for Vox, alleging that at the time the MEK had no idea Vox was a far-right outfit.

Vox is arguing that the money was a personal favor to Vidal-Quadras, who, during his time at the EU Parliament had helped rehabilitate the MEK as a viable counterpart against Iran’s Islamic Republic.

“We don’t have any relationship with them,” said Espinosa, the Vox vice secretary of international relations. “The funding of Vox by the NCRI came out of a personal relationship with Vidal-Quadras ... They supported him ... Not the party so much as him.”

In any case it is now evident that Vox could never have achieved any political victory without the financial output volunteered by the MEK – proof that extremists, for all their rhetoric, are more than willing to work together to push their respective narrative into the spotlight.

In their extremes it is often that Islamic radicals and the far-right meet. Both ideologies are based on the victimization of an in-group and the demonization of an out-group. More to the point both blame the ‘corrupt political establishment’ and ‘rigged mainstream media’ for all that is going wrong and aim to bring about radical societal change by creating countercultures.

As Ebner highlights in her book, “On both sides, you find groups that embrace violent solutions – including terrorism and hate crimes – to reach this goal, and others who resort to strategies such as hate preaching, information warfare, vigilantism, or street activism. Ultimately, both tend to encourage apocalyptic thinking and conspiracy theories, which can incite violence and in some cases inspire terrorism.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Highly Secretive Iranian Rebels Are Holed Up in Albania. They Gave Us a Tour

Patrick Kingsley

February 17, 2020

**M**ANEZ, Albania — In a valley in the Albanian countryside, a group of celibate Iranian dissidents have built a vast and tightly guarded barracks that few outsiders have ever entered.

Depending on whom you ask, the group, the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Jihadists, are either Iran's replacement government-in-waiting or a duplicitous terrorist cult. Journalists are rarely allowed inside the camp to judge for themselves, and are sometimes rebuffed by force.

But after President Trump's decision to assassinate Qassim Suleimani, a powerful Iranian general, it seemed worth trying again. Would a group that claims to want a democratic, secular Iran allow a reporter inside their camp?

**The New York  
Times**

The group's loudest allies include Rudolph W. Giuliani, the president's personal lawyer, and John R. Bolton, his former National Security Adviser. Both have received tens of thousands of dollars for speaking at the group's conferences, where these influential Americans describe the People's Jihadists as Iran's most legitimate opposition.

Initially, the group ignored several requests for access. So less in hope than desperation, I drove to its base and presented my credentials to a guard.

Three hours later, shortly before sunset, I got a call. To my surprise, I was being allowed inside. So began a series of interviews, propaganda sessions and tours that lasted until 1:30 a.m. A New York Times photographer was admitted several days later.

The group perhaps hoped to correct the impression left by previous journalistic encounters. A visit in 2003 by a Times reporter to the group's former base in Iraq ended badly after her subjects spoke from a rehearsed script, and she was barred from talking to people in private.

This time around, most residents were off limits, but officials did allow private interviews with several members.

At my request, these included Somayeh Mohammadi, 39, whose family has argued for nearly two decades that she is being held against her will.

"This is my choice," said Ms. Mohammadi, after her commanders left the room. "If I want to leave, I can leave."

While the group may not have tried to hide Ms. Mohammadi, there were several odd and telling moments when secrets were tightly held.

In particular, senior officials stumbled when asked about the whereabouts of the group's nominal leader, Massoud Rajavi, who vanished in 2003.

"Where is he?" said Ali Safavi, the group's main representative in Washington. "Well, we can't talk about that, that's ..."



He trailed off, staring at his feet.

Is he still alive? Is he in Albania?

“We can’t talk about it,” Mr. Safavi replied, after several seconds of silence.

Founded in 1965 to oppose the Shah of Iran, the group later rejected the theocracy that replaced him.

Immediately following the revolution, the group attracted significant public support and emerged as a leading source of opposition to the new theocratic regime, according to Professor Ervand Abrahamian, a historian of the group.

The group claims it still attracts significant support, but Mr. Abrahamian said its popularity plummeted after becoming more violent in the early 1980s.

“When you talk to people who lived through the revolution, and you mention the name ‘Mujahedeen’, they shudder,” said Mr. Abrahamian.

By the 1980s, the group’s ideology had begun to center on Mr. Rajavi and his wife, Maryam.

To prove their devotion to the Rajavis, members were told to divorce their spouses and renounce romance.

At the time, the group was based in Iraq, under the protection of Saddam Hussein.

Its destiny changed after the American-led invasion of Iraq. After an initial standoff, the group, also known as the M.E.K., gave up its weapons. Despite having been listed by America as a terrorist organization in 1997, it was placed under American protection.

But in 2009, American troops ceded responsibility for the M.E.K. to the Iraqi government. Led by politicians sympathetic to Iran, the Iraqi authorities tacitly allowed Iran-allied militias to attack the group.

American and United Nations diplomats began searching for a safer country

to house the group. After intensive lobbying by a bipartisan group of lawmakers, the American government also removed them from a list of terrorist organizations in 2012.

A year later, they were finally welcomed by Albania. The Albanian government hoped its hospitality would curry favor with Washington, according to the foreign minister between 2013 and 2019, Ditmir Bushati.

The group purchased several fields in a valley 15 miles west of Tirana, the capital, and built a camp there.

When I visited, the base seemed oddly empty. The group claims it houses about 2,500 members. But across the two days, we saw no more than 200.

The others seemed to have been sequestered away — or to have left the group altogether.

Dozens of former members now live independently in Albania. I met 10 of them, who each described being brainwashed into a life of celibacy.

Inside the group, they said romantic relationships and sexual thoughts were banned, contact with family highly restricted, and friendships discouraged.

All recounted being forced to participate in self-criticism rituals, whereby members would confess to their commanders any sexual or disloyal thoughts they had.

“Little by little, you are broken,” said Abdulrahman Mohammadian, 60, who joined the group in 1988 and left in 2016. “You forget yourself and you change your personality. You only obey rules. You are not yourself. You are just a machine.”

The group strongly denied the accusations and portrays many of its critics, including Mr. Mohammadian, as Iranian spies.

I was taken on a three-hour tour of a museum about the M.E.K.’s history, where the exhibits did not mention Saddam Hussein or forced celibacy. Instead, they focused on the group’s persecution.

Some rooms had been turned into replica torture chambers, to explain how Iranian jailers punished and interrogated supporters during the 1980s.

In each room, members waited in silence for me. These turned out to be survivors of the torture — ready to personally explain each method of repression.

One survivor, Raheem Moussavi, stood beside a bloodied mannequin and slowly detailed the four different techniques the Iranian torturers used to beat him. The process culminated in being whipped by a metallic cat-o'-nine tails.

Searching for influence, the group has turned increasingly to the internet.

I was shown a recording studio, where two musicians compose anti-regime songs and music videos for release on Iranian social media.

I wasn't shown the computer suites, which defectors had portrayed as a kind of troll farm: junior members using multiple accounts on Facebook and Twitter, typing messages that criticize the Iranian government, lionize the M.E.K. leadership and promote its paid lobbyists.

When Mr. Giuliani and Mr. Bolton made public speeches in recent years, members were ordered "to take a particular line and tweet it 10 times from different accounts," said Mr. Mohammadian, the former member.

I was taken to an empty gym, and then to a small cafeteria. It was already close to midnight, but a small group of women had been told to wait up for me.

They scoffed at the idea of the troll farm. As for the limits on their private lives, they said such discipline was necessary when battling as cruel an adversary as the government of Iran.

"You can't have a personal life," said Shiva Zahedi, "when you're struggling for a cause."

After I left, the group put me in touch with three former American military officers who had helped guard an M.E.K. camp in Iraq after the American invasion.

Each spoke glowingly about the M.E.K., and said its members had been free to leave since the American military began protecting it in 2003.

American officers had access to every area of the Iraqi base, and found no prison cells or torture facilities, said Brig. Gen. David Phillips, who commanded the military policemen guarding the camp in 2003 and 2004.

“I wanted to find weapons, I wanted to find people tied to beds,” General Phillips said. “We never found it.”

But other records and witnesses gave a more complex account.

Capt. Matthew Woodside, a former naval reservist who oversaw American policy at the Iraqi camp between 2004 and 2005, was not one of those whom the M.E.K. suggested I contact. He said that in reality American troops did not have regular access to camp buildings or to group members whose relatives said they were held by force. The M.E.K. leadership tended to let members meet American officials and relatives only after a delay of several days, Captain Woodside said.

“They fight for every single one of them,” he said.

It became so hard for some members, particularly women, to flee that two of them ended up trying to escape in a delivery truck, he recalled.

“I find that organization absolutely repulsive,” Captain Woodside said. “I am astounded that they’re in Albania.”

Patrick Kingsley is an international correspondent, focusing on long-term reporting projects. He has reported from more than 40 countries, written two books, and previously covered migration and the Middle East for The Guardian.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The United States Supports the Mujahedeen-e Khalk (MEK) Terrorist Organization

Robert Fantina

February 18, 2020

The United States continues to support the Mujahedeen-e Khalk (MEK), despite the fact that that terrorist organization is losing popularity, not that it ever had very much anyway, around the world. The group remains basically based in Albania, a nation that allowed about 4,000 of its members into the country at the insistence of the U.S. government. As Dr. Olsi Jazexhi has stated, “The Americans imposed them (MEK) on Albania and since Albania is a very fragile state, they had to accept”.



But what of other nations? The MEK’s foothold in Spain was lost when it supported the far-right VOX party. It has been barred from rallying in Germany, and France forbid its annual Villepinte rally. MEK members have lost access to European Union Parliament members.

Even the mighty U.S. has officially cooled its rabid support for the anti-Iran terrorist group. Following the assassination of General Qassam Soleimani by the U.S. in January, the murderous U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, ordered diplomats at all U.S. missions not to have contact with ‘Iranian opposition groups’.

Regardless of Pompeo’s statement, the group continues to have high-profile U.S. supporters, including former U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton, who famously proclaimed in 2017 that the MEK and its minions would be celebrating in the streets of Tehran before the fortieth anniversary of the Iranian Revolution in February 2019. That anniversary, and yet another, came and went without any MEK celebrations anywhere in Iran, let alone in the nation’s capital.

Another famous and infamous U.S. citizen, former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani, personal attorney to U.S. President Donald Trump, calls the MEK a ‘government in exile’. Apparently, Giuliani has lost the ability to discern truth from falsehood, fantasy from reality; this is not surprising, considering who employs him. All reputable polls of Iranians, in Iran and around the world, do not support his bizarre assumption that Iranians support the MEK; on the contrary, overwhelming evidence indicates that they oppose the MEK’s goals and tactics.



And to call the MEK a ‘government in exile’ is ludicrous. Consisting of a few thousand aging anti-Iran terrorists, and perhaps a limited number of younger recruits, the organization is not seen as a ‘government in exile’ by anyone but the delusional Giuliani. He also made this amazing statement: the MEK is “...a group that should make us comfortable with regime change.” This statement is incredible in a variety of ways: 1) the U.S. should not be in the business of overthrowing governments (e.g. ‘regime change’); 2) who is the

‘us’ that Giuliani says should be comfortable with the MEK as a potential governing body in Iran? Certainly not the Iranians; 3) this is a group that, until 2012, the U.S. designated as a terrorist organization. It is responsible for the deaths of at least 12,000 Iranians. So is Giuliani saying that he would be ‘comfortable’ with a nation of 81,000,000 people run by terrorists? Perhaps so, since he himself works for the head of the largest terrorist organization in the world.

With diminishing support in Europe, and even the U.S. putting the official breaks on contact with the MEK, how does it stay afloat? NBC News reported that it is likely that the MEK is financed by Israeli intelligence. That would make sense, since Israel, like the U.S., is a brutal, repressive regime, in violation of countless international laws, and forever violating the rights of the Palestinians in the most unspeakable ways. And since the U.S. supports Israel with \$4 billion annually, one can be confident that some of that money is finding its way to the MEK.

So with fading support, and funding probably coming from Israel, and thus, at least indirectly, from the U.S., what is the MEK to do? Hapless Albania must continue to house them, against the wishes of Albanians, but their leaders are in a U.S. chokehold, so they don’t have much choice. The U.S. wants the MEK nearby in case it needs their terrorism for some reason; the U.S. is not averse to having some other country do its dirty work: witness the U.S.-financed Saudi slaughter of Yemenis, as just one example. And should the Albanian government decide to act as its people want, rather than as the U.S. demands, would the MEK then turn its terrorism on them? Albania has certainly been put between a rock and a hard place by the U.S., which doesn’t care in the least about it or the Albanian people; the whole nation is just a pawn in an international chess game that the U.S. is playing, that no one else is interested in.

The Iranian Revolution, which overthrew the U.S. installed and supported Shah, just celebrated its forty-first anniversary, despite all the efforts of the U.S. to defeat it. One must remember that the democratically-elected government of Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mosaddegh was overthrown by the U.S. government in 1953, and then the Iranian people had to endure twenty-six years of oppression and torture under the U.S. puppet who did

exactly what he was told by the U.S.; his repression of the Iranian people was unimportant to the U.S. government. It is unlikely that such an overthrow, if attempted, would be successful again. So instead of direct overthrow, the U.S. attempts to harm the people through sanctions, expecting them to rise up, overthrow the government, and usher in the MEK to repress the people and do the U.S.'s bidding. This is the fantasy that Giuliani, Bolton, Trump, Pompeo and their cohorts dream about, but as has been mentioned, reality and the Trump Administration barely have a nodding acquaintance with each other.

The government of Iran will continue to strengthen its defenses, as it works to strengthen its economy with products other than oil. The U.S. will continue its bizarre rantings about Iran and terrorism, trying to hide the fact that it, not Iran or any other nation on the planet, is the major sponsor of terrorism around the globe. And the Iranian people will continue to demonstrate the remarkable resiliency that has made their nation great.

 Access the article from [here](#).





## Who are the People's Mujahedeen of Iran?

Bradford Betz

February 19, 2020

**T**he People's Mujahedin is a resistance group that has been fighting for regime change in Iran for decades, despite the Iranian government trying to dismiss the group as a "cult."

The Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, or MEK, has received strong support from prominent U.S. figures, including President Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani, and former National Security Adviser John Bolton. Tehran has fought to silence the group, which said the regime has executed tens of thousands of its members and sympathizers.

The group began in the mid-1960s in opposition to the highly unpopular U.S.-backed Shah of Iran. But, the MEK soon came to reject the theocratic regime that replaced him after the 1979 revolution.

The group began using increasingly violent efforts





against the regime, carrying out bombings and assassinations -- actions that led its popularity to plummet.

The MEK moved its operations to Paris before relocating to Iraq in the mid-1980s, where it received protection under Saddam Hussein.

Despite the U.S. State Department designating the MEK as a foreign terrorist group in the late 1990s, it nonetheless received American protection during the Iraq War.

After American troops began winding down operations in Iraq, the MEK suffered violent recriminations from the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government. In 2012, the U.S. removed the MEK from its terrorist list and worked with the United Nations to find an alternative host country. The following year, Albania welcomed the group, aiming to gain favor with Washington.

The group has since renounced violence, advocating for the peaceful overthrow of Iran's theocratic government. In an exclusive 2014 interview with Fox News, the group's leader, Maryam Rajavi, said she was "confident that the mullahs' religious dictatorship ruling Iran will not last in the 21st century and be overthrown.

She continued, "It really begs logic to expect this religious dictatorship, the founder of terrorism and fundamentalism in the whole of the region and is seeking nuclear weapons, to take international policy hostage, to continue and endure."

A New York Times reporter who recently gained access to the group's headquarters outside the capital of Albania interviewed subjects who said they were former members living in the country and claimed they were brainwashed. The group has denied such characterizations, arguing that it remained committed to fighting for freedom and democracy in Iran, and saying any "cult" comparisons were coming from the Iranian regime as part of its "misinformation campaign."

"The so-called former members are in fact agents of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security and on its payroll. A plethora of indisputable evidence confirming that they are part of the regime's terror network in Albania, exposed by Albanian police, was provided to the New York Times reporter," Ali Safavi of the National Council of Resistance of Iran told Fox News on Wednesday, saying the paper ignored the documents.

A Times spokesperson told Fox News, "We're confident in the accuracy of the reporting," adding, "at no time did the Albanian police provide our reporter with documentary evidence."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## A Giuliani-Trump Foreign Policy?

Bob Dreyfuss

March 5, 2020



Rudy’s coup at Foggy Bottom. Imagine, just for the sake of argument, that the president of the United States was an arrogant, information-challenged, would-be autocrat with a soft spot for authoritarian leaders from China, Russia, and North Korea to Egypt (“my favorite dictator”), Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. And then, suppose that very president, while hollowing out the State Department and slamming its diplomats as “Deep State” troublemakers, were to name a voluble wheeler-dealer attorney as his unofficial, freelance White House go-between with shady characters worldwide. Imagine further that the president would do an end run around the professionals of the U.S. intelligence community—more Deep Staters, natch—and rely instead on conspiracy theories trundled back to Washington in that attorney’s briefcase.

Now, one last unimaginable thing, but humor me: accept that the attorney in question went by the name of Rudy Giuliani.

That, of course, is a reasonable description of the state of America in 2020. Three-plus years into Donald Trump’s misshapen presidency, as the “adults” fled the room one by one or were pushed to the exits, the president was left with a rump collection of family loyalists and third-tier yes-people around him.

Rarely, if ever, do mainstream media types take a step back to survey the classic Star Wars bar-like crew of know-nothings, Bible-thumpers, and connivers who’ve been assembled as Trump’s “team” and their breathtaking incompetence and perfidy. Luckily, with Giuliani in the mix, there’s at least one figure so wildly over-the-top that analysts and pundits have heaped scorn or ridicule on his head, and often his alone, as a person so outrageously unfit, so borderline deranged, so nakedly in it for profit that it’s impossible to consider him without marveling at the tragicomedy of it all.

Since 2017, however, Rudy Giuliani has emerged as Trump’s shadow secretary of state with his hands in American foreign policy and politics from Iran to Russia, Turkey to Ukraine and beyond. That means anyone, anywhere in the world, with a few million bucks to proffer and an angle to pursue in Washington can avoid Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the Christian-right uber-hawk from Kansas, and sidle up instead to the former U.S. attorney from the Southern District of New York and mayor of New York City.

During most of 2019, as is well known to anyone who even casually followed the impeachment proceedings in Congress, Giuliani had a starring role in President Trump’s conspiracy-laden efforts to prove that Ukraine, not Russia, intervened in the 2016 election and that Joe Biden and his son, Hunter, were mixed up in something nefarious there. (To those in the reality-based world, of course, it was Russia, not Ukraine that meddled massively in 2016. And the Bidens, it’s clear, did nothing illegal in Kyiv.)

As we shall see, the Trump-Giuliani conspiracy theory about that country originated with and was “fertilized” by three individuals who’d earlier been caught up in Robert Mueller’s special counsel investigation of the White

House: Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, the disgraced former national security advisor in the White House; Paul Manafort, who chaired Trump's election campaign; and Manafort's Ukraine partner and ally, an apparent operative for Russia's GRU intelligence service, Konstantin Kilimnik. In other words, the Trump-Giuliani Ukraine adventure did indeed get a boost from Vladimir Putin's secret service and Moscow's propaganda machine.

You'll remember, perhaps, or maybe you've forgotten, that before Mike Pompeo was secretary of state, before his predecessor Rex ("Rexxon") Tillerson even took the job, it looked for a while like Giuliani was going to get it. He and Donald Trump had been political friends-with-benefits since the mid-1990s, as evidenced by a cringe-worthy 2000 video of Trump placing his lips unbidden on Giuliani-in-drag's "breast." The former mayor had quietly sought to reposition himself as the reincarnation of Roy Cohn, the mob-connected lawyer who had been a mentor to the up-and-coming New York real estate tycoon. ("Where's my Roy Cohn?") It's hardly surprising then that, following Trump's surprise victory in November 2016, Giuliani began lobbying hard for the secretary of state job. At the same time, he was fervently urging the president-elect not to select never-Trumper Mitt Romney for it. (Giuliani did, however, also endorse John Bolton, Washington's war-monger-in-chief, for the job.)

Back in 2016, a week or so after the election, a New York Times editorial drily noted that the appointment of Giuliani as secretary of state "would be a dismal and potentially disastrous choice," that he lacked "any substantive diplomatic experience and has demonstrated poor judgment throughout his career," appeared "unhinged," and would come with a "flurry of potential conflicts of interest." And keep in mind that, back then, Giuliani was only getting started.

In recent years, much has been written, and accurately so, about the exodus of veteran diplomats—ambassadors to toilers in the ranks—from a gutted Foggy Bottom and its global outposts under both Tillerson and Pompeo. Writing last October for Foreign Affairs, for instance, former diplomat William Burns noted that fewer people took the department's entrance exam in 2019 than in any year in previous decades. "Career diplomats," wrote Burns, "are sidelined, with only one of 28 assistant secretary-rank positions filled

by a Foreign Service officer, and more ambassadorships going to political appointees in this administration than in any in recent history.”He added: “One-fifth of ambassadorships remain unfilled, including critical posts.”

At the State Department, as one ambassador told the Hill, morale “is at a new low, although I am not sure it could fall much lower than where it has been for the past three years.”And that decline only accelerated after the humiliating dismissal of the U.S. ambassador in Kyiv, Marie Yovanovitch, whose ouster was orchestrated by Giuliani.

To be sure, the State Department was never a progressive bastion, not during the Cold War years nor in the era when America was the global hyperpower. It is, nonetheless, the main vehicle for any president wishing to use the levers of diplomacy rather than the oft-chosen military option. Now, with the adults gone and the diplomats increasingly neutered, we’re left with Trump and Giuliani. Neither hawks nor doves, they’re vultures, viewing every country as part of a vast veldt where they can pick at carcasses of every sort for their own business or political gain.

## **How to Become a Shadow Secretary of State**

Giuliani’s foreign policy portfolio extends far and wide, though it was in Ukraine—specifically with that country’s many corrupt, Russian-leaning oligarchs—that he rocketed to world attention and helped trigger the president’s impeachment. In his world travels, Giuliani has combined his roles as businessman, security consultant, political fixer, and the president’s personal attorney into a mishmash of overlapping identities. He has, in other words, become a kind of walking, talking conflict-of-interest machine.

Before zeroing in on Ukraine, however, let’s consider just a few of Giuliani’s other foreign ventures. Since leaving office as New York’s mayor, through Giuliani Partners, the Bracewell & Giuliani law partnership, and (after 2016) the giant law firm of Greenberg Traurig, along with Giuliani Security & Safety and Giuliani Capital Advisers, the former mayor has pulled in millions of dollars working on behalf of foreign clients, including highly controversial ones. Among those deals, contracts, and maneuvers, before and after Trump became president and hired his old friend Rudy to serve as his personal at-

torney in 2018, Giuliani has been involved in a far-flung series of deals: he's been a paid lobbyist in Romania; had a cybersecurity contract in Qatar; had deals in Colombia, Argentina, and El Salvador; worked shadow diplomacy (with a business angle) with Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro; operated in Japan, Serbia, and Guatemala; and that only begins to tell the story.

Consider Turkey, starting in 2017. Back then, when Lieutenant General Michael Flynn was forced to resign after just a few weeks as national security advisor, it turned out that he had quietly (and without reporting it) been working on behalf of Turkey's autocratic government, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during the 2016 election campaign. Erdogan was disturbed by the presence of a dissident, Fethullah Gulen, in the United States. As an unregistered advocate for Turkey, Flynn lobbied in 2016 to have the United States expel Gulen and send him back to Turkey. Early the next year, Flynn was gone, but no fear, Rudy Giuliani promptly took up the same cause. He began urging President Trump to extradite Gulen to Turkey, where Erdogan was accusing him of having plotted an attempted coup d'état. (In the end, Gulen wasn't expelled.)

Given Giuliani's ability to mix policy with business, you won't be surprised to learn that he was also enmeshed in more lucrative efforts in Turkey. At around the same time, he was lobbying Trump to endorse a prisoner swap involving one of his clients, an Iranian-born Turkish gold trader named Reza Zarrab whom the FBI had arrested in 2016 on charges of money laundering and trying to do an end run around economic sanctions on Iran. According to the New York Times, Zarrab had been working with Halkbank, a major Turkish bank with close ties to Turkish Finance Minister Berat Albayrak who is also President Erdogan's son-in-law, to "funnel more than \$10 billion in gold and cash to Iran."

At first blush, it might seem odd for Giuliani to offer his services on behalf of an Iranian expat accused of trying to break U.S. sanctions whose family, it turned out, had close ties to former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Curious, yes, but for Giuliani, business is business and there were bucks to be made. That he would use his connections to the Oval Office in an ultimately unsuccessful appeal for his client is even odder, given that Giuliani is otherwise a militant hardliner when it comes to demanding the overthrow of



the Iranian government.

Case in point: his long-time affiliation with the People’s Jihadists, otherwise known as the Mujaheddin-e-Khalq, or MEK. Like many of Giuliani’s escapades abroad, his efforts with MEK were a money-making project. Along with John Bolton, the late Senator John McCain, former National Security Advisor Jim Jones, and former Attorney General Mike Mukasey, Giuliani has for years been affiliated with the MEK, making perhaps a dozen appearances, mostly paid speeches, at its conventions and rallies.

The MEK has almost no support inside Iran, not only because it’s conducted a terror campaign against that country’s top officials since 1981, but because it operated with the backing of Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein during and after the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. It’s also widely regarded as a cult. Last year, in the midst of his anti-Joe Biden skullduggery in Ukraine, in his 11th appearance at an MEK confab, Giuliani traveled to Albania, of all places, where the group has established a military and political base. There, he called Trump “heroic” for “doing away with the reckless nuclear agreement and putting [Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] on the terrorist list.”

In 2018, this reporter attended one of the MEK’s large-scale events, held at a hotel in midtown New York City. General Jim Jones, who became an ultra-hawk after being ousted as President Obama’s national security advisor in 2010, spoke to the gathering first, noting proudly that he is supposedly on a list of people the government in Tehran plans to assassinate.

Rising to speak after Jones, Giuliani seemed jealous. “I hope I say enough offensive things that they’ll put me on that list to kill me,” he commented. Needless to say, both Jones and Giuliani are still alive and kicking, and there’s no evidence that either one is on any Iranian kill list. However, thanks in part to Giuliani’s hardline, anti-Iran advice to the president, that country’s top general, Qassem Soleimani, was indeed placed on a presidential kill list and drone assassinated as 2020 began.

### **And Then There Was Ukraine**

It was, of course, in connection with Ukraine that Giuliani’s freelancing came

to the world's attention. In the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence's impeachment report, his name is mentioned about 160 times. He's cited, first and foremost because, in that infamous "perfect" July 2019 phone call of his, Trump asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to work through him; because the former mayor was the primary organizer of the smear campaign against the actual ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, who was subsequently fired; and because it was he who, starting as early as May 2019, masterminded a months-long political witch hunt against the Bidens, demanding over and over that Ukraine carry out an ersatz investigation of the man the president then expected to be his chief 2020 election opponent.

Numerous figures, including Ambassador Bill Taylor, who succeeded Yovanovitch at the U.S. embassy in Kyiv, would express dismay over Giuliani's role as the "irregular" channel for the Trump administration's Ukraine policy—the "Giuliani factor," as Ambassador to NATO Kurt Volker called it. The story of how all this led to the president's impeachment is too well known to be rehashed here.

The Joe Biden/Hunter Biden part of the Ukraine story was straightforward enough in its own way. Far more complicated and troubling was the adherence of the president and Giuliani to a weird conspiracy theory that Ukraine, not Russia, used its intelligence service to try to sway the 2016 election. According to various official reports and in the opinion of virtually every expert who's studied the matter, it was Russia that intervened to boost Trump's election campaign. According to Trump and Giuliani, however, Ukraine meddled in 2016 on behalf of Hillary Clinton and indeed, they argue, the actual Democratic National Committee server somehow found its way to Kyiv, thanks to a computer security firm called CrowdStrike, which Trump claimed was owned by a wealthy Ukrainian. (It is not.)

Naturally enough, this Trump-Giuliani theory was nonsense, but according to the Washington Post, it had its origins—perhaps not surprisingly—in propaganda generated in Moscow. The Post reported that Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn, and Manafort's partner, Konstantin Kilimnik, "played a role in convincing Trump that Russia did not actually interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, despite what both Mueller and the U.S. intelligence commu-

nity have concluded, and that it was actually Ukraine.”

According to Rick Gates, Manafort’s deputy, the Ukraine conspiracy theory originated with his boss who “parroted” the line from Kilimnik. And both Manafort and Kilimnik—who was indicted by Mueller—had ties to Moscow operatives and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, while Kilimnik himself was identified by Mueller and the FBI as part of Russia’s GRU.

As the Post concluded: “So we have two men [Manafort and Flynn] who have been convicted of offenses related to their Russia ties, have both lied to investigators about their interactions with Russian interests, and who apparently played a significant role in pushing a theory to Trump that Russia did not actually interfere in the 2016 election. They instead pointed the finger at Russia’s nemesis, Ukraine, and that has apparently stuck with Trump for more than three years.”

And it was that line that would be spread eagerly by pro-Trump writers like the Hill’s John Solomon. In a review of Solomon’s pieces, released this month, the Hill’s editors analyzed 14 of his columns with titles like “As Russian collusion fades, Ukraine plot to help Clinton emerges.” In doing so, they found numerous troubling facts about Solomon, his sources, and his overall reporting. As the Hill report put it:

“Giuliani has indicated he was a key source of information for Solomon on Ukraine, telling the New York Times in November 2019 that he turned over information about the Bidens earlier in the year to Solomon. ‘I really turned my stuff over to John Solomon,’ Giuliani said.

“The former New York City mayor later told the New Yorker he encouraged Solomon to highlight information on the Bidens and Yovanovitch, stating, ‘I said, “John, let’s make this as prominent as possible,”’ adding, “I’ll go on TV. You go on TV. You do columns.””

Two colorful characters who acted as Giuliani’s Ukraine go-betweens, Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, have been indicted on conspiracy charges and, according to Fortune, Giuliani, too, could be indicted in that case. As CNN noted in January, it’s nearly unheard of for a U.S. Attorney’s office—in this

case the one for the Southern District of New York (SDNY)—to end up indicting a former U.S. attorney who led the same district. CNN added: “The SDNY community has watched in disbelief as Giuliani continues to seek the spotlight even as the investigation has unfolded and expanded into new fronts on a nearly weekly basis. The impeachment inquiry has also unleashed new evidence regarding his role performing shadow diplomacy on behalf of President Donald Trump as recently as [mid-January].”

Indeed, Giuliani is still at it. In concert with a collection of corrupt ex-prosecutors in Ukraine and in his ongoing role as shadow secretary of state-cum-intelligence chief, Giuliani is still gathering conspiracy-riddled information on the Bidens in Kyiv—and Attorney General William Barr has obligingly created an “intake process in the field” to absorb Giuliani’s work product straight into the Department of Justice. One thing is guaranteed: “Secretary of State” Giuliani will have a clear field in Kyiv, since Ambassador Taylor was unceremoniously fired on January 1st of this year.

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■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Defectors Tell of Torture and Forced Sterilization in Militant Iranian Cult

Murtaza Hussain, Matthew Cole

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On a blisteringly hot summer afternoon in 2006, Reza Sadeghi ran into an old friend at the Iraqi headquarters of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an exiled Iranian militant group better known as the MEK. The two men had not seen each other in over a decade. Sadeghi guided his friend, who had just arrived from Canada, on a stroll through the desert compound known as Camp Ashraf. He was glad to catch up with an old comrade. But he also had a burning question.

Sadeghi had effectively given his life to the MEK, which means “People’s Mujahideen of Iran.” A 26-year veteran of the group, he had not left Camp Ashraf for over a decade. During that time, he’d had no contact with his family or news of them. The MEK leadership had forced him and most of the other cadres living at Camp Ashraf to abandon even their closest relationships. Most painful for Sadeghi

were thoughts of his son, Paul, his only child, now 16 years old. Sadeghi hadn't seen or spoken to Paul since he'd arrived in Iraq.

As Sadeghi and his old friend strolled through the compound, two MEK minders followed at a distance. Sadeghi walked a bit faster, signaling to his friend that he needed to talk out of earshot of their escorts. Turning a corner between buildings, he whispered: "How is Paul?"

Sadeghi had first learned about the MEK in early 1980, shortly after the Iranian Revolution, when the group's leader, a man named Massoud Rajavi, arrived at Sadeghi's neighbor's home in Isfahan for a private memorial. Rajavi had come to eulogize Sadeghi's best friend's older brother, who lived on Sadeghi's street. Sadeghi worshipped the older brother, who had died a few years earlier under mysterious circumstances. The shah had been toppled in the 1979 revolution, and the MEK had played a role. They no longer had to hide. Rajavi was there to tell the family and neighbors that the brother was an MEK martyr who had died protecting Rajavi and the MEK leadership from an internal coup when they were still an underground group. The group's message about freedom and democracy resonated with Sadeghi, and he viewed its armed struggle as heroic.

The Mojahedin-e Khalq started as a militant revolutionary movement, committed in principle to bringing human rights and democracy to Iran. But over the last four decades, it has devolved into a secretive, cult-like group that resembles a militant, Islamist version of the Church of Scientology. The MEK has carried out bombings, sabotage missions, and murders. Since its founding in 1963, it is believed to have killed hundreds or even thousands of Iranians, as well as a handful of Americans.

From 1997 to 2012, the United States designated the MEK a foreign terrorist organization. But the group, which once opposed U.S. intervention in Iran, has effectively switched sides, becoming a convenient proxy force for Tehran's enemies, particularly American neoconservatives, the Gulf Arab states, and Israel. The current MEK leadership maintains close ties with several prominent American politicians, including Donald Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton and the president's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani, both of whom have been paid speakers at MEK events.

Yet despite the harm it has caused to Iranians and others, the MEK's most numerous victims may have been its own members. Interviews with six defectors in Europe reveal that the MEK has isolated, disappeared, and tortured many of its cadres into submission, including forcing dozens of female members to have sex with Rajavi and undergo medical sterilization so they could devote themselves more fully to the leader and his cause.

During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Human Rights Watch and the Rand Corporation provided some of the first accounts in English of the MEK's treatment of dissidents and the repressive conditions at Camp Ashraf. But the interviews with the six defectors, including several who held senior positions in the organization, provide the most comprehensive account to date of what life was like inside the MEK and afterward, when they have found themselves alone in an unfamiliar world, trying to pick up the pieces of their former lives. Having traded a despotic regime in Iran for another at Camp Ashraf, the defectors told us, they are relieved to be free. At the same time, they've been forced to grapple with a bitter irony: The only people who can truly understand what they've endured are other former MEK members.

"I couldn't feel whether I was alive or dead," said Issa Azadeh, a senior operative who left the group in 2014 after 34 years. "I was thinking, 'Did I make a mistake?' But the first time when I got into the internet, I saw the truth. I searched about cults. I realized we were robots."

The MEK did not respond to requests to comment for this story. On a website associated with the group, high-ranking MEK official Ali Safavi last week denounced this story, which had not been published, as "a new propaganda hit piece," characterizing it as a distraction orchestrated by Iran's ruling clerics to draw public attention away from the devastating impact of the coronavirus in Iran.

Reza Sadeghi joined the group in 1980, after the fall of the shah, while he was still in high school. But in 1981, a new Iranian government led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini pronounced the MEK an enemy of the state. The revolutionary regime declared war on the group, which had thousands of members at the time. Sadeghi was shot in the leg by a government militia member during a demonstration in Tehran. He was later arrested, charged with mem-

bership in a banned group, and ultimately sentenced to five years in prison, he told *The Intercept* in a recent interview. While in detention, Sadeghi was frequently starved, beaten, and tortured by his captors. During one stretch, he spent 22 months in solitary confinement.

After leaving prison in 1986, Sadeghi fled to Canada. He reconnected with the MEK — whose members had been forced out of Iran and were now scattering across the globe — and took up a new set of duties, including fundraising for the group. While in Canada, he married; Paul arrived two years later. Sadeghi lived in Toronto with his family before relocating to Los Angeles, all the while helping to wage the MEK's desperate international battle to overthrow the Iranian government and reclaim the revolutionary inheritance they believed Khomeini had denied them.

In 1996, Sadeghi traveled to Camp Ashraf, the group's sprawling compound in northeast Iraq, for a mandatory six-month military training. While the MEK did propaganda and intelligence work, the group's core skills were military. Membership required extensive training, including everything from weapons skills and bomb-making to operating a T-55 tank.

While he was in Iraq, Sadeghi decided to leave Paul, who was then almost 5 years old and had been born in Canada, with Sadeghi's parents in Iran. At the time, Paul had never met his grandparents or been to Iran. Sadeghi planned to train for six months, retrieve Paul, and return to the U.S., where he'd spent several years raising money for the MEK's leadership, which is based in Europe.

But when his training was over, the group asked Sadeghi to stay for another six months. He had been selected to train for assassination missions inside Iran and would fine-tune the fighting and sabotage skills that his commanders told him would soon help liberate his country. His MEK commander told Sadeghi that Paul would be sent back to Toronto to live with his mother, a Canadian woman whom Sadeghi had divorced not long after their son was born. Sadeghi agreed to stay.

The MEK operates under a strict hierarchy, and members are not allowed to communicate with relatives outside the group. There were no phone calls,



no letters, and virtually no access to the world outside of the 13-square-mile camp, except, beginning in 2003, when U.S. soldiers occupied a small base inside Camp Ashraf, where they kept an eye on the group.

After the fall of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the MEK base in Ashraf presented a conundrum for the U.S. government. Here was a group of roughly 3,500 Iranian exiles — branded as terrorists — who were no longer welcome inside Iraq. They were stateless refugees with nowhere to go. The United States established a basic agreement with the MEK: The Americans would disarm the group and protect them at Ashraf from Iranians or Shia Iraqis who sought revenge for their attacks on Iran’s revolutionary government. The United States would also try to accommodate MEK defectors without outright meddling in the group’s internal affairs. They did this via what became known as the Temporary Internment and Protection Facility, a U.S. military-controlled area that was later officially recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as a holding zone for refugees.

Sadeghi got only rare updates about Paul during the 10 years he spent in Ashraf. Members were forbidden from discussing family or friends who were not MEK members. When he did ask about his son, they always told him that the boy was well, living in Toronto with Sadeghi’s ex-wife and receiving hundreds of dollars in support every month from the group.

Now, his old friend from Toronto told Sadeghi something that seemed impossible. His son, the friend said, was not in Canada at all. He had never left Iran and was being raised by Sadeghi’s parents there. Sadeghi’s Canadian ex-wife had filed a report with Canadian authorities, believing that Sadeghi had kidnapped the boy. Paul was declared a missing child by the Royal Mounted Canadian Police. His picture had even been printed on milk cartons in Canada in the hope that someone might find him and return him to his mother. “No, he’s in Canada,” Sadeghi declared in disbelief. The friend insisted that wasn’t true. Canadian authorities had even interviewed him about Sadeghi and his son, the man said.

Sadeghi abruptly left his friend and marched to his commander’s office. He told her that he was leaving the organization to retrieve his son. He planned to join the U.S. soldiers at the spartan desert encampment they’d built to house those who managed to escape, Sadeghi said.

His commander called a group of other MEK members to detain him. Suddenly, about a dozen of Sadeghi's comrades were grabbing him, trying to push and lift him into the back seat of a nearby Toyota pickup. As he resisted, he felt one of his fingers snap. The MEK members shoved him into the back of the truck, pinning him to the floor with their bodies. The truck started driving. "You're dead," one of Sadeghi's captors told him. "We are going to put you in the ground, and no one will ever know what happened to you." Forced disappearances and solitary confinement were not uncommon at Camp Ashraf, and Sadeghi was sure he would be executed.

His only chance, he thought, was to try to kick out the window of the truck hoping the commotion would attract attention. He slammed his foot against the glass as the others fought to restrain him. The windows didn't break, but as the truck slowed to turn onto the camp's main road, it approached two American soldiers patrolling the road in a Humvee.

The soldiers stopped the truck and ordered everyone out. The men in the back got off Sadeghi and he raised himself up. "I want to leave the MEK," he told the Americans in English. "I need your help." The Americans took Sadeghi past the razor wire and armed Humvees and into their own makeshift military compound next door.

Once inside, Sadeghi asked to make a phone call. He still had the phone number of his brother who lived in Canada. He called him and asked for their parents' number in Iran. After so much time without a word, they didn't even know whether Sadeghi was alive or dead.

"When my mother picked up the phone, all I could say was hello. I didn't know what else to say to her," he recalled recently. "She recognized my voice and just started crying."

For most of its existence, the MEK has functioned as a mini totalitarian state, impenetrable to outsiders. Few left the group, and fewer still could speak freely with those inside. But since being evicted from Iraq in 2013 and relocating to Albania, a steady trickle of defectors have begun to paint a fuller picture of those lost years. Sadeghi, Azadeh, and four other high-ranking former MEK members, all now living in Europe, spoke with *The Intercept* for this sto-

ry, revealing new details about the MEK's history and operations, as well as the bizarre, tragic lives of thousands who have essentially found themselves trapped inside the organization.

These former members described the life of a typical MEK member as a nightmare of psychological and physical torture, paranoia, forcible separation from family, and ideological indoctrination. Some female MEK members have been ordered to have their ovaries surgically removed to prove their commitment to the organization. The MEK is a highly secretive organization, and it was not possible to independently verify all parts of the defectors' stories. However, five of them agreed to speak on the record about their experiences, which were broadly consistent and often confirmed aspects of other former members' accounts. Secret Iranian intelligence documents obtained by The Intercept also confirm several of their claims, including information that is not publicly known. Their testimonies reveal a brutal organization that, for decades, has held thousands in a state of physical and psychological slavery as it degenerated from a popular political movement to a freakish cult of personality under the absolute control of one all-powerful leader.

For most of the MEK's history, the group's leader has been Rajavi, a paunchy, mustachioed onetime University of Tehran law student who reinvented himself as a revolutionary firebrand. From the beginning, the group was violent. In the 1970s, the MEK assassinated a handful of Iranian officials and foreigners in Iran, among them several Americans.

Many MEK members were killed and jailed in Iran; those who survived fled. It was during this long, strange exile that the group became a full-blown cult of personality focused on Rajavi, and, after he disappeared in 2003, his wife Maryam. Massoud Rajavi is widely believed to be dead, but most MEK defectors who spoke to The Intercept said that they are unsure of his fate. Some suggested that he is still alive and controls the group in secret, a reflection of his towering psychological presence.

The MEK has shelled out hundreds of thousands of lobbying dollars in Washington, first as part of a successful campaign to get itself removed from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations and later, to build its reputation as a credible alternative to the Iranian government. Daniel

Benjamin, a senior counterterrorism official for the Obama State Department who was part of the effort to delist the MEK, said the goal was to resolve the group's status as the U.S. military withdrew from Iraq, and that as an opposition faction within Iran, the MEK was irrelevant. "We don't know how many followers they have inside [Iran], but it's certainly very small," he told *The Intercept*. "Their history is pretty horrifying and nothing that should lead anyone to think that they would rule Iran in a positive way."

Since then, the group has cultivated an impressive roster of American supporters in addition to Bolton and Giuliani, including Democrats like former presidential candidate Howard Dean and Sen. Bob Menendez. Former Attorney General Michael Mukasey, now one of President Donald Trump's lawyers, allegedly began working for the MEK as far back as 2017, but only registered as a lobbyist for the MEK this fall. (Giuliani reportedly took part in Mukasey's initial meeting with the group.)

"This is a group that has both pariah status and friends in high places. Its friendships are largely purchased," Benjamin said. "Anyone who's looked at the MEK ideology or its past I think recoils in horror at the thought of them having any significant role in governing Iran. There is no serious debate over the group's history. It has American blood on its hands."

The sources of the MEK's funding remain unclear. But the group is believed to receive money from Gulf Arab states to maintain its sprawling headquarters in Albania and to finance rallies and lobbying efforts throughout the West. The powerful Saudi prince and former intelligence chief, Turki al-Faisal, has been a notable guest speaker at its events. The MEK is suspected of having ties to the intelligence services of Israel and Saudi Arabia, both sworn enemies of Iran. A former senior U.S. intelligence official who spoke to *The Intercept* confirmed previous reports that some MEK members participated in the Israeli assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists.

"The MEK has long been a deniable asset for the Israelis," the former senior intelligence official said.

Issa Azadeh is imposing. Broad-shouldered and about 6-foot-2 with a dark goatee and glasses, he was a high-ranking MEK military and intelligence of-

ficer. Every member of the MEK at Camp Ashraf had to undergo intense military training. Now 61, Azadeh still looks capable of carrying out the demanding assassination and sabotage missions he was trained for.

Like Reza Sadeghi, Azadeh joined the MEK in his youth. He defected only in 2014, after a period of growing disillusionment with what he viewed as the group's authoritarianism. After a lifetime of sacrifice to the movement, he finally realized that he had fallen into the grip of a totalitarian organization with no apparent intention of bringing human rights and democracy to Iran. "I loved the MEK very much. I saw all my dreams in this organization, everything," Azadeh said when we met in Cologne, Germany, last fall. "But when I got involved in detail with things that no one else knew, I realized that there was no difference between [Joseph] Stalin and Massoud Rajavi."

For MEK members, he said, "Rajavi was right after God. This is something that they put in our minds. Over the years, minute by minute, month by month, year by year, they put that in our minds. If you doubt Rajavi, it means that you doubt God."

Azadeh was one of the MEK's original street fighters. When he joined, a war was underway between the revolutionary factions that had defeated the shah's regime. This struggle pitted Khomeini and his followers against leftist and Islamist groups like the MEK. Those battles soon became bloodier than the revolution itself. As Khomeini gained the upper hand, his enemies found themselves cast into prison or exiled; thousands were killed. Despite their support for the uprising against the shah, the MEK found themselves banned from taking part in new elections.

In the summer of 1981, operatives from the MEK, now effectively outlawed in Iran, bombed a government building, killing over 70 people. Their increasing willingness to commit violence was sapping their support in Iran, including among other opposition movements. But it was their decision to side with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War that put the MEK beyond the pale for most Iranians.

In 1986, thousands of MEK operatives, including Azadeh, were reorganized on Iraqi soil at Camp Ashraf. The war against Iran was nearing its sixth year,

and hundreds of thousands had already been killed on both sides in brutal, World War I-style trench warfare, as well as the Iraqi regime's use of chemical weapons.

In the midst of this bitter conflict, the MEK's leadership cut a deal with Saddam to organize its 7,000 followers to fight on the Iraqi side. Azadeh soon found himself on the front lines. In 1988, he took part in Operation Mersad, an MEK-led offensive that aimed to capture the Iranian city of Kermanshah, one of the last major offensives of the war. Bristling with tanks, heavy weaponry, and air support provided by Saddam, the MEK units succeeded in driving almost 200 kilometers into Iran. But as they gained ground, they found that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps had led them into an ambush. Thousands of MEK members were killed, many by airstrikes that hit their tanks and heavy vehicles on the open highways near Kermanshah.

Azadeh survived the operation, but the MEK was devastated. The group had sacrificed thousands of loyal cadres in a pointless battle and its hopes of taking power in Iran by force had evaporated. At the same time, the MEK's transformation into a cult began to rapidly accelerate. Azadeh and others had seen their comrades slaughtered in a senseless operation authorized by Rajavi, but before they could process this disaster, a new set of directives came down that would radically alter their lives. It was time for an "ideological revolution" inside the MEK, Rajavi said in an address at Camp Ashraf in 1989. "Rajavi told us that you have to divorce your family completely," Azadeh said. The leader told his acolytes that "family are the main poison for you guys" and counseled them that if their siblings or other relatives showed up at Camp Ashraf, the MEK members would be required to kill them. Azadeh was shocked. "At one time, family for MEK was honor," he said. "Then Rajavi announced that family is poison or shame."

A few years earlier, Rajavi had ordered his deputy Mehdi Abrishamchi to divorce his wife, Maryam, and then married her himself. Now it was time for the entire MEK to take this step. Members of the group were soon asked to immediately divorce their spouses. In a sign of the psychological thrall in which Rajavi held his followers, Azadeh and many others accepted the order unquestioningly. "I was the 38th person that Massoud Rajavi personally took their [wedding] ring off," he said. At the time, his wife was living in the Irani-

an city of Kerman.

“[Rajavi] said: ‘Don’t think about women. That’s not your life,’” Azadeh recalled. ““You have only one aim and one target: to obey everything I say and to overthrow the Iranian government.””

By the time the Iran-Iraq War ended in 1988, around 3,500 MEK members were living at Camp Ashraf. Intended as a launch pad for the MEK to liberate Iran, the base had become a place where members were ordered to surveil each other and carry out increasingly intense self-criticism sessions. MEK cadres were banned from leaving, communicating with the outside world, or even moving around Camp Ashraf without Rajavi’s permission. Some would spend two decades on the base without ever seeing it in its entirety, according to all the defectors who spoke to *The Intercept*. People also began to disappear into detention, accused of disloyalty to Rajavi and his revolution.

Azadeh was troubled by the organization’s adherence to secrecy and its self-imposed segregation from the wider world. “Why do we have to be scared of letting people in if we talk about freedom and democracy?” he wondered.

A reign of terror began to descend over Camp Ashraf. Even Azadeh, who had given up his wedding ring to Rajavi on command, found himself targeted.

According to the defectors, as many as 700 people were detained at Camp Ashraf in the year after the Iran-Iraq War ended. They were taken to isolated cells, where they were held incommunicado for months at a time. “They used to tell us that these people went for an operation or training,” Azadeh said. He suspected the explanations were lies. He was a senior commander who worked in the operational headquarters; orders to send members to fight or train would have crossed his desk. When he happened to see one of the arrests, Azadeh secretly followed the guards as they took the MEK member away. They delivered the man to a building used as a prison. It was clear, Azadeh said, that the arrests were calculated to instill fear.

Azadeh began to agitate. “I wrote [to Rajavi] and told him that we young

people came to this organization for freedom and democracy,” Azadeh said, remembering the message he sent to his leader. “The Iranian government executed and tortured us. What’s the difference between you and the Iranian government?”

Three days later, Azadeh became one of the disappeared. “At night, they came and blindfolded and handcuffed me and put me in prison,” he said. He was interrogated, beaten, tortured, and berated by MEK commanders. After four months in solitary confinement, he was brought out of his dark cell to meet Rajavi at another building on the base. Rajavi told him that Iranian intelligence agents had infiltrated the MEK and he’d ordered a purge to find them, adding that some had been executed and others released, Azadeh recalled. “Rajavi said, ‘Even if 1,000 people died, there is nothing that compares. They have no value next to Maryam Rajavi.’”

Afterward, Massoud Rajavi and Azadeh had lunch together and Rajavi recited a Persian proverb: “You saw the camel and you didn’t see the camel.” Azadeh explained Rajavi’s message: “It means if there is a cup of tea, say there is no cup of tea.” Rajavi then kissed Azadeh on the cheek and told him that he was “a child of this organization.”

Azadeh could scarcely comprehend what had happened, but he felt a wave of relief and elation. Many more MEK members were released in the coming weeks, but some never reemerged, Azadeh said. All was forgiven, it seemed. But Rajavi’s grip on his followers had only grown stronger.

One of the most notable things about the MEK is the prominence of women in the group. In contrast to the Iranian government, where women hold few leadership positions, the MEK has made a point of highlighting its female members. It also claims to favor gender equality and women’s rights, another contrast between the group and Iran’s ruling clerics. Today, the face of the organization is Maryam Rajavi, who rose to prominence after marrying Massoud in 1985. The heads of the MEK military commands — each of which numbers roughly 120 people — are women. The MEK High Council, supposedly an important decision-making body, is also all women and has 24 members.



But according to two female defectors, the apparent prominence of women in the group has less to do with equity than with furthering its leaders' desire for control. They say that what looks like empowering women is more about suppressing men, who Massoud Rajavi and those around him view as the more serious threat. It also has to do with MEK leaders' attempts to intimidate and control the group's hundreds of female members.

Batool Sultani was an MEK commander and a member of the High Council. Soft-spoken with brown hair and glasses, Sultani easily blended into the crowd when we met in Cologne. The High Council governed the conduct of everyone living at Camp Ashraf. They could order the isolation, ostracization, and imprisonment of members who ran afoul of Rajavi. But when it came to major decisions, the council had "no real power," Sultani said. "It was just for show and a means of using the women to keep control over the men who might become Massoud Rajavi's rivals in the Mojahedin."

She had joined the MEK in the 1980s, following her husband, who had become enamored with the group and its leader. She had rationalized the decision as a way to keep her family together. But the group's cultish nature became clear when they began living at Camp Ashraf in Iraq. Her relationship with her husband rapidly grew strained. They were both subject to what she described as "brainwashing" by the group's senior cadres, who segregated them by rank and controlled their interactions with one another.

In 1991, MEK commanders took Sultani's two young children, age 6 months and 5 years; the children were sent to live with MEK members in Holland and Sweden. It was a decision that she felt unable to oppose. In the insular world of the MEK, Massoud Rajavi had been effectively transformed into a subject of worship. Cadres were taught to both fear and love him, and they did. Many female members were expected to express this love physically.

"Maryam Rajavi came to us as female members of the group many times and asked us why we haven't demanded to see our leader in his bedroom," Sultani said. "There was a strong pressure" on MEK women to initiate sexual relationships with Rajavi, she said, "to show your commitment to the leader and the group."

Soon the pressure became even more overt. Female MEK members were periodically given stainless-steel pendants printed with Rajavi's face, a sign that they had been summoned to his bed. Sultani received hers in 1997 and soon became sexually involved with Rajavi. According to records she and other defectors say they kept, over 400 female members of the group had sexual relations with him.

Sultani's husband, a man named Hussein Moradi, is still part of the MEK and lives in Albania. She speaks with detachment about her past life. But like other former members, she is bitter about what the MEK did to her family. Since leaving the group, she has tried to rebuild her relationships with her children, who are now in their early 20s, only to find them angry and uncomprehending about the decades she spent away from them.

"I try to tell them we were like robots, it was brainwashing. Anything Masoud Rajavi told us to do we did; we didn't feel like we had any choice," she said. "They ask me why I never called, even on their birthdays. It is hard for them to understand any of this."

Another female member of the High Council at Camp Ashraf, whom The Intercept agreed to identify only as Sima, said she joined the MEK in the 1980s and left it in 2014. Unlike other former members, Sima asked that her real name not be used because she feared retaliation from current MEK members. She now lives in hiding in a European country and agreed to meet privately in a place where other local supporters of the group were unlikely to see her.

"You must know the organization and the psychological warfare that they start against you," she told us in an effort to explain her fear. "They assassinate your personality and you will lose your closest friends; even your family wouldn't trust you. This is the reason that these people are scared."

Sima joined the MEK in Iran after becoming disillusioned with leftist movements that seemed hesitant to confront either the shah or the Islamic Republic. But unlike others, she said, she never felt fully committed to the group's ideology. After getting caught up in the organization, it was just hard to find a way back to the life she'd had before. MEK members were being executed by

the Iranian regime. She married another member, and when the group moved to Camp Ashraf, she found that she had nowhere else to go. By this time, the world outside Rajavi's control felt both unreal and frightening.

Like other MEK members, Sima spent years at Camp Ashraf doing military training in preparation for what they viewed as the inevitable invasion of Iran that would install Rajavi as the country's leader. They pored over maps of possible attack routes and conducted weapons and intelligence training. There was also money, lots of it, coming from Saddam's Iraqi intelligence services. Sima was among those who managed the group's finances in the years before the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

"I was managing the money for the hundred people in my section," Sima said. "We received sacks full of Iraqi dinars every month."

As the years dragged on, she began to clash with other members. In response, they placed her under surveillance and forced her to engage in grueling self-criticism sessions that she described as psychologically tortuous. Around 2000, Sima was nearing a breaking point. She made a plan with another woman to escape from Camp Ashraf. They plotted their exit in meticulous detail, but the other woman turned her in to MEK leaders. As punishment, Sima was subjected to even more intense ostracization and psychological torture. For most of the next 14 years, Sima was confined to one section of Camp Ashraf, unable to move freely on her own. Like Batool Sultani, Sima described an intense form of psychosexual manipulation by Rajavi that she said became an integral tool for controlling female cadres. Years earlier, in 1995, "Rajavi gave every single woman in the organization a pendant and told us that we are all connected to him and to no other man," Sima said. She was forced to divorce her husband and, like Sultani, eventually became sexually involved with Rajavi.

Around 1998, an even more chilling directive came down from Rajavi to the female members of the organization. "I see some obstacles which have prevented us from reaching our goals and achieving victory," Rajavi told members of the group, Sultani recalled. "That obstacle is hope for the future. We want to eliminate any kind of hope for the future from your mind. You are either with us or not!"

Sterilization would be a means of focusing the women's minds. "They said that this organ of the body, the womb, has made women want to be mothers someday and return to domestic life," Sultani said. "And so, visits with women began, to get them to go in groups of 20 or 30 to have a hysterectomy."

Women were scheduled for appointments at an MEK hospital in Camp Ashraf. The procedures would be carried out by a female MEK member who had been trained as a doctor, assisted by a local Iraqi physician. At first, Sultani resisted. But finally "the pressure was so great that it broke my resistance, and I agreed that I, too, should make an appointment," she said. "In other words, they gave so many and varied arguments for me to go to the hospital that I had no choice."

Sultani said she finally defected from the MEK in 2006, after she was scheduled for the surgery but before it could be carried out.

"How many women have reached the castle?" Rajavi later asked in a meeting Sultani attended, referring to what she called the "women who had abandoned the last vestiges of their sexual world and were operated on." The doctor answered that there had been 50 so far.

After much urging from MEK leaders, Sima said she finally agreed to have her ovaries surgically removed in 2011. "When you are under brainwashing, you would do anything and everything," she told *The Intercept*. "You would do any military operation, you would go and have sexual relations with your leader, you would sell information and intelligence. We were under constant control by the leader."

When Sima finally left the group, she said, "I was like a lost person." The United Nations set up a meeting between her and her brother, whom she hadn't seen for 30 years. At first, she was reluctant to hug or kiss him, so deeply alienated had she become from her closest kin. He showed her how to shop and use money. "We've never seen anything like this for about 30 years," Sima said. "I completely forgot about real life outside MEK."

Now in her early 60s, she is separated from her husband and has no family except a brother who lives in a neighboring European country. She relies on

support from the government that granted her asylum. In her spare time, she writes in Persian about her experiences in the MEK. “They destroyed my life,” she says quietly.

When she first spoke out against the group, current members requested a meeting. They offered her several thousand euros not to criticize the group, which Sima says she declined. “I told them, ‘You cannot return what I lost, my family, my husband. You cannot return that.’”

Of all the MEK defectors we spoke to, Ali Hosseinnejad was the oldest and spent the most time in the organization. He joined in 1970 as a university student studying Arabic literature. His entire adult life, as well as the lives of his closest relatives, has been governed by the MEK. Two of his brothers were also members. While in graduate school in 1975, he was arrested for his MEK affiliation and served a year in prison. His wife, who went by the nickname Tayebah, joined the organization in 1978. They had two daughters, Zeynab and Mona.

In 1981, when the Iranian government declared the MEK a banned organization, Hosseinnejad and his family decided to flee Iran. Zeynab was 4 years old but Mona was a newborn, too young to be exiled. Ali, Tayebah, and Zeynab fled to Europe, leaving Mona with Hosseinnejad’s mother in Iran. For three years, they moved between Turkey, Greece, and Spain, finally settling in France, where the MEK established a headquarters in exile. Tayebah became the commander of the MEK’s suburban Paris headquarters.

Then, in 1986, the three moved again, this time to Camp Ashraf. Like Azadeh, Hosseinnejad, his wife, and one of Hosseinnejad’s brothers were part of Operation Mersad, the failed MEK operation that had sought to capture an Iranian city for Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War. Hosseinnejad survived, but his wife and brother were killed. Their bodies were never recovered.

Hosseinnejad returned to Ashraf. Zeynab, then 10, asked about her mother. Unable to tell her the truth, Hosseinnejad said that her mother had moved to Iran. Devastated, Hosseinnejad eventually sent Zeynab back to France, where she lived in the MEK compound outside Paris. Zeynab would later learn from an MEK member in France that her mother had been killed inside Iran.

Hosseinnejad was left a widower with two dead brothers, one child in France, and another in Iran whom he hadn't seen since she was 3 weeks old. Still, Hosseinnejad remained loyal to the MEK. He stayed in Ashraf and became Rajavi's Arabic translator.

Now nearly 70, Hosseinnejad looks even older, with hunched shoulders and a weary manner. Looking back, Hosseinnejad said he was troubled by much of what he knew about Rajavi and the MEK but felt that he couldn't leave. "I always had a problem with one person being in charge forever," Hosseinnejad told us. But relentless psychological pressure, he said, kept him in the group. As Rajavi's translator, Hosseinnejad had access to sensitive information about MEK operations. From the beginning of the MEK's time in Iraq, the group worked for and with Saddam's intelligence apparatus against Iran. "Even during the Saddam era, the MEK was spying for Saddam [on Iran]," Hosseinnejad said. "That was a big problem for me." But few inside the MEK knew. By all accounts, the MEK's efforts on behalf of Saddam and Iraq ended any chance of their winning broad support in Iran. Even in the early years, the defectors told us, the group was secretive and rigidly hierarchical. While MEK members were willing to pragmatically help the Iraqis fight to remove the ayatollahs, few in the organization understood how close the relationship between Saddam and Rajavi was.

"We joined the MEK for freedom and democracy and independence," Sa-deghi said. "But if we knew that Masoud Rajavi was spying on the Iranian government during the [Iran-Iraq] war, I would never accept that. If I knew that [we received] money from Saddam Hussein to give information, I would never accept that."

After the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, the Americans disarmed the MEK and the group became more focused on propaganda. Hosseinnejad was assigned to support the group in its "meddling in Iraqi affairs." By then, Zeynab had returned to Iraq and been trained as an MEK fighter. But the psychological stress and isolation in the camp began to wear on Hosseinnejad. Despite living in the same compound, he was allowed to see Zeynab just once a year. He hadn't seen Mona, his younger daughter, since the day he fled Iran.

Finally, in 2012, Hosseinnejad left the MEK. He told us that life in the group

had taken a toll on his health. He now lives in France. Zeynab left the MEK in 2018 and moved to Paris, and father and daughter have reconnected.

While reporting this story, we tried to talk to MEK leaders in the Paris suburb of Auvers-sur-Oise, where Hosseinnejad once worked. In January, a reporter and a cameraperson from The Intercept approached the group’s open-air compound on a residential street blocked off by gated checkpoints. We hoped to speak to an MEK representative about the defectors’ claims. Instead, guards from the MEK tried to physically detain us, even trying to grab the keys out of the ignition of our rental car.

Hosseinnejad acknowledged that his choice to join and stay in the MEK destroyed his life. At one point, he reached for his phone and scrolled through his Facebook page to find a video of Zeynab and Mona meeting for the first time in 37 years. In it, the sisters cry as they hold each others’ faces in their hands.

Given the slim likelihood that the MEK will ever come to power in Iran, the group has developed ways of targeting Iranian assets, including carrying out assassinations and bombings, with small teams of operatives. It also runs an extensive propaganda operation out of its base in Albania with the aim of steering the United States and Iran into a war that could lead to regime change. Former MEK members said that the group’s leaders are absolutely committed to starting such a war.

Many MEK members are now in their 50s and 60s. They have spent decades separated from their families under the control of the Rajavis and a few other top officials. Over the years, some younger members have been recruited or born into the group. After 2003, MEK members based at Camp Ashraf began looking for Iraqi teenagers who had been separated from their families to adopt and train. Some remain part of the group today.

Reza Sadeghi said he saw all this. As he began to notice the deceit, coercion, and corruption of the group, he went back over his memories of the life he had spent with the MEK.

“I remember we were attending a rally at Camp Ashraf where everyone from

the movement was supposed to be gathered together,” he said. “They had told us that we had hundreds of thousands of members and maybe millions more supporters in Iran. At the rally, there were only a few thousand people at most. I remember at the time a few of us were wondering, If this is really a movement like Rajavi says it is, where is everyone?”

In the post-Saddam era, the MEK resisted any visits from outsiders, but representatives from the Red Cross and the U.N. occasionally passed through the compound. Over time, its members became effectively stateless. Their leaders kept members’ Iranian passports — if they had passports at all — while warning anyone who might contemplate leaving that they had no visas to be in Iraq. In essence, the organization told potential defectors: You can be detained by an Iraqi government friendly to Iran or smuggle yourself back to the Islamic Republic, whose security services will certainly arrest you. Most stayed.

The day Sadeghi decided to leave in 2006 was the first step in trying to rediscover the life he’d given up the day he joined the MEK.

In the coming months, with the help of the U.S. military and the Red Cross, Sadeghi worked to get his passport back and return to Iran. Throughout it all, he said he had only one goal: to get back to his son Paul. Four months later, he boarded a flight to Tehran. He was detained by Iranian intelligence as soon as he landed.

“They held me for two weeks,” he said. “They asked me all kinds of questions, but I found that they already knew everything about me.”

After he was released, Sadeghi went to his family home in Isfahan, on the same street where he’d first learned about the MEK. His reunion with Paul was bittersweet.

“My son was supposed to be away from me for six months. It was 10 years,” he said. “The first question was, ‘Dad, where were you? I cannot believe that in the 20th century, you were in some place that you couldn’t be able to send me a postcard or call me for my birthday.’”

Sadeghi had no answer. He was ashamed. He could not articulate how being a member of the MEK had made him feel bereft of individual agency.



Instead, Sadeghi focused on returning Paul to Canada and reuniting him with his mother. Paul was 16 and would soon be compelled to serve in the Iranian military if he stayed. Sadeghi would get Paul out before he was conscripted, even if Sadeghi couldn't accompany his son to Canada. Paul is now back there and recently married. Sadeghi eventually smuggled himself to Belgium, where he still lives. He is trying to get to Canada so he can live near Paul. In the meantime, Sadeghi, like the other defectors, has many regrets and struggles in his new life. What's left of his family is scattered between Iran and the West.

“I would never [again] leave Iran, because all these years I left my family and my parents died,” he said. “I miss them very much.” Every night, he dreams some version of the nightmare he's lived. “Either I am in prison [in Iran], or I am in Camp Ashraf trying to escape. When I wake up, I'm sweating.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump Retweeted Praise from an Anti-Iran Hard-Liner Who Doesn't Exist

Murtaza Hussain

April 22, 2020

**“This is not and has never been a real person.”**

**O**n Wednesday morning, just a few hours after once again threatening to go to war with Iran, President Donald Trump shared a tweet from an account from someone by the name of Heshmat Alavi. Like many of the tweets the president circulates, Alavi was praising Trump, this time for his hard-line stance against the Islamic Republic.

The Intercept

Trump's amplification of the post was bad enough on its own: Alavi is a supporter of a militant Iranian cult called the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, known as the MEK, an organization that was designated for decades as a terrorist organization and is widely hated inside Iran. What makes it even worse, however, is that Heshmat Alavi does not exist.

As The Intercept reported last June, Alavi is a com-

posite identity run by a team of MEK members based mainly at the group's compound in Albania, according to defectors who were involved with managing the account and other sources.

“Heshmat Alavi is a persona run by a team of people from the political wing of the MEK,” a former MEK member named Hassan Heyrani, who helped manage the Alavi persona in Albania, told *The Intercept* in 2019. “They write whatever they are directed by their commanders and use this name to place articles in the press. This is not and has never been a real person.”

In a blog post published after *The Intercept* story, the Alavi account admitted for the first time that there was no real Heshmat Alavi, claiming instead to be using a pseudonym. “No, I will never reveal my real identity or photograph,” the account wrote. “No activist in his/her right mind would do so. That would place all of my family, friends and myself, both inside & outside of Iran, in complete danger.”

While the Alavi account has never declared itself a member of the MEK, the content produced under the name frequently toed a pro-MEK line. In the same post published after *The Intercept* story, however, the account explicitly stated its support of the group: “Why do I support the MEK? 1) They have an organization. 2) They have an agenda. 3) They are serious and dedicated.”

Under Alavi's name, a steady stream of blog posts and tweets have been produced over the years, always advocating harsh U.S. policies toward Iran and occasionally sliding in messages of support for the MEK and its leadership. And it's not just social media activity: Articles under Alavi's name were published in an array of mostly right-leaning news outlets in the U.S. At least one of these articles, published under Alavi's name in *Forbes*, was cited in the past by the Trump administration to the press to justify its aggressive Iran policy.

Following *The Intercept*'s 2019 expose, publications like *Forbes*, the *Daily Caller*, and *The Diplomat* that had published articles by Alavi either removed or updated them to reflect his nonexistence as a person.

While news outlets with editorial standards showed a willingness to remove articles by people demonstrated to not exist, social media outlets like Twitter

remain useful vectors for getting misinformation out to the public — as in Alavi’s case. Today, Alavi’s account still exists and is still producing superhuman amounts of content.

The account was briefly suspended following The Intercept’s report, but after a storm of pro-MEK advocates tweeting at Twitter’s support account and the company’s CEO, the account was reinstated a few days later. Twitter does not comment on its decisions regarding individual users, but a source familiar with the organization told the Saudi-government owned al-Arabiya news that, after temporarily being banned, the Alavi account was reactivated after being deemed a “credible use of pseudonymity.”

Social media companies have been under increasing criticism for their roles in helping amplify disinformation, including from sources connected to foreign governments and political movements. During the 2016 presidential election, troll farms connected to the Russian government were accused of helping sway American public sentiment over the vote. These activities are only believed to have increased since then.

The MEK, for its part, has a checkered history. A half-century-old revolutionary group, the organization has cycled through ideologies and tactics — from Marxism to democratic advocacy, from terrorist violence to protests and active lobbying in Washington — to rise to prominence. The turn toward seeking U.S. support is a decade-old tactic for a group that once allied with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and, in the 1980s and 1990s, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussain.

This year, an Intercept investigation documented allegations by former members of the group depicting a cult-like atmosphere inside the organization. The former members detailed practices of forced sterilization, torture, and other methods of controlling followers.

Nonetheless, the MEK now has powerful allies throughout Washington. Most notably, as of today, the group has found a friend in the White House — a president who has never been uncomfortable with blurring the lines between reality and falsehood.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Why Iran's Zarif accused Trump of promoting 'Saddam's terrorists'

Ali Harb

April 23, 2020

Chief Iranian diplomat denounced Trump for retweeting MEK-linked account Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Thursday accused US President Donald Trump of making threats that were cheered on by "Saddam's terrorists".



The chief Iranian diplomat was referring to the formerly US-designated terrorist group Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian opposition group that was allied with the late Iraqi autocrat Saddam Hussein.

It all started on Wednesday, when Trump said in a tweet that he ordered the US Navy to "shoot down and destroy" any Iranian gunboats that harass American ships.

The US president's post was celebrated by an MEK-linked account. Trump retweeted that response, tak-

ing a dig at the presumptive Democratic nominee, former vice president Joe Biden.

“The mullahs’ regime ruling Iran harasses UN [sic] Navy ships for propaganda purposes,” Heshmat Alavi, a popular MEK-linked Twitter account, responded to Trump’s post.

“Thank you, President Trump, for reminding this regime that the Obama years are gone.”

In turn, Trump shared Alavi’s post commenting: “Sleepy Joe thought this was OK. Not me!”

## **The case of Heshmat Alavi**

Alavi, who has penned opinion pieces in several major international publications, has been the subject of an ongoing controversy since the Intercept published a story last year alleging that he is not a real person, but a “propaganda operation” run by the MEK.

The report cited former members of the Iranian opposition group as saying that a group of MEK members in Albania manage Alavi’s persona.

Twitter briefly suspended the account after the publication of the Intercept story. Alavi had pushed back against the story, saying that it was a “highly biased article full of lies”.

He did acknowledge that he supports the MEK and does not write under his real name.

“No, I will never reveal my real identity or photograph. Not as long as the mullahs’ regime is in power,” Alavi wrote in a blogpost in June 2019.

“No activist in his/her right mind would do so. That would place all of my family, friends and myself, both inside & outside of Iran, in complete danger.”

Fake or not, Alavi’s voice was amplified by the president of the United States on Wednesday, who shared the controversial account’s content with his more than 78 million followers.

Critics were quick to call out Trump for promoting the MEK-affiliated account.

“Behold Donald Trump’s open coordination with an Iranian terrorist organization. The person he retweets does not exist, the account is run by six people in the MEK’s terrorist base in Albania,” tweeted Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, an anti-war think-tank in Washington.

“Yes, the president of the United state [sic] is retweeting a terrorist account.”

The MEK has a long history of violent attacks in Iran, and until 2012 it was considered a terrorist organisation by the United States.

**‘More of a cult’**

Ryan Costello, policy director at the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), a Washington-based group that opposes war with Iran, said the US administration’s ties to the MEK were “deeply concerning”.

“This is still a group that’s more of a cult than an advocacy organisation or a legitimate organisation... To think this is an organisation that is influencing the president and the administration should be cause for concern,” Costello told Middle East Eye.

The group has managed to garner strong relations with key members of both major parties in Congress. Trump’s personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and his former security adviser John Bolton are also ardent supporters and have spoken at the group’s events for hefty fees.

The White House did not return MEE’s request for comment.

Detractors also accuse the group of being a “totalitarian cult” centred around

its leader, Maryam Rajavi. Moreover, the MEK is tainted by its past ties to Iraq's Hussein, who is loathed as a brutal figure in both Iran and the United States.

But MEK supporters dismiss such accusations, insisting that it is the most organised opposition group calling for a democracy in Iran.

The MEK supporters are no fans of NIAC. They often falsely accuse the organisation of being a lobby for the Iranian government in Washington. On Wednesday, Alavi called out Parsi, who is the co-founder and former president of NIAC, for his past association with the group.

“He constantly parrots Zarif’s talking points,” Alavi said of Parsi.

To prove that point, Alavi shared a video showing Parsi mirroring Zarif’s criticism of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman by bringing up the Qatar blockade, kidnapping of former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri and the war in Yemen.

Such talking points against bin Salman’s policies have not been uniquely denounced by Zarif. Many of the kingdom’s critics, including members of the US Congress, have cited them in the past.

The Iranian opposition group enjoys close ties with Saudi Arabia. Saudi commentators and officials have praised the group and spoken at its events in the past.

The MEK and a US advocacy group aligned with it did not return MEE’s request for comment.

Costello said the MEK’s animosity with NIAC goes to the fact that the Iranian-American organisation opposed removing the group from the US terror list.

## **Tensions in the Gulf**

Trump’s threat to shoot Iranian boats on Wednesday renewed fears of a mil-



itary confrontation between the US and Iran at a time when both countries are combatting the spread of the coronavirus.

In 2018, the US administration nixed the multilateral Iran nuclear deal, which saw Tehran scale back its nuclear programme in exchange for lifting sanctions against its economy.

Over the past two years, Washington has been piling up sanctions against various Iranian individuals and industries as part of its “maximum pressure” campaign.

The two countries came to the verge of war earlier this year when a US drone strike killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.

Last June, Trump ordered, then cancelled, military strikes against Iran after Islamic Republic downed a US drone over the Gulf, claiming that it violated Iranian territorial waters.

NIAC’s Costello said in the past the US Navy has done an “exemplary job” of de-escalating tensions with IRGC boats that try to make life difficult for American ships in the Gulf.

He added that Trump’s threat risks inviting the hardliners in Iran to continue to “test the resolve” of the US, endangering everyone involved.

“I’m very concerned that what Trump has done here increases the risks that there’s another movement toward war or some sort of incident that results in ships being sunk in the Persian Gulf,” Costello said.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Iranian MEK cult in Albania poses public health risk

Massoud Khodabandeh

April 24, 2020

The MEK won't let its members leave their camp in Albania to seek medical care and the MEK won't let health workers inside.

With its small population of 2.8 million people, the Republic of Albania may appear to have a more manageable task (depending, of course, on the availability of health care resources) of testing and tracking contacts to halt the spread of the coronavirus, than countries with multiple millions of citizens living in large, sprawling cities and conurbations. But as Albania extends its lockdown to stop the spread of the coronavirus, the country faces a specific problem that some other countries also face — notably South Korea — the presence of a closed and secretive cult in the midst of the population.

Since its arrival in Albania in 2016, the Iranian Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), also known as the Rajavi

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cult after its leaders Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, the group has caused problems for the authorities and citizens of their host country. Exploiting the unresolved problems of crime, corruption, and a weak state dependent on American approval, the MEK has manipulated, bribed, and intimidated its way into the political, media, and criminal elements of Albania. According to well-known historian Olsi Jazexhi, the MEK has even perverted Albania's foreign policy making it a hub for anti-Iran activities and creating a security nightmare for Albania's police and security services.

Now the group poses another risk to the country — a public health risk that cannot be assessed or managed.

In 2017, both tacit support from the Trump administration, and overt support from neoconservative personalities, enabled MEK leaders to evade a planned de-radicalization program and instead build a closed secure camp in Manez — a remote town in the county of Durres — to house up to 2,000 cult members. Camp Ashraf 3 — as it is known — is guarded by private armed security personnel as well as MEK officials; only invited persons are allowed entry. Before this mass incarceration, dozens of members took advantage of the move to Albania to separate from the group. They reported terrible human rights abuses and conditions of modern slavery in the MEK. Journalists were refused entry to the camp to interview members locked up there.

For the majority of MEK members then, a lockdown may seem irrelevant since they were already in forced isolation from the outside world, but for Albania, the existence of the group in the country poses a real dilemma. Although most cult members will not emerge in public, the group relies on regular supplies from outside, particularly food and medicine, and those who emerge to procure these supplies are part of a greater chain of contacts that stretch all the way to Italy. Not only are MEK members who move around Albania unaccountable and untraced, the MEK is notorious for trafficking its own members past national borders.

The MEK's leading members made frequent trips to Italy in the early months of this year, exposing them to COVID-19. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that the MEK members are not all based in the closed camp.

Last year, MEK leader Maryam Rajavi was forced to leave her base in France and set up her new headquarters in Albania. Many leading members live in the capital Tirana and occupy a variety of premises — from business offices to an entire floor of the International Hotel in Skanderbeg Square in Tirana. Where are those people now? What contact did they have between Italy and the residents of Camp Ashraf 3? Durres county is the epicenter of the current coronavirus epidemic in Albania. Have MEK members inside been infected?

We don't know and we may never know. The Albanian authorities, including the security services, do not have access to the camp. According to investigative journalist Gjergji Thanasi, who lives in Durres county near the MEK camp, the Health Ministry “deals with Camp Ashraf 3 as if it does not exist. There is not a single line in the Durres Municipality health officials’ paperwork written about the camp and its residents. No Albanian health official has ever entered the camp.”

This means that no matter how hard epidemiologists may be working to trace the contacts of positive cases throughout the country, the MEK will not submit to allow Health Ministry staff inside the camp to test the individuals there. Thanasi goes on to explain, “the MEK have their own doctors, nurses, and dentists. When they have seriously ill patients, they hire private ambulances to transport them to a public hospital in Tirana.”

What is deeply concerning in this crisis, however, are the messages emerging from the camp and covertly passed to those who are concerned with their welfare. Over a thousand families of these disappeared MEK members, who have been trying for two decades to gain contact with their loved ones, say these messages are alarming. They say that the MEK leaders have blocked every form of access to medical care and hospital visits have been cancelled. They also report that some people have gone missing and nobody knows where they are. Everyone inside the camp is worried about the virus and that they are getting no help. They say there is a general sense of dread about the spread of COVID-19.

According to Thanasi, employees of Durres Municipality who engaged in disinfecting streets, squares, flea markets, and agriculture produce markets

had contacted the MEK camp via the local Manez council officials offering to disinfect the camp. “We were thanked profusely before our offer was very politely turned down. The commanders at the camp insisted they had already thoroughly disinfected the camp”, Thanasi was told. The Municipal workers however added there was “no evidence this had been done.”

Outside the camp, local residents have observed the MEK’s efforts to deal with the crisis. Speaking to Thanasi, one resident said, at the camp entrance, Albanian armed security guards and MEK members have been observed wearing masks and gloves, “but those on duty at a second gate do not always use protective gear.”

It appears that in public, MEK personnel will wear the masks and gloves, but a group of MEK members who work in a small facility outside the camp fence opposite the main entrance generally do not wear protection. It could be that a shortage of PPE means the MEK has to adopt a public relations exercise to be seen to observe distancing, isolation and protective measures. More cynically, the patchy distribution of protective gear could be linked to a hierarchy of privilege.

Without official oversight, it is not known how many MEK members will contract the virus and how many will die as a result. What is known is that since arriving in Albania, dozens of MEK members have died — reportedly from old age and illness — yet their reported cause of death cannot be relied upon.

MEK leaders mostly refuse post-mortem examinations. The MEK leaders are just as unlikely to report incidences of COVID-19 infections and deaths. MEK members are especially susceptible to the ravages of this virus. Their average age is around 65, with some members in their seventies and eighties. Many members have underlying health issues, and weakness brought on by the decades of overwork and harsh living conditions endured in Iraq. Rajavi herself is so frightened of succumbing to the virus that back in March she had one of her parliamentary lobbyists raise the possibility of travelling to the UK where even as a visitor she could access world class medical facilities. Clearly, even if the MEK does eventually allow sick members to be tested and gain access medical care, Albania is barely equipped to deal with a widespread

outbreak of the coronavirus among the indigenous population. If this troublesome group consumes badly needed resources, the finger of blame will surely go to Albania's corrupt politicians who allow this group to flout the country's laws and national interests and pursue its own agenda. That finger of blame must as well point directly at the Trump administration too.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is happy to use MEK propaganda churned out by the troll farm in Camp Ashraf 3 by enslaved members to attack Iran and justify the continuation of extreme sanctions. What responsibility will he take for the health and wellbeing of these people and the people of Albania.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## The United Sects of America: How cultists help to form of the US foreign policy

United World International

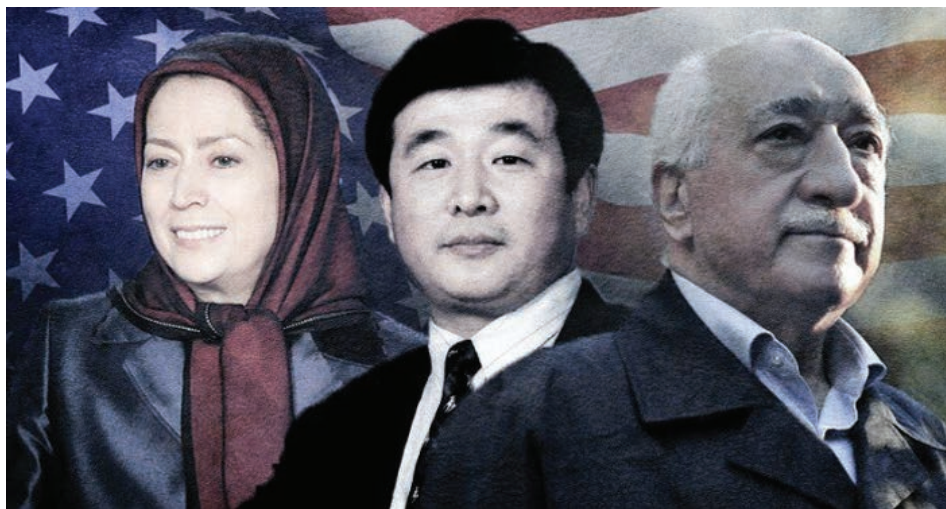
June 03, 2020

The United States of America was the first country in the world to be built by sects. Representatives of the European persecution of Protestants settled in the New World to build their “city upon a hill”, a millenary Protestant utopia. It was a claim to build a new society, whose principles would extend to other nations in the future.



As time passed, American Protestantism, from Pentecostals to Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, became important tools of American soft power.

Many remember the case of American Evangelical missionary Andrew Brunson, who was arrested in Turkey for espionage. During the investigation, facts emerged about his connection to the Mormon network of influence in Turkey, which was also connected to the American intelligence services.



However, it is not only American sects around the world that can be considered an instrument of influence by the US. The opposite trend has become more and more common: the United States has increasingly been working together with sects and cult groups aimed at overthrowing power in various countries. At the same time, at some point, it becomes difficult to see who is using whom.

## **FETÖ and the CIA**

In July 2016, a coup attempt took place in Turkey. The poutchists who organized the underground structure in the army intended to destroy the country's leadership, including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. However, because the patriots and Kemalists refused to support them, the mutineers' plot failed. Turkish authorities, after the investigation started, said that the terrorist movement of Fethullah Gülen FETÖ was behind the attempted coup. According to Turkish authorities, FETÖ was also behind the assassination of Russian Ambassador Andrei Karlov in 2016, and action aimed at preventing the normalization of Russian-Turkish relations. The attack was also linked to the terrorist "Kurdistan Workers Party".

Previously, the Gülen movement was behind the high-profile "Ergenekon" case in the early 2000s. As the New York Times wrote "In 2005, years before the trials, a man affiliated with the Gülen movement approached Eric S.



Edelman, then the American ambassador, at a party in Istanbul and handed him an envelope containing a handwritten document that supposedly laid out a plan for an imminent coup”.

Ergenekon’s goal was to weaken the Turkish army and eliminate its military patriotic orientation, not oriented towards the United States.

Gülen almost came close to intercepting power in Turkey in the early 2000s, acting as an ally of the ruling Justice and Development Party, but his influence waned after 2013. His organization acted as a network of devotees, despite the self-created image of pure religious and humanitarian organization. The 2016 coup showed that under the mask was a “parallel state”.

Despite attempts by Gülen’s supporters to portray his movement as social, educational and democratic, it is in reality based on a cult of devotion to an autocratic leader and resembles a secret network. The organization is recognized as terrorist by Turkey, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Pakistan, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

At the time of the coup attempt, FETÖ was being governed from the US. Gülen himself received a green card in 2002. Since then, he has lived in the US. Interestingly, the FBI and the State Department opposed Gülen’s attempts to settle in the United States. But the CIA vouched for him.

CIA National Intelligence Council former vice chairman Graham E. Fuller, former CIA official George Fidas and former US Ambassador to Turkey Morton Abramowitz wrote letters in support of Gülen’s green card. Turkey has now issued an arrest warrant against Fuller and is seeking the extradition of Gülen, accusing them of organizing a coup d’état.

Gülen’s extradition is a major issue that is poisoning US-Turkey relations. However, the Americans refuse to extradite the ringleader of the Islamist structure. Many advocates of Gülen, including Graham E. Fuller himself, vehemently oppose the very possibility of reconciliation between the US and current Turkish leadership.

The Gülen organization has 156 charter schools in the US. He has ties with the US establishment, including Bill and Hillary Clinton. Gülenists heavily invest in the US, predominantly Democrats.

## **Falun Gong: Anti-Chinese propaganda**

The Epoch Times Conservative media outlet has become very popular in the US over the past few years. For the average American, it looks like another pro-Trump media outlet: conservative, fervently supporting the current US president and all his policies, especially his criticism of China, its headquarters located in New York.

Recently, it actively spread the conspiracy theory that the new Coronavirus was created in biological laboratories in China. Last week, the media even began distributing a free issue of the Epoch Times newspaper, consisting of anti-Chinese propaganda of various kinds, in the United States and Canada. However, there are no white protestant or conservative representatives of the Jewish community behind this media source as is the case with sources such as Breitbart News. The Epoch Times is the media arm of Falun Gong sect – a guru-centred movement with political ambitions banned in China. Its media empire in 2003 became the largest Chinese news system outside mainland China.

After Donald Trump came to power in the US with his fervent anti-Chinese rhetoric, the sect's adherents began to aggressively influence the English-speaking audience. Today Epoch Media Group includes The Epoch Times newspaper and NTD TV channels (New Tang Dynasty Television). NBC News reported in 2019 that former Falun Gong cult members believe the end of the world is coming. They believe that “communists” will be sent to a kind of hell, and that President Trump is an ally in the fight against communism.

In 1999, the Chinese government banned Falun Gong. By then, the cult had thousands of adherents all over China, united in faith in the coming apocalypse, the coming of aliens, special spiritual techniques and unconditional submission to its leader, Li Hongzhi.

Falun Gong has all the signs of a totalitarian sectarian movement and is very similar to Aum Shinrikyo, another Asian (Japanese doomsday cult), whose followers carried out the deadly Tokyo subway sarin attack in 1995.

Former Chief Strategist of White House Steve Bannon teamed up with Falun Gong filming the propagandist movie “Claws of The Red Dragon”.

## **The MEK: the ‘good terrorists’**

A description of the US administration’s ties to sects would not have been complete without reference to The People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran, or the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK). Formally, it is a left-wing political movement. In fact, it has long since degenerated into the personality cult of the leader – Maryam Rajavi.

The MEK was created back in the 1960s. In the 1970s, its members organized several terrorist acts against Americans in Iran. They supported the Islamic Revolution in 1979, but then disagreed with the Islamic clergy, and began a campaign of terror.

The victims of MEK’s terror were Iran’s second president Mohammad-Ali Rajai and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar in 1980. In all, several dozen high-ranking Iranians were killed at the hands of MEK members.

During the Iran-Iraq war, MEK members betrayed Iran and took the side of Saddam Hussein. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, MEK members who were on the base in Iraq were “inherited” by the US.

From 1997 to 2012, the US listed MEK as a terrorist organization. Back in 2009 RAND Corporation in the report ordered by the US government said MEK has “many of the typical characteristics of a cult, such as authoritarian control, confiscation of assets, sexual control (including mandatory divorce and celibacy), emotional isolation, forced labor, sleep deprivation, physical abuse and limited exit options.

In 2012, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh revealed the scheme of how US Joint Special Operations Command trained MEK militants in 2005-2009. At that time the structure was considered a terrorist organization in the US.

In 2016, the US paid for the relocation of 3,000 MEK members from Iraq to Albania, a Balkan country absolutely loyal to Washington.

At various times, former National Security Adviser to President Trump John Bolton and Trump's close friend and personal attorney Rudy Giuliani addressed MEK leadership.

The Iranian "mujahideen" are waging an active information war against Iran and possibly used for intelligence by the United States. However, MEK propaganda is aimed not only at Iran, but also at the United States. This structure lobbies the most harsh policies towards Iran.

This is how "Heshmat Alavi" appeared, a group of MEK activists that wrote texts under a pseudonym for Forbes, The Diplomat, The Hill, The Daily Caller, The Federalist and the English edition of Al Arabiya's website. One of the articles written by this team of authors was used by the White House to justify the imposition of new anti-Iranian sanctions.

There was also information that MEK was giving money to Rudy Giuliani. MEK and its subsidiary, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, have openly advocated a change of power in Iran, promising to establish democracy and the rule of law. At the same time, inside MEK itself, there is truly totalitarian order, and the members of the sect are under the constant control of the leadership, their whole life is regulated.

## **The tail wags the dog**

FETÖ, Falun Gong and MEK are working with the US to fight against legitimate governments around the world. At the same time, the US is not ashamed to use organizations whose structure does not comply with any principles of democracy or human dignity, hypocritically claiming to fight for human rights.

The fact that the US has found best friends in the three most important areas in the face of totalitarian sects says a lot about the US leadership itself. It understands that only sectarians with brainwashed minds can confront sovereign Turkey or Iran and China. On the other hand, sectarians are usually will-

ing to do anything, and asking Americans for their help is a dangerous sign. But cooperation with sects is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they are an instrument of American imperialism. On the other hand, lobbying, bribery of officials, frantic activity in the media, promotion of their “experts” shape American policy in line with these cults’ strategies.

How will US policy toward Iran be built if the voices of MEK’s allies are loudest? Will Washington be able to come to a truce with Beijing if Falun Gong forms a negative image of China among Trump supporters? If Fethullah Gülen’s friends and devoted activists of his sect constantly appear in the American media and bombard them with the ideas of their CIA friends, what will be the American policy towards Turkey?

The answers to these questions are obvious. By working with cults, Washington may soon become a dog being wagged by its own tail.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Patrick Kennedy's ties to Iranian exile group becomes campaign issue in South Jersey

Matt Friedman

June 10, 2020

**F**ormer U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, the husband of New Jersey congressional candidate Amy Kennedy, was paid nearly \$60,000 to deliver a speech last year in Albania to a controversial group that opposes the current regime in Iran but was considered a terrorist organization by the United States until 2012.

POLITICO

Amy Kennedy's main opponent in the 2nd Congressional District's Democratic primary, Brigid Harrison, has made Patrick Kennedy's finances a campaign issue, and is calling the fee he earned from the opposition group People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (MEK) for the speech he delivered in February 2019 "dirty money."

"Let's be clear: MEK engaged in a well-documented effort to buy off American politicians, and in accepting this fee, the Kennedys demonstrated that

they are ‘for sale,’” Harrison said in a statement. “For the United States to counter terrorism around the globe, it must oppose terrorism in all its forms. Accepting inflated ‘speaking fees’ for advocacy by an organization that is often described as a cult, that today still requires its members to divorce and remain celibate is antithetical to American and Democratic values.”

According to a candidate financial disclosure Amy Kennedy recently filed with the clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, MEK paid Patrick Kennedy — the son of the late Sen. Ted Kennedy who has helped bankroll efforts to elect his wife to Congress — \$59,996 sometime between Jan. 1, 2019 and April 1, 2020.

It’s not the first time Patrick Kennedy, a former Rhode Island congressman who now lives with his wife in South Jersey, has been paid to speak in support of MEK, and he’s far from the only U.S. or New Jersey politician to do so. MEK opposes the current Iranian regime and for years was aligned with the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Prominent politicians from both major U.S. political parties have spoken in support of the group, often because of its opposition to the Iranian regime.

After an intense lobbying campaign that won the support of many U.S. politicians, MEK was removed from the government’s terrorism list in 2012. MEK has been exiled from Iran for decades.

In a December 2016 opinion piece for POLITICO, former State Department Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Daniel Benjamin — responding to former New Jersey Sen. Robert Torricelli’s defense of the MEK — wrote that the U.S. government “has blamed the MEK for killing three U.S. Army colonels and three U.S. contractors, bombing the facilities of numerous U.S. companies and killing innocent Iranians.”

In 2011, Patrick Kennedy emceed a Capitol Hill rally urging the State Department to remove the group from its list of foreign terrorist organizations, according to the magazine Foreign Policy. He acknowledged being paid \$25,000 for that speech.

Patrick Kennedy has spoken in favor of the group since then, including at

July 2019 rally in Berlin. Sean Richardson, his chief of staff, said in an interview Wednesday the payment listed on Amy Kennedy's financial disclosure was for a speech Patrick Kennedy gave in Albania, where MEK is headquartered. He said he believes the nearly \$60,000 figure included travel expenses. The speech in Albania was one of 14 for which Patrick Kennedy reported receiving compensation since 2019. He also earned \$25,000 for a speech he delivered to another anti-Iranian regime group, the California Society for Democracy in Iran. His speaking fees ranged from \$5,000 to the nearly \$60,000 from MEK. Most of the speeches were delivered to health care companies. Amy Kennedy and Harrison are running in the 2nd District Democratic primary for the party's nomination to take on Democrat-turned-Republican U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew.

In a statement, Yoli Navas, a spokesperson for Amy Kennedy, emphasized that Sen. Bob Menendez(D-N.J.), who has endorsed Harrison, supports MEK.

"In addition to Sen. Menendez and [Rep.] Eliot Engle (D-N.Y.), the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the group is also supported by an endless string of notable government and military leaders including two former chairs of the Democratic National Committee, Howard Dean and Ed Rendell, John McCain, Nancy Pelosi and many others. Maybe Brigid should have googled 'Bob Menendez' instead of 'typical losing campaign tactic,'" Navas said. "Brigid's blatant and insulting attempts to mislead voters won't fool anyone. The people of South Jersey deserve a leader who wants to serve the community not themselves. "

Richardson, Patrick Kennedy's chief of staff, said there's nothing wrong with supporting an organization that backs democracy in Iran.

"Since about 2011, he's been an active supporter of the organization and has spoken to them from time to time, like many senior congressional Democrats as well as Republicans," Richardson said. "His support for the organization is rooted in his support for regime change in Iran. It's pretty simple."

"Does anyone other than Brigid Harrison think John McCain, Ted Kennedy, Louis Freeh, Tom Ridge, Hillary Clinton would do something that was bad



for our foreign policy?” Richardson said. “The claim’s absurd.” Richardson also cited Menendez’s support of the MEK.

Harrison’s campaign has based many of its attacks on Amy Kennedy on her husband’s record and finances, including highlighting a story from New Jersey Globe about how he was the sole donor of \$500,000 to a previously-moribund super PAC that ran negative online ads against Harrison. The Harrison campaign has also gone after Patrick Kennedy for recently joining the board of Wellpath, a controversial company that runs health care services in some for-profit prisons and whose executives donated \$10,000 to Amy Kennedy’s campaign. Of the \$816,000 Amy Kennedy had raised as of April 1, \$250,000 came from a personal loan.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## US Officials Speak at Iran Regime Change Conference

Dave DeCamp

July 19, 2020

Conference hosted by controversial Iranian opposition group MEK

An exiled Iranian opposition group held its annual Free Iran conference online on Friday featuring speeches from an array of former US politicians and military officials. The conference was held by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a coalition led by the People's Mujahedin of Iran, or MEK (Mujahedin-e Khalq), a controversial group widely considered to be a cult, and up until 2012, designated as a terrorist organization by the US government.

The MEK is considered the top Iranian opposition group in Washington, and if Iran hawks had their way, the MEK would replace the current Islamic regime in Tehran. Trump administration officials like Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have appeared at events with MEK members. After the assassination

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of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in January, it was reported that President Trump sought advice on Iran from MEK-linked allies, like his personal attorney and former mayor of New York City Rudy Giuliani.

A frequent guest of the MEK, Giuliani spoke at Friday's conference, calling for regime change and railing against the mullahs. "To me, the mullahs are like the people who ran the mafia, the people I prosecuted who ran the mafia and extorted their people," Giuliani said. The former mayor also praised Maryam Rajavi, the MEK's leader. "Regime change in Iran is within reach. That's the goal of NCRI and Maryam Rajavi."

Senator Martha McSally (R-AZ) and Rep. Lance Gooden (R-TX) also spoke at the conference, the only sitting members of Congress to attend. "Thank you to Madame Rajavi on everything she's done. I want to encourage young people to continue your fight, your resistance ... the people of the United States are with you," Gooden said.

Other speakers from the US included former Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, former New Jersey Senator Robert Toricelli, and others. The MEK pays well for these short speeches. President Trump's Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao collected \$50,000 from the MEK for a five-minute speech in 2015. Although he was missing from this conference, former National Security Advisor John Bolton is a MEK favorite and has delivered many speeches to the group. Records show the MEK has paid Bolton at least \$180,000 for speeches over the years.

From the MEK's compound in Albania, in front of hundreds of screens, Rajavi addressed the conference. "Our first commitment is that we, the Iranian people and the Resistance, will overthrow the clerical regime and will reclaim Iran," Rajavi said. "The final word is that the mullahs have no solutions and their regime is doomed to fall in its entirety."

The MEK is now based out of Albania, but for many years they operated in Iraq after the group was kicked out of Iran in the 1980s. The MEK started as a leftist organization in the 1960s and carried out attacks on the US-backed Shah's police force throughout the 1970s. The group played a role in the 1979

overthrow of the Shah but ultimately opposed the new Islamic government and carried out major attacks against the mullahs.

The MEK was welcomed into Iraq by Saddam Hussein, who gave them refuge at a military base, Camp Ashraf. From their base in Iraq, the MEK carried out terrorist attacks inside Iran and took Hussein's side in the brutal eight-year war between Iran and Iraq war. For these reasons, it is believed the MEK has little or no support inside Iran today. The MEK is also suspected of being involved in assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists that took place in 2012.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the US government commissioned a report on the MEK from inside their former headquarters at camp Ashraf. The report concluded that the MEK has “many of the typical characteristics of a cult, such as authoritarian control, confiscation of assets, sexual control (including mandatory divorce and celibacy), emotional isolation, forced labor, sleep deprivation, physical abuse and limited exit options.”

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## People's Mujahedin of Iran forces

Weapons and Warfare

August 1, 2020

The People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran, also known as the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization, started life as a left-wing revolutionary group, largely composed of third-level university students. Though its ideology has evolved since its foundations in the 1960s, the MKO espouses an egalitarian, classless society based on Islamic principles; it has been described by many government agencies, including the UN Human Rights Commission, as a cult.

**Weapons and  
Warfare**

The MKO contributed extensively to the revolution against the Shah, but when it became clear that the new Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini would not share power with any other revolutionary groups, the MKO turned to mass protests, leading to arrests and executions of MKO members and their supporters. They then quickly turned to assassinations and bombings of regime employees and



Revolutionary Guards. In response, the Revolutionary Guards raided MKO headquarters in a violent crackdown, killing many, including the MKO leader Massoud Rajavi's first wife. Many of the MKO then fled into exile, with the leadership setting up headquarters in France.


With Iraqi forces having been pushed out of Iranian territory by 1982, they contended that the Iran-Iraq War should be ended with a negotiated settlement. To this end, Rajavi entered into an open alliance with the Ba'ath, and resumed terrorist attacks inside Iran. Thus, the MKO began to be seen as traitors by the vast majority of Iranians, which hamstrung their goal of regime change in Tehran. After being deported from France as part of a deal to free French hostages in Lebanon, the MKO then re-established itself in Iraq at the invitation of Saddam himself.

From 1986 onwards, the MKO and its armed wing, the National Liberation Army of Iran, were held in considerable trust and esteem by the Ba'ath. The Iraqis supplied the NLA vast numbers of main battle tanks, trucks, APCs, armoured cars, and engineer equipment. The NLA forces now fought side by side with Iraqi forces, attacking their fellow Iranians for the last two years of the war. As the war came to a close, the MKO participated in Operation Forty

Stars, the June 18, 1988 attack on the Iranian city of Mehran. This operation involved massive air strikes and nerve gas attacks, leading to the capture of much Iranian military equipment and 3,500 Iranian casualties. Though the war was nearly over, the NLA planned one last offensive that would become a watershed event in MKO history.

On July 26, 1988, six days after the ceasefire ending the Iran-Iraq War, the NLA poured over the border into Iran in Operation Eternal Light. After destroying the Iranian town of Eslamabad-e Gharb, a force of 7,000 NLA troops (which included many women soldiers), in convoys of IFA W50 trucks and EE-9 Cascavel armoured cars, pushed into Iranian territory assuming they would be met with cheering crowds. Instead, they were decimated by the regime's helicopter gunships and strike aircraft. By July 29, the NLA survivors withdrew from Iran, leaving behind an estimated 1,400 to 4,500 casualties. Following the operation, the regime executed thousands of long-term MKO prisoners, along with many other political prisoners. The NLA base at Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad, would become a target for Iranian airstrikes and ballistic missile attacks.

After Saddam's massive defeat in Kuwait, NLA forces assisted Republican Guard units in quelling the resulting Shi'a and Kurdish uprisings in Iraq. Indeed, Maryam Rajavi, a co-leader of the MKO, exhorted her forces to "take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Revolutionary Guards." With the 2003 invasion of Iraq and a new Shia government in Baghdad with close ties to Iran, the MKO's days in Iraq drew to an end. The MKO handed over 2,000 pieces of equipment to the US military, and much of it was taken to the Al Taji scrapyard as seen in the next chapter. Many of the surviving 3,800 members of the MKO were airlifted from Iraq to Albania, where they currently wait out events to see if they may play a new role in the turbulent geopolitics of the Middle East.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Another Opinion Columnist Pushing War With Iran Who Doesn't Actually Exist

Paul Brian and Arthur Bloom

September 2, 2020

There is at least one more foreign policy opinion writer from the Mujahideen-eKhalq (MEK) whose existence is dubious, based on a study by a social media analyst and statements from a defector from the group. Amir Basiri, who contributed to *Forbes* 9 times, the *Washington Examiner* 52 times, *OpenDemocracy*, *Algemeiner*, and *The Hill* once also appears to be a fabrication.

The American  
Conservative

The MEK is an Iranian exile group for which John Bolton, Rudy Giuliani, and other foreign policy luminaries have given paid speeches. Dems like Joe Lieberman and Howard Dean have also spoken on their behalf. But the group has American blood on its hands, has been accused of practicing forced sterilization, and their belief system has been described as a mixture of Marxism and Islamism. Its supporters claim they, and their front group the National Council of Resistance of Iran, are a sort of





government-in-exile, despite nearly nonexistent support for the group within Iran. They also have waged a substantial disinformation campaign in the Western press, in particular targeting conservative media.

“Amir Basiri and Heshmat Alavi are two fake accounts,” Hassan Heyrani, an MEK defector told TAC. “At Camp Liberty, near the BIAP airport in

Iraq, I was in the political unit of the organization with some of the persons who grew up in America and Canada. We worked as a team to write the articles analyzing the Iranian regime. The MEK put them in *The Washington Post* and all the newspapers in Western countries.”

Basiri’s op-eds focus on the need for regime change in Iran which he claimed is “within reach.” The thrust of Basiri’s writing – last placed at the *Examiner* in October of 2018 – is to encourage American readers to take an interest and sympathize with the plight of Iranian protesters and dissidents. Basiri consistently argued against the Iran nuclear deal, downplayed terrorism against Iran, called for tougher sanctions as a method of regime change and highlighted the necessity of Trump working with the Iranian opposition.

“We are currently looking into the matter, so I won’t comment on this specific byline,” Philip Klein, Executive Editor and Commentary Editor of the *Washington Examiner* told TAC. “But I will say that we have recently instituted more rigorous vetting of outside contributors, including but not limited to asking for photo identification if necessary. We are especially on guard when it comes to unsolicited foreign policy commentary.”

A request for comment from OpenDemocracy, a site greatly concerned about

disinformation campaigns, has not been returned as of press time. Basiri's articles on Forbes are no longer online. (Update: Julian Richards, managing editor of OpenDemocracy, writes, "This article was submitted to us through our normal process and our editor corresponded with Amir Basiri about the text. In light of the allegations you have made, we have removed the article text from our site for the time being and I have written to the email address that Amir Basiri used to ask for confirmation of his identity.")

The list of MEK disinformation tactics also includes fake online since-deleted sites such as PersiaNow and ArabEye and questionable sites such as Iran Focus whose domain was formerly registered under the name of an NCRI spokesperson and is now anonymously held.

MEK's recent influence campaign on Facebook spearheaded by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) was recently reported on last year by Lachlan Markey at the Daily Beast. Markey explained how NCRI lobbyist Soheila Aligholi Mayelzadeh has helped place paid ads on Facebook reaching between 500,000 to 1.4 million users as part of the campaign to sway US public opinion in favor of MEK and intervention in Iran.

The list of outright fakes recently in the realm of foreign policy analysis is significant: there is the apparent Emirati fabrication Raphael Badani to MEK sock puppet Alavi, first revealed by The Intercept, to deepfake non-existent anti-Palestinian activist Oliver Taylor, whose work was placed at highly-respected publications in the United States and Israel.

As Adam Rawnsley wrote for the Daily Beast, "Badani is part of a network of at least 19 fake personas that has spent the past year placing more than 90 opinion pieces in 46 different publications. The articles heaped praise on the United Arab Emirates and advocated for a tougher approach to Qatar, Turkey, Iran and its proxy groups in Iraq and Lebanon."

Geoff Golberg is the founder of Social Forensics, which tracks and monitors online social media networks and disinformation campaigns. Golberg's run-in and exposure of various pro-MEK personas, sock puppets and boosters came just prior to his Twitter suspension in July of 2019, the official reason for which was calling an account he believed to be fake and interfering in

Canada's elections a "moron."

"Rather than suspending accounts that blatantly violate Twitter Rules, Dorsey instead opted to silence my voice. Specific to Iranian-focused platform manipulation, along with The Intercept, I helped out 'Heshmat Alavi' as a sock-puppet propaganda operation run by the MEK. Remarkably, despite initially suspending the fake account, 'Heshmat Alavi' has been reinstated by Twitter and continues to disseminate propaganda," Golberg said, adding that Basiri – whose account is currently suspended by Twitter – is another fake persona which has been on his radar for some time. He produced the following graphic demonstrating the interconnectedness of the two accounts:

Golberg said he knows little of geopolitics or political aspects and was led to investigate sock puppet accounts fomenting war with Iran because he noticed many oddities about their networks, followers and tweeting patterns. His further research and analysis led him down a rabbit hole of connections and resulted in death threats, mass reporting of his account and accusations that he sympathized with the Ayatollah's regime.

Rather than the hype over Russian bots, the real danger on platforms like Twitter is fake accounts and troll farm accounts which amplify hashtags, spread lies and bolster the desired propaganda of their paymaster, Golberg says.

"Despite media coverage that tends to focus on 'bots,' which simply means fully-automated accounts, Twitter's much larger problem is actually fake accounts. There are more than 100K fake accounts that exist solely to create the illusion of widespread sentiment that the US should go to war with Iran," Golberg told TAC, adding, "Take 'Sheldon,' @patrick\_jane77, for example, an account that reflects having nearly 120K Followers. Very few of the account's Followers are authentic accounts, yet given Twitter refuses to enforce their own rules, it is easy to mistake "Sheldon" for being a popular account. Twitter's entire platform is propped up by misleading or inflated Followers/Following counts. Twitter's CEO, Jack Dorsey, has built a house of cards and continues to commit ad fraud at a massive scale."

Golberg sued Twitter earlier this year, alleging that the platform engaged in

“deceptive practices” and hasn’t stood by its own terms of service.

Accusations from MEK supporter Hanif Jazayeri that The American Conservative itself and senior editor Daniel Larison act as a mouthpiece for the mullahs are part of a broader campaign aimed at maligning the reputation and integrity of anyone who opposes regime change in Iran. Tweets calling for investigations of TAC also came from noted MEK sock puppet Alavi, MEK spokesman Shahin Gobadi and NCRI’s Ali Safavi.

A barrage of accounts retweeted Jazayeri’s accusations, many with only a few followers and which solely tweet boosting the MEK and supporting regime change in Iran.

It’s worth noting that Heshmat Alavi was following Amir Basiri prior to his suspension, as were others closely connected to the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies such as Jerusalem Post Iran hawk Seth Frantzman, @sfrantzman, Jazayeri and a number of other pro-MEK shills. It is a hall of mirrors amplifying the case for war with Iran, and the ad money from NCRI and pro-MEK accounts seems to have dampened Twitter’s desire to crack down. A request for comment from Twitter was not returned as of press time.

As a matter of journalistic ethics any organization engaging in systematic dishonesty like this has provided a very good reason to blacklist them. Failing to do so will encourage other foreign interests to do the same in the future, so conservative publishers should decline all content and interviews from the MEK in the future. This is not a matter of foreign policy differences: if you wish to see the U.S. pursue regime change in Iran, the MEK does not help make that case. Any publishers or think tanks who are aware of this dishonesty and still treat them like a legitimate opposition group should be considered part of a campaign not wholly different from the last time we were lied into a Mideast war.

Arthur Bloom is the managing editor of TAC.

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■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Analysis of the psychological condition of the Mojahedin Khalq (MKO, MEK, PMOI, NCRI), based on the theory of Erich Fromm

Alireza Niknam

September 17, 2020

Different concepts and theories from a social and psychological perspective can explain the situation of the Mojahedin Khalq, but it seems that to understand the social world of this group, in the first place, it is necessary to focus on recognition of two complementary elements, namely “the leadership” and “members” of this group.

In fact, these two are inseparable elements, which feed on each other, are the key to answering the question of how in a modern era, according to Marshall Berman, everything that is hard and solid can smoke and blow into the air and a new type of slavery take shape in Europe? In this part, I will first explain the concepts related to the discussion, because to analyze any action of this group, we must first know who we are facing.

There is a common characteristic between the fol-



lowers and the leader in this group, and this characteristic is the existence of an “authoritarian personality” in both of them (although there is a difference between the authoritarian personality of the leader and the authoritarian personality of the follower, which I will discuss later).

First, what is the characteristic of an authoritarian personality? And what are the common points of these two (leader and follower of Mojahedin Khalq)? This type of personality, is an immature person whose important characteristic feature is the inability to rely on himself, dependent and inability to tolerate freedom. Humans learn two important skills during maturity, lovemaking and wisdom, which the authoritarian personality lacks. In fact, love means feeling that a person has with the world while maintaining the independence and integrity of one’s identity, or in other words, love means knowing the world as an emotional and passionate experience.

Wisdom is also understanding the world and trying to reach the essence and principle of phenomena. An authoritarian character has neither love nor wisdom, so he remains immature and extremely lonely. Note that the meaning of loneliness in this situation explains the subsequent actions of the authoritarian personality.

This situation leads him to desperately need a bond that does not require love and wisdom. He destroys his identity, he must melt into another person;

because he cannot stand loneliness. These are the features that are common between Massoud Rajavi and his followers. Both incapable of making love and reasoning, they melt into the other half and feel lonely without each other to the point of madness. This situation reflects the hysterical states of the members of this group in many cases, such as the strange behavior like self-immolation of these people or suicide attempts. So that even people who are separated from this group are confused for a long time and cannot make decisions.

Now the question may arise for the reader that the type of action of the leader is not different from the followers? The answer is yes, and this is exactly where we divide the authoritarian personality into two categories: “active authoritarian personality” such as Massoud Rajavi and “passive authoritarian personality” such as members of the group.

We will first understand the situation of the members of this group, who were categorized as “passive authoritarian personalities”. These people are self-harm, under control and eager to be a small part of a “big” person, a “big” organization, or a “big” idea, Whether this is greatness be real or it only be in the minds and illusions of these people, what matters is that this person feels strong and great by feeling that he is part of this greatness, the paradox is that such a person by shrinking and humiliating himself, can actually become part of this delusional greatness. This is the point that the leadership of the organization (Massoud Rajavi) repeatedly mentions in different meetings that the members of the group must be connected to a point outside of themselves in order to release their energies and reach unity, and only this is the path to reach the peak of human perfection.

This part may sound strange to a reader unfamiliar with the ideology of the MKO, but one of the techniques used in this group, called self-criticism or self-criticism sessions, has the same function. At first, the forces of this group “threatening and insulting each other”, humiliating themselves and attributed the most vile insults and misdeeds to themselves, then when all the identity of the members were destroyed, according to the group’s leadership, that member has been cleansed and purified, because he has put all his sins on the shoulders of the leader!!! And now that he is clean, or rather, he has no identity left, he can melt into leadership.

The next step is that such a person desperately wants orders and accepts orders wholeheartedly, or as this group calls this mental state, an organized member! But the fact is that such a person is so eager to accept orders because he does not have to decide and be responsible, avoiding his freedom as a human being, he devotedly seeks to give meaning to his destroyed existence. This humiliated character, who is terrified and feels helpless and lonely, seeks a leader to command him and control this feeling in him.

The passive authoritarian character, who is “under control” and dominated by the leader, fears, and this fear causes him to take refuge to his self-made idol and calm down. A crowd of authoritarian figures gathered around an idol forms a “mass” that explains another scenario in this group. When they are inside a population, they acquire new characteristics that are different from the characteristics of each individual that makes up that population. In fact, their self-conscious personality disappears and they seem to find a common spirit that guides the members’ feelings, thoughts and behaviors. This is the point at which the intellectual abilities and personality of individuals fade into the general spirit of the masses, and being in the crowd gives them a sense of invincible power. This situation can explain the actions of the members of the Mojahedin Khalq Group in situations where they are especially asked to sing slogans and songs with great enthusiasm in the meetings, and of course there are leaders to watch out for people who does not participate in this mass show with passion and enthusiastic. Those who are familiar with the ideology of this group know that “gathering” is one of the situations for which the members of the organization have been harmed many times for that, and Rajavi and his gang wouldn’t tolerate any resistance in this mass to the leadership of the group. Because distancing oneself from the mass that is in the unconscious state and is only willing to do anything to kill itself in terms of indoctrination and contagion of other members, if it approaches the conscious state which is the domination of rationality, it realizes that all the members who shout the leader’s name with all their might are automatic beings who have lost their willpower. This is exactly the situation that many members of the Mojahedin Khalq Group have written in their biographies that they did not know what they were doing in that situation! It was like that they are not more themselves who were shouting, or even when they were about to commit suicide, it was as if someone else was leading them.



Now it is time to understand the status of leadership or the “active authoritarian personality.” This character, who is harming others, is very frightened and lonely, even though he looks like a confident and powerful person in the eyes of his followers; because he only feels empowered when he swallows others. He is heavily dependent on his followers, although his helplessness is manifested when he has lost power or is unable to swallow others. It is good to pay attention to the very brutal reactions that Rajavi and his associates have to members who make the slightest criticism of the group or the leadership. References to documents and individuals who have previously had experience in this group show that the slightest mercy did not exist even to those very close to Rajavi, and the slightest disagreement and critics dealt with severely punishment. This situation clearly shows how incompetent and lonely the leadership of this group is; because any kind of opposition frightens him greatly. He feels empowered and overcomes his deep loneliness by humiliating and enslaving the members of the group and seeing that the members of the group endure all the suffering of slavery without any resistance or disobedience.

With the explanation of these items, it is now clear why these two are the main parts of the Mojahedin Khalq Group and do not last without each other!

To understand this phenomenon more deeply, I ask a question that may have occupied the minds of many readers: If we accept these explanations, then what is the role of many leaders who have liberated and saved their society? What is the role of many patriots and martyrs who have sacrificed their whole existence for their nation? How can a sick authoritarian figure be distinguished from a true leader? What is the difference between real martyrs and national heroes and brainwashed masses? To answer this question, I return to the beginning of the discussion, where we defined the main characteristic of an authoritarian personality as his inability to make love and reason; what do we see in examining the real leader and the true patriot and the relationship between the leader and followers? The element of wisdom and the element of love. First, in this situation, followers are allowed to think, ponder, choose, critique, and decide freely; so they have reasoned, and if the forces stay with their leader, they will achieve their goals with love.

Compare this situation with the type of relationship Massoud Rajavi has with his followers; Those who for any other reason cannot or do not want to continue with this group, would be tortured, or killed, or if they can survive, they should suffer slanders, lies and conspiracies (as an example MKO attacks on critical journalists). To understand the difference between a true leader, a true patriot, and a thief of emotions, the only indicator that provides love is the one that brings freedom and independence to its people, not a sick man that Fearing for his loneliness, denies his freedom and his followers.

Finally, I call on all liberal and sociological institutions in Europe and the United States that are pursuing humanitarian goals to take a closer look at the situation of these individuals by being at the camp of Mojahedin Khalq members in Albania and consider the dimensions of this issue by further scientifically investigations

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Judge Barrett represented Iranian exile group in fight to end terrorist designation

Paul Sonne, Yeganeh Torbati

September 30, 2020

**A**my Coney Barrett, President Trump's nominee to join the Supreme Court, once represented an affiliate of an Iranian exile group as it challenged its State Department designation as a foreign terrorist organization.

Barrett disclosed her legal work for the group, which she undertook while employed at a law firm in Washington, in the Senate questionnaire she submitted during her 2017 confirmation process to join the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit. The work did not come up in her confirmation hearing. Barrett wrote that she was one of five lawyers on a team that represented the National Council of Resistance of Iran and its U.S. representative office from 2000 to 2001 in their petition to review the State Department's foreign-terrorist-organization designation.

The Washington  
Post



The NCRI is affiliated with the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), a onetime militant group comprising Iranian exiles who oppose Iran’s clerical regime. The Obama administration removed the group from the U.S. government’s list of terrorist organizations in 2012. The MEK has faced accusations of cultlike practices, which the organization has disputed as smears.

Barrett wrote that she “assisted with legal research and briefing” for the Iranian exile group’s case while she worked for Miller, Cassidy, Larroca & Lewin LLP, a law firm that merged with Baker Botts LLP in 2001 during her employment there. In her questionnaire, Barrett said the counsel of record on the case was Martin D. Minsker, signaling that she was a junior lawyer on the case.

Minsker didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment. A spokesman for Baker Botts declined to comment.

The MEK formed as a militant group in opposition to Iran’s monarchy but was forced into exile after the 1979 revolution that toppled the shah. The State Department designated the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997, citing its involvement in the killing of Americans in Iran during the

1970s. The department, which also cited a 1992 incident in which five men with knives invaded the Iranian mission to the United Nations in New York, said the NCRI “functioned as part of the MEK” and “supported the MEK’s acts of terrorism.”

Shahin Gobadi, a spokesman for the MEK, said the State Department designated the group as a foreign terrorist organization unfairly in 1997 for political reasons, to curry favor with Iran.

“What’s important is the designation, to begin with, wasn’t established and was politically motivated,” Gobadi said, citing statements by Clinton administration officials involved in the decision.

Barrett played a small role in the MEK’s years-long effort to remove its terrorist designation in the United States.

In the case she worked on before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, the NCRI argued that because it maintained a U.S. affiliate office and bank account, and was seen as an alias of the MEK by the U.S. government, the exile group should have been afforded due process rights under the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution when the State Department deemed the organization a terrorist group.

The court agreed, ordering the State Department to provide due process by disclosing certain information it used to make the determination and affording the designee a right of rebuttal. The U.S. government maintained the terrorist-group designation until 2012, when a D.C. Circuit judge set a deadline for the State Department to grant or deny the group’s petition.

Days before the deadline, the department revoked the designation, citing the group’s public renunciation of violence and the absence of confirmed acts of terrorism for more than a decade. The decision came as the MEK agreed to leave a base in Iraq that Saddam Hussein had allowed its members to occupy for years. The U.S. military had been providing protection for the group at that base.

“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 upon delisting the group. “The Department also has serious concerns about the MEK as an organization, particularly with regard to allegations of abuse committed against its own members.”

Gobadi, the MEK spokesman, said the terrorist-group designation was “thrown out the window by the courts.” He called the department’s citation of abuse allegations “preposterous remarks” that “were made as a face-saving measure on the day.”

White House spokesman Judd Deere emphasized Barrett’s junior role in the case, noting that she was not the counsel of record and “assisted with legal research and briefing.”

Arthur Hellman, a professor emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and an expert on the U.S. federal courts, said Barrett, as a junior associate at a law firm, probably would not have had permission to choose her clients — and in any case shouldn’t be judged by them. He said the Supreme Court could use judges with more experience in private practice.

“If we think it’s desirable, as I and a lot of others do, that you have justices on the Supreme Court who have gotten their hands dirty with real-world litigation — some of that is probably going to be on behalf of clients that are not terribly admirable,” Hellman said.

Barrett worked in private practice for two years after clerking for Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia and before entering academia.

The MEK has long sought legitimacy in the United States, in part by paying former government officials from both major parties to speak at its annual rallies, and has presented itself as a secular, democratic alternative to Iran’s theocratic regime. The dissidents also revealed the existence of secret Iranian nuclear sites, aiding U.S. efforts to thwart Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

Former New York mayor and Trump ally Rudolph W. Giuliani and former Trump national security adviser John Bolton have both been outspoken pro-

ponents of the group, as have Democrats like former Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell and former Vermont governor Howard Dean.


The group, however, has also been dogged by accusations of human rights abuses, after some former members described cultlike practices by the organization designed to control its members.

“I call them basically a cult,” said Ervand Abrahamian, a professor emeritus of Iranian and Middle Eastern history and politics at Baruch College in New York.

Gobadi, the MEK spokesman, disputed those accusations, describing them as part of a long-standing disinformation campaign against the group by the Iranian regime and its intelligence apparatus.

He said the allegations had been proved “time and again to be totally baseless.”

Julie Tate contributed to this report.

 Access the article from [here](#).



## Trump's Former Top Intel Adviser Has Become a Key Source of Disinformation

Dan Friedman

November 2, 2020

As the election nears, Richard Grenell is lying about Biden's mask and Harris' associations.

The primary source of disinformation in the 2020 campaign is not Russia, or any foreign state, but rather President Donald Trump and his administration. And a key culprit is Trump's former acting director of national intelligence, Richard Grenell.

**Mother Jones**

Grenell—who has also served as Trump's ambassador to Germany and as a special envoy for peace talks between Serbia and Kosovo—on Sunday tweeted a photograph showing Joe Biden maskless on a plane, along with an image of Biden wearing a mask while outdoors. The tweet suggested that Biden is a “phony” whose mask use is nothing more than a public pose. But as legal scholar Steve Vladeck and others quickly noted, the photo of Biden without a mask is from November, before the pandemic. Grenell ap-



## Trump's Former Top Intel Adviser Has Become a Key Source of Disinformation

*As the election nears, Richard Grenell is lying about Biden's mask and Harris' associations.*



DAN FRIEDMAN

Reporter

Bio



Richard Grenell at a White House news briefing on September 4, 2020. Chris Kleponis/CNP via ZUMA WI

pears to have taken the picture from a Vogue Magazine article on Biden's traveling press secretary, Remi Yamamoto, while omitting the caption that noted the date.

Confronted with his error, Grenell attacked those who flagged it, then posted another picture of Biden without a mask, this time ignoring the fact that it came from a drive-in rally where Biden wore a mask prior to taking the stage, where he spoke

alone.

This is nothing new for Grenell, a noted Twitter troll. Last week, Grenell retweeted a false claim by an account with the username “Heshmat Alavi” that lobbyists for Iran had “established ties with the Biden/Harris circle.” This claim includes multiple layers of falsehoods. First, according to a report last year by the Intercept, Alavi “appears not to exist” but is instead a composite persona created by the radical Iranian opposition group Mojahedin-e-Khalq, or MEK. The nominal author was published widely in *Forbes* and in right-leaning outlets before the deceit was uncovered. MEK, based in Albania, exercises strict control over adherents that has drawn frequent comparisons to a cult. The State Department listed the group as sponsor of terrorism following its alleged involvement and in an attack on US soil in 1992, and in the killing of US citizens in Iran in the 1970s, before removing the group from the list in 2012. MEK aggressively lobbies in the US for the overthrow of Iranian regime. Mother Jones has reported that MEK has received vocal support on Twitter from a network of “likely bots along with real accounts and ‘cyborg’ accounts—accounts run by real people, but augmented with software to push posts faster and more frequently.” It’s unclear who is behind these Twitter accounts.

“Heshmat Alavi is a persona run by a team of people from the political wing

of the MEK,” a high-ranking MEK defector told the Intercept. “They write whatever they are directed by their commanders and use this name to place articles in the press. This is not and has never been a real person.” In a subsequent blog post, a person identifying themselves as Alavi acknowledged that is not the name of a real person, but claimed it was a pseudonym intended to protect “all of my family, friends and myself, both inside & outside of Iran, in complete danger.”

The Alavi tweet that Grenell promoted showed Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) standing near two women, Iranian-American journalist Negar Mortazavi and Yasmine Taeb, a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy, a think tank. It asserts they are former members of the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), which it falsely calls “Iran’s lobby arm in DC.” In fact, the event pictured was a January 29, 2017, protest in Washington of Trump’s Muslim ban—an event that Mortazavi and Taeb helped organize. Harris and Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) attended to support the protesters but have no other ties to the women, Mortazavi told Mother Jones. NIAC has supported diplomacy with Iran, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or Iran nuclear deal, that was forged under the Obama administration. Those actions have led the MEK and right-wing advocates of Trump’s bellicose “maximum pressure” policy to accuse the group of lobbying for Iran. But there is no evidence for those claims. The organization denies them and is not a registered foreign agent. (Americans lobbying for MEK are registered as foreign agents.)

When I pointed out last week that Grenell had amplified false claims by a composite persona, the former director of national intelligence accused Mother Jones of “giving aid and comfort” to Iran’s rulers.

Grenell also made several false claims during remarks at the Republican National Convention in August that were aimed at bolstering Trump’s false “ObamaGate” assertions. Grenell said that “the Obama-Biden administration secretly launched a surveillance operation on the Trump campaign, and silenced the many brave intelligence officials who spoke up against it.” He also claimed that “Biden asked intelligence officials to uncover the hidden information on President Trump’s incoming national security adviser three weeks before the inauguration.”

A Washington Post factcheck faulted Grenell for bolstering “unfounded conspiracy theories” in those remarks. The FBI investigation into links between the Trump campaign and Russian entities was not ordered by former President Barack Obama or by Biden. The claim about Biden ordering an investigation into former national security adviser Michael Flynn relies on Biden’s attendance at a January 2017 White House meeting where Flynn was discussed. Handwritten notes by a former FBI agent suggest Biden may have mentioned the Logan Act, a law Flynn could potentially have violated through his secret contacts with Russia’s ambassador during the presidential transition. (Flynn was never charged with breaking this law.) But officials present have said they do not recall Biden saying anything at the meeting. And the FBI’s investigation into Flynn had started many months before that, rendering it impossible for the then-VP or Obama to have initiated the investigation into Flynn at the meeting.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Corporate Media Shills For Assassination Of Iranian Scientist

Dan Cohen

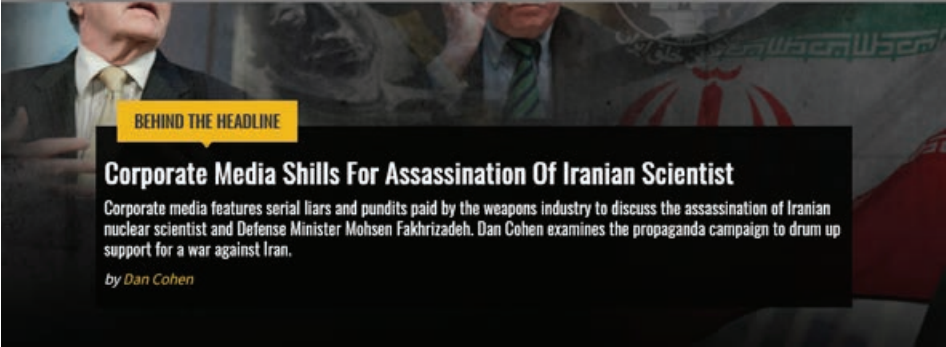
December 14, 2020

Corporate media features serial liars and pundits paid by the weapons industry to discuss the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist and Defense Minister Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. Dan Cohen examines the propaganda campaign to drum up support for a war against Iran.



The Trump administration committed another act of war against Iran, and like every U.S. war in the modern era, it began with a lie: that Iran is developing nuclear weapons. It's a total falsehood we've heard get repeated again and again throughout mainstream media and from pundits who personally profit from U.S. aggression.

Jack Keane, who once proclaimed, "Iran with nuclear weapons and missiles that deliver them is absolutely a bonafide existential threat to Israel," has a cozy relationship with the MEK, an Iranian exile



cult that has assassinated Iranian scientists itself and who the U.S. government had listed as a terrorist group until recently. It’s no secret that the MEK pays U.S. officials to advocate on its behalf. Keane is the chairman of the Institute for the Study of War – a think tank funded by arms manufacturers like Raytheon and General Dynamics, which paid Keane more than \$200,000 dollars in 2018 alone.

Then there’s the uber-hawkish human walrus John Bolton. Bolton was on the payroll of the MEK too, but CNN didn’t bother to mention that, nor that Bolton famously told a fawning audience at an MEK rally, “that’s why before 2019, we here will celebrate in Tehran. Thank you very much!”

## Media shills

It’s not just right-wing fanatics paid by the MEK that are lying about Iranian weapons capabilities. It’s also respectable liberal media outlets.

Sonam Sheth, a political correspondent at Business Insider covering national security issues told MSNBC that, “it’s very unlikely that his [Mohsen Fakhrizadeh] assassination is going to impede Iran’s efforts to continue its producing nuclear weapons.”

ABC News also presented the allegation of an Iranian nuclear weapons program as an undisputed fact, describing Fakhrizadeh simply as, “The scientist believed to be the mastermind behind Iran’s covert nuclear weapons pro-

gram.” “Believed to be” – what an interesting term. It was used over and over in coverage of the assassination of Fakhrizadeh. Who exactly is doing the believing here?

The New York Times described the operation as being carried out by “U.S. and Israeli intelligence,” which the so-called paper of record said, “are known for their upstanding behavior and honesty.”

## **A broken record**

Remember when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu swore that Saddam Hussein was developing nuclear weapons? “There is no question, whatsoever, that Saddam is seeking and is working, and is advancing towards the development of nuclear weapons. No question whatsoever,” he said in 2002 testimony to Congress.

George Bush, too, proclaimed that “Those weapons of mass destruction gotta be somewhere.” At the very same hearing pushing for U.S. war on Iraq, he said “Iran was developing nuclear weapons too.”

Of course, all of these outlets conveniently ignore the statement from then-top intelligence official Dan Coats that “we do not believe Iran is currently undertaking the key activities we judge necessary to produce a nuclear device.” Because that would undermine the drive to war.

But don’t worry. Biden isn’t like Trump. He’s one of the adults in the room. And he’s surrounded by seasoned diplomats who have made it clear they’ll return to the Iran deal that stupid Trump tore up, right? Wrong.

Biden’s secretary of state Tony Blinken said this, “If Iran returns to compliance with the nuclear agreement, we would do the same. But then we would use that as a platform to try to, working with our allies and partners, to try to strengthen and lengthen it.”

And then there’s national security advisor Jake Sullivan, who said Biden would return to the JCPOA (Iran deal) if Iran “returns to compliance... and is pre-

pared to advance good-faith negotiations on these follow-on agreements.”

So Biden’s Iran policy is basically just Trump lite. But that’s not terribly surprising when you examine his top foreign policy advisor’s record. Jake Sullivan is a favorite of the Foundation of Defense For Democracies, the neoconservative think tank funded by top Trump donor and ultra-zionist Sheldon Adelson which an Israeli official described as acting on its behalf. The FDD crafted Trump’s maximum pressure strategy to achieve regime change in Iran.

So even if Biden doesn’t go to war with Iran, he’s not projecting any desire for real diplomacy or de-escalation of hostilities. He hasn’t even said he’ll lift the crippling sanctions the Trump administration leveled. And what happens when the next administration decides it wants full-on war with Iran?

Just because Trump is out, don’t think for a second that the U.S. is going to fundamentally change. The U.S. is gearing up for war a catastrophic war on Iran, even if Biden doesn’t authorize he’s not going to prevent his successor from doing it.

■ Access the article from [here](#).



## Brainwashing members to achieve organizational goals

Jack Turner

December 15, 2020

The Mojahedin Khalq Organization is a group from which ISIL and suicide attacks have emerged.

MEK is the first group to launch a suicide operation and calling themselves role models for terrorist groups, claiming that members of the organization sacrificed their lives for the organization without any expectations, and the leadership of this group sacrifices the lives of its members for their own desires. Suicide operations are the least done by the members of the group, and in 1971, Ahmad Rezaei, one of the leaders of the organization, started the first suicide operation, during which 30 members of the organization were asked to sacrifice their lives and do this violent manner and end their lives.

MEK continued their bloody operations even after the revolution and assassinated the revolutionary



figures of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but they wasted their lives in a dark and endless way.

MEK claimed human rights, but the lives of the members of the organization are too insignificant to them that they not only accepted responsibility for their suicide operations but also threatened to do so again. Saleh Rajavi, Massoud Rajavi's brother, says that: "when thousands of people are willing to sacrifice their lives for the organization and its goals, then let them call us terrorists, and how can thousands of people who sacrifice for the freedom of their people be called terrorists?"

Yes, when members are forced to obey the orders of the organization without any authority and by brainwashing, they are not able to make decisions. To the extent that they were given cyanide tablets so that they would not be arrested alive in operations so as not to disclose information about the organization. In 2003, when Maryam Rajavi was arrested in France, a large number of people protested against her arrest, declaring that they were burning themselves, the Parisian newspaper wrote that: "Before and after the self-immolation, several reporters were contacted on their cell phones, and the foreign relation spokesperson announced them the name of the person who wanted to set himself on fire."

Interestingly, after the self-immolation, one of the Mojahedin offers the reporter a better photo of the self-immolation, and the Mojahedin filmed and photographed these scenes and posted them on their site, but after a while, they removed them from the site page due to bad feedback.

The organization uses different names to impress itself in the public mind by deception, and this is the imposition of a lie on its audience, and the individual suffers from multiplicity in the mind.

MEK went so far that due to their unpopularity among the Iranian people and the opposition groups, announce themselves as representing the majority of the people to the point that they hired a number of foreigners to be presented at their annual conference and gave them the flag of MEK to show that their number of supporters is more than the reality.

Even regarding the self-immolation of individuals, two members of the organization, Mahmoud Alemi, and Hossein Amini Gholipour, encouraged in-

dividuals to carry out self-immolation operations.

The interesting thing is that out of the 10 people who set themselves on fire, three of them were members of the political branch not from the military branch that would be a definition of being a soldier that feels like it is his duty to burn himself.

In 1984, France deported a number of members to Gabon, where they went on a 40-day hunger strike until the French government had to return them. What is very prominent among the MEK is the spirit of sectarianism, which is very outdated, and the Mojahedin even decided to carry out suicide operations because they do not care about the lives of the people and seek to do things that will make a noise in the world, they even decided to carry out suicide operations in Karbala and even trained the women of Camp Ashraf in Iraq to carry out suicide operations there.

A 2009 report stated that the MEK praised suicide and always carried cyanide tablets with a leather cover around their necks, and swallowed a pill immediately if caught on missions. Also Rajavi called all members of the organization living martyrs, and among all the actions they took, self-immolation was the most common type of suicide and self-immolation became a tool, and even when members of the organization were prevented from leaving, they set themselves on fire, and the cause of death of disobedient members who had been killed under torture was declared a suicide.

All this goes back to the tortures and brainwashing that were inflicted on members, otherwise who is willing to sacrifice his life, which is his most important and valuable asset, to achieve the worthless human desires of a man introduces himself as the leader of the group and a claimant of human rights. One of the tortures was that members of the organization were locked in solitary confinement and given a leaflet declaring their support for Massoud Rajavi as the leader of the group, and the individual had to repeat these sentences to himself to never forget it. Can a cult that violated every kind of human rights call itself a democratic group?

■ Access the article from [here](#).

## CBS News

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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.

## New York Post

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MEK, formed in 1965 by radicalized university students, has been implicated in the death of several Americans, including US Army Lt. Col. Lewis L. Hawkins, who was killed in 1973 by MEK assailants wearing motorcycle helmets as he worked in Tehran.

## National Interest

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There are ample warning signs about the real nature of the MEK. The administration needs to avoid that organization like the plague.

## The Intercept

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The biggest problem with U.S. politicians backing the MEK is that the group has all the trappings of a totalitarian cult.

## The Week

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It presents itself as the official democratic opposition, but in reality it has virtually zero support inside Iran itself.

## The Guardian

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Most observers of Iranian politics say the MEK has minimal support in Iran and is widely hated for its use of violence and close links to Israeli intelligence.

## The Washington Post

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Members of the group have been implicated in the deaths of Americans and thousands of Iranians, primarily in the 1980s when the neo-Marxist group was allied with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in the war between Iraq and Iran.

## Haaretz

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Today, many Iranians still refer to the MEK as monafeghan, or hypocrites, for fighting alongside Saddam and taking up arms against fellow Iranians.

