
Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) Dossier

CENTER FOR POLICING TERRORISM
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Executive Summary

Led by husband and wife Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) is the primary opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran; its military wing is the National Liberation Army (NLA), and its political arm is the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). The US State Department designated the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997, based upon its killing of civilians, although the organization's opposition to Iran and its democratic leanings have earned it support among some American and European officials.

A group of college-educated Iranians who were opposed to the pro-Western Shah in Iran founded the MEK in the 1960s, but the Khomeini excluded the MEK from the new Iranian government due to the organization's philosophy, a mixture of Marxism and Islamism. The leadership of the MEK fled to France in 1981, and their military infrastructure was transferred to Iraq, where the MEK/NLA began to provide internal security services for Saddam Hussein and the MEK received assistance from Hussein. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, however, Coalition forces bombed the MEK bases in Iraq, in early April of 2003, forcing the MEK to surrender by the middle of April of the same year. Approximately 3,800 members of the MEK, the majority of the organization in Iraq, are confined to Camp Ashraf, their main compound near Baghdad, under the control of the US-led Coalition forces. Despite the ceasefire agreement between the MEK and the United States, the goal of the MEK continues to be the overthrow of the current Iranian government and the installation of the NCRI as the transitional Iranian government until free and fair elections can be administered.

Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, the MEK obtained all of its military assistance and the majority of its financial support from Saddam Hussein's regime, with the remainder of the MEK's financial assistance obtained from ex-patriot Iranian communities. Iraq supplied the MEK with weapons, bases and protection, and the MEK pursued Saddam Hussein's Iranian enemies. This relationship between Saddam Hussein and the MEK caused the MEK to lose considerable support from Iranians living in Iran, though ex-patriot Iranians have provided the MEK with some financial support through front organizations.

The MEK's terrorist attacks have been, for the most part, against the Iranian government and within the borders of Iran; the organization has limited itself to non-violent activities internationally. The MEK does not have the resources to overthrow the Iranian government alone and has lost significant support within Iran as a result of its relationship with Saddam Hussein. Often seen as resembling a cult, the MEK membership has decreased in recent years. Despite their decline in popularity and their limited resources, the MEK remains a serious threat to the Iranian government. Furthermore, the MEK's 1992 bombings on Iranian embassies in eleven countries illustrate the organization's capacity to conduct a coordinated global campaign of violence in a short span of time.

The relationship between the MEK and the United States is complex and controversial; there have been indications recently that this relationship is evolving into an alliance against the current Iranian government. Some officials within the Bush administration hope to resurrect the democratic reform movement in Iran through the infiltration of US-trained former MEK members, a move that would require the United States to alter its Iran policy to support regime change. Some officials in the Defense Department would support such an alteration, but Secretary Rice and other officials in the State Department are apprehensive of developing closer ties between the MEK and the United States. Maryam Rajavi, one of the organization's key leaders, also does not support attempts to split up the MEK, although she does advocate for the removal of the MEK from the State Department's list of designated foreign terrorist organizations as well as for US support in the overthrow of the Iranian government.

The State Department's designation of the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization is also contentious. According to the State Department, the MEK's status as a designated foreign terrorist organization is based upon its use of Saddam Hussein as a major source of financial and military support; the MEK's support of the 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran, Iran and the subsequent hostage crisis; and the MEK's role in the deaths of Americans in the 1970s. The reputation of the MEK has been further tarnished because of evidence gathered by US weapons inspectors in Iraq suggesting that the MEK has profited from the oil-for-food program; an inconsistent and often completely inaccurate intelligence record regarding the Iranian nuclear weapons program; and the MEK's resemblance to a cult. Despite these issues, many US officials believe that the MEK does not represent a threat to the security of the United States and should not longer be considered a designated foreign terrorist organization because of the assistance that the organization could potentially provide for regime change in Iran.

Chapter 1: Background

Section 1.1: Overview

Also known as the Mojahedin Khalq Organization, the Mujahideen-e Khalq Organization (MKO), and the People's Mujahideen of Iran (PMOI), the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK) is the primary opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran; its military wing in Iraq is the National Liberation Army (NLA).¹ The largest and most militant organization opposed to the current Iranian government, the MEK serves as the hub for the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a coalition, comprised of 570 members, that claims to be the transitional parliament-in-exile. The MEK has been on the US State Department's list of designated foreign terrorist organizations since 1997, based upon its killing of civilians, and on the European Union's terrorist list since 2002, although the organization's opposition to Iran and its democratic leanings have earned it support among some American and European officials.²³

Section 1.2: History

A group of college-educated Iranian leftists who were opposed to Iran's pro-Western leader, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, founded the MEK in the 1960s as a splinter group of the Liberation Movement of Iran, a liberal nationalistic party supporting former Prime Minister Mossaddeq against the Shah, whom the MEK viewed as a dictator and a puppet of the United States.⁴⁵ Despite the MEK's role in the 1979 Islamic revolution that overthrew the Shah and installed a Shiite Islamist regime under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, the ayatollahs excluded the organization from the new Iranian government.⁶

The MEK's philosophy, a mixture of Marxism and Islamism, conflicted with that of the new Iranian regime. After the MEK's appeal in 1981 for a mass demonstration over the impeachment of Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, the elected President and chairman of the Islamic Revolutionary Council, the Iranian regime imprisoned and killed thousands of the MEK members. The leaders of MEK were forced to relocate to Paris and the MEK's military infrastructure was transferred to Iraq, near its border with Iran. The MEK began to aid Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war, moving its headquarters to Iraq in 1987 and creating a separate military arm, the NLA. With its new location on the Iran-Iraq border, the MEK began using Iraq as a staging point for cross-border raids into Iran. The MEK also helped Saddam Hussein to suppress the Shia and Kurdish uprisings in 1991, after which the MEK continued to provide internal security services for Hussein and the MEK received financial and military support from Saddam Hussein.⁷

The MEK has continued to clash with the Iranian government and the focus of its terrorist attacks has, for the most part, been the Iranian government. The MEK carried out near-simultaneous attacks of Iranian embassies and institutions located in 13 countries in 1992. The MEK was responsible for assassinating Asadollah Lajevardi, the director of Iran's prison system; and for assassinating Ali Sayyad Shirazi, the deputy chief of the Armed Forces General Staff of Iran in April of 1999. During "Operation Great Bahman," in February of 2000, the MEK conducted 12 attacks against Iran. The MEK has also been linked to many mortar attacks and hit-and-run raids on Iranian

military and law enforcement units and government buildings, one of which killed Iran's chief of staff, near the Iran-Iraq border in 2000 and 2001. One of these mortar attacks was conducted on President Mohammad Khatami's palace in Tehran in 2000.⁸

Prior to the 2003 Iraq war, some experts theorized that the MEK bases in Iraq were being used to conceal Iraqi illegal weapons programs and expressed concern that the Iraqi government would use the MEK to repel any US-led attacks on Iraqi cities.⁹ During Operation Iraqi Freedom, however, Coalition forces bombed the MEK bases in Iraq in early April of 2003, forcing the MEK to surrender by the middle of April of the same year.¹⁰ The following month, French authorities searched an MEK compound located just outside of Paris and arrested one of the organization's main leaders, Maryam Rajavi, along with 160 other members of the MEK.¹¹ French authorities accused the MEK "of conspiring to prepare and finance acts of terrorism from the group's French base, where authorities also confiscated \$8 million."¹² Although Maryam Rajavi and the other suspects were later released, many of these suspects, including Maryam Rajavi, are confined to their homes as the investigation continues to unfold.¹³

Occasionally, the MEK disclose to the international community information regarding Iran's nuclear weapons program. While information from the MEK typically cannot be authenticated, information provided by the MEK was critical in the 2002 determination that Iran was administering a uranium enrichment program. In February of 2005, the MEK revealed to the International Atomic Energy Administration (IAEA) that Iran is currently in possession of sources for polonium-210 and beryllium, which are components critical for building an "initiator." According to the MEK, Iran intends to possess a nuclear weapon by the end of 2005.¹⁴ Despite these revelations, the intelligence record of the MEK is inconsistent and often completely inaccurate.¹⁵

Section 1.3: Ideology

The philosophy of the MEK is a mixture of Marxism and Islamism. According to some experts, the MEK bears an increasing resemblance to "a cult that is devoted to Massoud Rajavi's secular interpretation of the Koran and is prone to sudden, dramatic ideological shifts."¹⁶ There are also reports that members of the MEK deify Maryam Rajavi. Her photographs are frequently found in MEK camps, and MEK members staged public self-immolations to protest her 2003 arrest in Paris.¹⁷

Section 1.3: Goals

The goal of the MEK is to oust the current Iranian regime and to install the NCRI as the transitional Iranian government until free and fair elections can be held. The MEK established a 16-point plan, the "Charter of Fundamental Freedoms", at a conference the organization held in 1995 in order to pinpoint more specific goals for the organization.^{18,19} The plan is as follows:

- 1) Guarantee freedom of belief, expression and the press, without censorship;
- 2) Guarantee freedom for political parties, unions, groups, councils, forums, syndicates, except those loyal to either the Shah or Ayatollah Khomeini, provided they stay within the law;

- 3) Ensure governments would be elected;
- 4) Respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- 5) Abolish courts, tribunals, security departments introduced by the Ayatollah Khomeini;
- 6) Ensure women enjoy the same social, political and cultural rights as men (including a ban on polygamy);
- 7) Abolish privileges based on gender, religion or ethnic group;
- 8) End discrimination against religious minorities;
- 9) Abolish compulsory religious practice;
- 10) Secure Iranian territorial integrity while recognizing the right of Iranian Kurdistan to autonomy;
- 11) Safeguard all social, cultural and political rights for ethnic minorities;
- 12) Repeal what the MEK deems to be ‘anti-labor, anti-peasant laws’;
- 13) Encourage a return from exile for all those who fled either the Shah or Khomeini regime;
- 14) Base the economy on the free market, national capitalism and private ownership;
- 15) Provide welfare needs to the poor;
- 16) Improve Iran’s foreign relations with neighboring and other states; to live in peaceful co-existence.²⁰

Section 1.4: Organization

The MEK is the primary opposition group to the current Iranian government. The NLA is its military wing. The MEK is also the dominant member of the NCRI.²¹

Section 1.4a: Leadership Council

The Leadership Council of the MEK consists of 12 members and 12 deputies, all of whom are women.²²

Section 1.4b: NCRI

The National Council of Resistance of Iran, a political coalition of Iranian opposition groups, considers itself to be the Iranian government-in-exile. The goal of the NCRI is a secularist Iranian government “which supports gender equality, political pluralism and the separation of church and state.”²³ Founded in 1981, President and official spokesperson of the NCRI is Massoud Rajavi, husband of Maryam Rajavi. The NCRI is comprised of 550 members, half of which are women.²⁴



The National Council of Resistance of Iran²⁵

According to the NCRI, it intends to provide Iran with a 6-month provisional government upon the overthrow of the current Iranian government; the major responsibility of this provisional government would be to administer free and fair elections for a National Legislative and Constituent Assembly and then to transfer power to these newly-elected representatives. In August of 1993, the NCRI elected Maryam Rajavi, the principal leader of the MEK and the wife of Massoud Rajavi, as the President of this transitional government.²⁶

The NCRI has offices in Europe.²⁷ The United States designated the NCRI as a foreign terrorist organization in 1999. In August of 2003, the State Department and the Treasury Department froze the NCRI's assets and closed their offices in Washington DC.²⁸

Section 1.4c: NLA

The National Liberation Army of Iran was founded in 1987 when the MEK moved its military forces to bases in Iraq, near its border with Iran; at that time, the NLA became the military arm of the MEK. The MEK/NLA began using its bases in Iraq as a staging point for cross-border raids into Iran. The MEK/NLA helped Saddam Hussein to suppress the Shia and Kurdish uprisings in 1991, after which the MEK/NLA continued to provide internal security services for Hussein.²⁹ During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the MEK/NLA signed a cease fire agreement with the US-led Coalition forces, confining the majority of the NLA to Camp Ashraf and forcing the NLA to relinquish its weapons, including tanks, armored vehicles, and heavy artillery.³⁰

Section 1.5: Leadership

The leaders of the MEK are husband and wife Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. Maryam Rajavi, the President-in-exile, is the principal leader of the MEK; her husband Massoud leads the organization's military forces – the NLA – and is the President and official spokesperson of the NCRI.

Section 1.5a: Maryam Rajavi

Maryam Rajavi was born in 1953 to an upper-middle class Iranian family in Tehran; she earned a degree in metallurgy from Sharif University of Technology in Tehran. While studying at the University, Rajavi became one of the leaders of the student anti-Shah movement in the early 1970s. The Shah's government was responsible for the execution of one of Rajavi's sisters, Narges, and the Khomeini government was responsible for the torture and murder of another sister, Massoumeh, who was 8 months pregnant at the time.^{31,32}

In 1981, Rajavi fled from Iran to Paris, along with the rest of the MEK leadership, and she was elected as the MEK's joint leader. In June of 1987, Rajavi became the deputy commander-in-chief of the MEK's military forces. Rajavi was appointed Secretary-General of the MEK in October of 1989. In August of 1993, the NCRI elected Rajavi as the



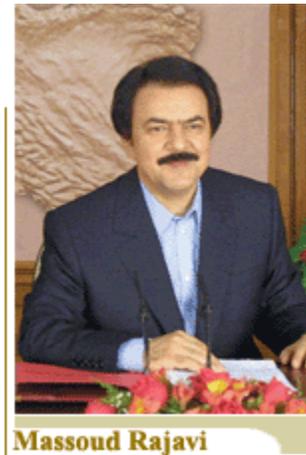
Maryam Rajavi

President of the transitional government of Iran. ³³

In June of 2003, French authorities searched an MEK compound located just outside of Paris and arrested Rajavi, along with 160 other members of the MEK. ³⁴ French authorities accused the MEK members “of conspiring to prepare and finance acts of terrorism from the group’s French base, where authorities also confiscated \$8 million.”³⁵ Although Rajavi and the other suspects were later released, many of these suspects are confined to their homes as the investigation continues to unfold. ³⁶ Rajavi remains confined to the MEK compound outside of Paris today. ³⁷

Section 1.5b: Massoud Rajavi

The youngest of five brothers, Massoud Rajavi was born in 1948 in Tabas, a town in the northeastern province of Khorassan. He graduated from Tehran University with a degree in political law. The Khomeini regime arrested and imprisoned his parents in 1981. Rajavi’s first wife, Ashraf, was imprisoned by the Shah’s government due to her participation in the MEK. ³⁸ Rajavi and Ashraf married in 1979; three years later she was killed when the Pasdaran (often referred to as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) – a paramilitary force that serves as a counterweight to the influence and power of the regular armed forces in Iran – attacked her home. ^{39, 40, 41}



Rajavi was arrested and given a death sentence in 1971, but that death sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment; in 1979 the Iranian government released Rajavi from prison. Rajavi founded the NCRI in 1981 in Tehran, Iran; shortly thereafter, he fled to France, along with most of the MEK leadership. ⁴² In June of 1987, Rajavi founded the NLA. ⁴³

Section 1.6: Operation

While the Iranian regime forced the leaders of the MEK to escape from Iran to France in the 1980s, the MEK stationed almost all of its armed units in bases near the Iraq-Iran border after resettling in Iran in 1987. ⁴⁴ The MEK camps in Iraq (see the Appendix for satellite imagery) consist of:

- 1) Camp Ashraf, the MEK military headquarters, which is located approximately 100 kilometers west of the Iranian border and 100 kilometers north of Baghdad, near Khalis;
- 2) Camp Anzali, which is located near the town of Jalawla [Jalula] and approximately 120-130 kilometers (70-80 miles) northeast of Baghdad and approximately 40-60 kilometers (20-35 miles) from the Iraqi border with Iran;
- 3) Camp Faezeh, which is located in Kut;
- 4) Camp Habib, which is located in Basra;
- 5) Camp Homayoun, which is located in Al-Amarah; and
- 6) Camp Bonyad Alavi which is located near the city of Miqdadiya in Mansourieh (approximately 65 miles northeast of Baghdad). ⁴⁵

Since Operation Iraqi Freedom, the majority of the organization's members in Iraq have been confined to the organization's headquarters, Camp Ashraf, which was named after the first wife of Massoud Rajavi. An overseas support structure, however, still exists, consisting of associates and supporters as well as numerous front organizations, with which the MEK uses to raise funds internationally, located throughout Europe and North America.⁴⁶

The MEK compound in France is in Auvers sur Oise, which is a village located just outside of Paris.⁴⁷ Maryam Rajavi has been under house arrest at the compound in Auvers sur Oise since her release from French custody following her arrest in June of 2003.⁴⁸

Section 1.7: Strength

The MEK claims to control an armed guerrilla force of 30,000 to 50,000 in Iraq, but the worldwide membership of the MEK is believed to be 10,000, one-half to one-third of whom are fighters.^{49,50} Approximately 3,800 members of the MEK, the majority of the organization in Iraq, are confined to Camp Ashraf, their main compound near Baghdad, under the control of the US-led Coalition forces. Per the cease-fire agreement, the MEK surrendered its weapons and other military supplies, including tanks, armored vehicles, and heavy artillery.⁵¹ By the middle of May of 2003, Coalition forces had "consolidated 2,139 tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces, air defense artillery pieces and miscellaneous vehicles" from the MEK.⁵² Coalition forces also destroyed the majority of the MEK munitions and caches.⁵³

Chapter 2: External Aid

Section 1: Iraq

Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, the MEK obtained all of its military assistance and the bulk of its financial support from Saddam Hussein's regime.⁵⁴ Iraq supplied the MEK with weapons, bases and protection, and in exchange, the MEK pursued Saddam Hussein's Iranian enemies. According to experts, the intensity of the MEK's attacks on Iran increased during periods of poor relations between Iran and Iraq.⁵⁵

Section 2: Ex-Patriot Iranian Communities

The MEK retains little support for its cause within Iran because of its relationship with Saddam Hussein's regime. Many Iranians consider the MEK "as toxic, if not more so, than the ruling clerics."⁵⁶ The MEK lost considerable support from Iranians living in Iran because the organization accepted Iraqi aid; attacked targets in Iran for Iraq; and killed Iranian civilians.⁵⁷

Although the MEK does not enjoy much support from within Iran, the organization has generated some support in many ex-patriot Iranian communities. The MEK obtains financial aid from ex-patriot Iranian communities using front organizations, such as the Muslim Iranian Student's Society, in order to raise funds for their organization and their cause.⁵⁸ In a 1994 dossier, the State Department said that "many of these member groups are actually shell organizations, established by the [MEK] in order to make [it] appear representative and...popular...Likewise, the [MEK] has formed associated groups with benign names, such as the 'Association of Iranian Scholars and Professionals' and the Association of Iranian Women."⁵⁹ The MEK has been linked to numerous organizations, many of which either have prominent MEK members within their membership or are known front organizations for the MEK.

Organizations with links to the MEK include

- The Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia,
- The Association of Iranian Women USA, which is also known as the Association of Iranian Women, and whose leader is Behjat Dehghan, a well-known member of the MEK in the United States,
- The Iranian Society of South Florida, an MEK front organization,
- The Iranian-American Society of Texas, an MEK front organization,
- The National Committee of Women for a Democratic Iran, which is led by Ramesh Sepehrrad, a prominent member of the MEK in Washington DC, and is an MEK front organization,
- The Iranian-American Cultural Association of Missouri, an organization known to have strong MEK sympathies,
- Colorado's Iranian-American Community, an organization known to have strong MEK sympathies,
- The Society of Iranian Americans in Dallas, an organization known to have strong MEK sympathies,

- The Association of Iranian-American Scholars in Southern California, an organization known to have strong MEK sympathies,
- US for Democracy and Human Rights in Iran, whose website is registered to Hamid Azimi, a member of the MEK, and whose membership includes Saeid Sajadi, yet another member of the MEK
- The Southern California Society of Iranian Scholars and Professors, whose former president is Hamid Azimi, a member of the MEK
- The Iranian-American Solidarity Society of Kansas City, whose president is Hamid Azimi, a member of the MEK, and
- The Society of Iranian-American Medical Professionals, whose president is Hamid Azimi, a member of the MEK.⁶⁰

Section 3: Bam Earthquake Charity Event

The Bam earthquake charity event held in January of 2005 demonstrated how the MEK uses front organizations to raise funds for itself and for its cause. On January 26, 2005, the Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia hosted a charity event in Washington DC to raise money for the survivors of the earthquake in Bam on December 26, 2004; to support the Iranian Resistance; and to call for a referendum in Iran.⁶¹ More than 3,000 people attended the event, with a charge of \$35 per person. “Of the 23 organizations listed as sponsors for the event, 17 are known MEK front groups or linked to prominent MEK members and activists. None appears to be registered with the Internal Revenue Service or state agencies as legitimate businesses or charities.”⁶² FBI agents were present at the charity event, and two days after the event was held, the Treasury Department froze the assets of the Iranian-American Community of Northern Virginia.⁶³

Chapter 3: Modes of Attack

Section 1: Operative Training

The MEK bears some resemblance to a cult. The members of the MEK supposedly deify Maryam Rajavi. Photographs of Maryam Rajavi are seen all over the MEK camps; the MEK members held self-immolations in public as a protest for her 2003 arrest in France. Divorce is supposedly required for members of the MEK. In addition, members reportedly endure regular self-criticism sessions.⁶⁴

Section 2: Operational Patterns

The majority of MEK attacks have occurred against the current Iranian government and within the borders of Iran. Although “the MEK is not considered capable of overthrowing the Iranian Government on its own, and is believed to have lost much of its popular support within Iran since siding with Iraq, it has continued to demonstrate its ability to conduct assassinations, sabotage and other attacks in Iran.”⁶⁵ Despite this loss in popularity amongst Iranians living in Iran, the MEK remains a serious threat to the current Iranian government.⁶⁶

The MEK for the most part limits itself to non-violent activities overseas, such as publicity campaigns, political demonstrations, and fundraising. For example, according to Germany’s Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the publicity campaigns of the MEK typically consist of efforts to contact members of the German Parliament to explain the goals of the MEK; to further advance the political support of the MEK in Germany; and to manipulate parliamentary debate regarding Iran. An exception to this pattern is the MEK’s 1992 bombings on Iranian embassies in eleven countries. While not common, these embassy bombings illustrate the MEK’s capacity to conduct a coordinated global campaign of violence in a short time span.⁶⁷

Chapter 4: Recruits

Section 1: Sources

The MEK sends the children of its members to Western nations, separating them from their parents; Iranian families adopt these children in the Western countries. At the age of 18 some of these children choose to become members of the MEK because “from the day they were born, these girls and boys were not taught to think for themselves but to blindly follow their leaders.”⁶⁸ According to experts, however, MEK membership has decreased in recent years as its popularity in Iran has dwindled. The MEK has struggled in recent years to recruit new members; the organization is comprised of its founding members for the most part.⁶⁹

Section 2: Female Recruits

Female recruits play a significant and active role in the MEK. Women occupy many of the senior positions in the political, international and military aspects of the organization. Half of the members in the MEK’s political arm, the NCRI, are women. Women comprise a third of the MEK’s military wing, the NLA; furthermore, two-thirds of the commanders of the NLA are women. The Leadership Council of the MEK is solely composed of women.

Chapter 5: The MEK and the United States

Section 1: Past Attacks against US Targets

The MEK was founded in the 1960s as a splinter group of the Liberation Movement of Iran, a liberal nationalistic party supporting former Prime Minister Mossaddeq against the Shah, whom the MEK viewed as a dictator and a puppet of the United States. US support for the Shah placed the MEK at odds with the United States in the 1970s.⁷⁰ As a result, the MEK killed US military personnel as well as US civilians who were working on defense projects in Tehran during the 1970s.⁷¹ The MEK also supported the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979; fifty-two American hostages were held for 444 days in this crisis.⁷²

Section 2: The Iraq War

In early April of 2003, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States began bombing the MEK bases in Iraq. The United States and the MEK signed a ceasefire on April 15, 2003. This ceasefire was the first agreement of its kind between the United States and a designated terrorist group, motivated on the part of the United States by the desire to protect the principal Iranian opposition to the current Iranian government; the agreement, however, remains highly controversial, even within the Bush administration.⁷³ “Apart from the obvious short-term benefit of securing protection from an armed rebel group allied with the Iraqi regime, the long-term objective of the US Government is believed to have been an attempt to preserve the only major armed opposition to the Iranian regime.”⁷⁴ Soon after the ceasefire agreement, the United States disarmed the MEK due to pressure from the State Department, but promised to protect the MEK from Iranian forces and the Badr Brigade (a group of Iraqi exiles supported by Iran).⁷⁵

Section 3: US Ally Against Iran

Recently, there have been indications that the complex relationship between the United States and the MEK is evolving into an alliance against the current Iranian regime. In January of 2005, *The Guardian* reported that the Pentagon has recently taken the controversial measure of using members of the MEK in “cross-border operations” to collect intelligence in Iraq.⁷⁶ The following month, *Newsweek* reported that “the [Bush] administration is seeking to cull useful MEK members as operatives for use against Tehran, all while insisting that it does not deal with the MEK as a group” according to US government sources.⁷⁷ Under this plan, the United States would separate select MEK prisoners from the organization and train these former MEK members as spies. These new spies would subsequently be dispatched to Iran where they would be in a better position to collect intelligence on the Iranian government, and most especially, on the Iranian nuclear weapons program. Some officials within the Bush administration also hope to resurrect the democratic reform movement in Iran through the infiltration of these former MEK members into Iran.

Engaging the MEK in this manner, however, remains controversial, and to further complicate the issue, the Bush administration still cannot agree upon a policy towards Iran. Some officials in the Defense Department are seeking a policy that would advocate regime change using Iranian exiles like former members of the MEK while Secretary

Rice and other top officials in the State Department are apprehensive in developing closer ties between the MEK and the United States. Secretary Rice recently commented that “the Pentagon is playing at the margins” with regards to this recruitment strategy.⁷⁸ According to *Newsweek* sources, the CIA is also reluctant to recruit spies from within the MEK ranks because they are regarded as “unreliable cultists under the sway of Rajavi and her husband.” A spokesperson for the Defense Department claims that there is no cooperation agreement with the MEK and that the Pentagon is not planning to make use of MEK members in any fashion.⁷⁹

Maryam Rajavi also does not support attempts to split up the organization, although she does advocate for closer ties with the United States and for US support in the overthrow of the Iranian government. Maryam Rajavi wants the MEK and its affiliates to be removed from the State Department’s list of designated foreign terrorist organizations and the organizations’ assets unfrozen. She believes that the United States is increasingly becoming aware that the current Iranian government must be removed from power, especially in light of its defiant stance with regards to its nuclear weapons program. “I believe increasingly the Americans have come to realize that the solution is an Iranian force that is able to get rid of the Islamic fundamentalists in power in Iran,” Maryam Rajavi said in an interview with *Newsweek*.⁸⁰ Maryam Rajavi believes that the MEK, with significant assistance and support from the United States, can overthrow the current Iranian government and establish a secularist Iranian government that holds free and fair elections in Iran.⁸¹

Section 3: Status as a Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization

When the State Department created its list of foreign terrorist organizations in 1997, the State Department designated the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization. The State Department added the NCRI and its related affiliates to the designated foreign terrorist organizations list by 1999. According to the State Department, the MEK’s status as a designated foreign terrorist organization is based upon its use of Saddam Hussein as its major funding source; its support of the 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran and the subsequent hostage crisis; and its role in the deaths of Americans in the 1970s.⁸²

Despite its designation, the members of the NCRI in the United States have continued to operate and to advocate for its change in status. According to the NCRI’s former representative in the United States, Alireza Jafarzadeh, the US government designated the NCRI as a foreign terrorist organization in order to appease moderate elements within the Iranian government. Jafarzadeh works as a foreign affairs analyst at Fox News. According to former intelligence officials, the NCRI maintains its contacts in defense circles, a situation that the Pentagon denies. The NCRI also files foreign agent registration documents with the Justice Department and participates in meetings with dozens of members of Congress, media interviews, rallies and speeches.⁸³

Section 4: Level of Support within the United States

Although the MEK has been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department since 1997, and the NCRI and its affiliates since 1999, American officials are split as to whether or not this designation should be lifted. Representative Brad Sherman,

a Democrat from California said, “The Defense Department is thinking of [the MEK] as buddies and the State Department sees [the MEK] as terrorists. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle...Maybe they should get time off for good behavior.”⁸⁴ While many within the US government echo this sentiment, others are convinced that the MEK still poses a serious threat to the United States.⁸⁵

Section 4a: MEK Supporters within the US Government

While the MEK’s designation as a foreign terrorist organization remains, the MEK’s opposition to Iran and its democratic leanings have earned it support among some American officials.⁸⁶ In 2002, for example, 150 members of Congress dispatched a letter to the State Department expressing their support for the removal of the MEK from the State Department’s list of designated foreign terrorist organizations. Some experts believe that the MEK does not intentionally target civilians and that the organization could serve as a potentially useful ally for the United States against the Iranian government, especially if the United States chooses to advocate regime change in Iran. Supporters also emphasize that the MEK has provided accurate intelligence to the United States regarding Iran’s nuclear weapons program, illustrated by the MEK and NCRI’s revelation of the existence of two secret Iranian nuclear sites in 2002.⁸⁷

MEK supporters in Congress who would like to use former MEK members to gently push for regime change in Iran have filed legislation that would remove the MEK from the State Department’s list of designated foreign terrorist organizations; and that would also provide funding for the organization.⁸⁸

Section 4b: MEK Opponents within the US Government

Despite these efforts on the part of the MEK and its supporters, however, the United States has not changed its policy towards the MEK and many US officials remain opposed to an alliance, or any manner of cooperation, between the MEK and the United States. According to an anonymous State Department official, the MEK is still considered a threat to the United States because of the terrorist acts the organization has committed in the past. Many within the US government believe that their past acts of terrorism, especially those against Americans in the 1970s, indicate that the MEK is still a threat to the security of the United States.

The terrorist attacks that the MEK has conducted over the years against the United States and other countries are not the only potential stumbling blocks to the removal of the MEK from the State Department’s list of designated foreign terrorist organizations; and to an alliance between the organization and the United States. Evidence gathered by the US weapons inspectors in Iraq suggests that the MEK has profited from the oil-for-food program, a United Nations program that is currently under investigation for corruption. “Further complicating the issue, the report from the top US weapons inspector in Iraq said that the [MEK] received oil as part of the scandal-tainted oil-for-food program, earning it millions of dollars in profits,” although the MEK denies this assertion, claiming that it is an attempt to discredit the MEK.⁸⁹

The reputation of the MEK amongst US officials is plagued with other problems as well. MEK opponents stress that although the NCRI revealed the existence of two secret Iranian nuclear sites in 2002, the intelligence record of the MEK is inconsistent and often completely inaccurate. Furthermore, even if the MEK's status as a foreign terrorist organization changes, argue MEK opponents, their resemblance to cults; their total control over their members' marriages and divorces; and their domination over their members' children are reason enough to eliminate any potential cooperation between the United States and the MEK.⁹⁰

Appendix⁹¹

Satellite Imagery



NIMA map of area west of Baghdad, showing MEK training facility.



CIB image showing MEK Training Camp to the east of the city of Fallujah.



Overview of MEK training camp, as of 10/26/02. (Source:Digital Globe)



View of headquarters complex of MEK facility, 10/26/02. (Source: Digital Globe)



Detail of headquarters complex,



Detail of headquarters complex,

10/26/02. (Source: Digital Globe)



**Image of MEK headquarters complex
from US Dept. of State publication
"Saddam Hussein's Iraq," Sept. 1999
(Updated 3/24/00)**

10/26/02. (Source: Digital Globe)

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2003



Camp St.-Mère is a forward base of the Army's 82nd Airborne Division.

Camp St Mere - 2003

Endnotes

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