

ParsBrief

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Exiled Armed Group Abuses Dissident Member

Opposition Group Seeks Recognition and Support in Western Capitals

Human Rights Watch

Full Report

(Paris, May 19, 2005) -- An armed Iranian opposition group in exile, the Mojahedin Khalq Organization, has subjected dissident members to torture and prolonged solitary confinement, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

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

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

One former high-ranking MKO member, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, was held in solitary confinement for eight-and-a-half years, from September 1992 to January 2001. The MKO then turned him over to Iraqi authorities. He was held in Abu Ghraib prison until 2002, when he was forcibly repatriated to Iran. The witnesses also reported two cases of deaths under interrogation by MKO operatives.

Stork said "it would be a huge mistake to promote an opposition group that is responsible for serious human rights abuses."

Mojahedin in Oil-for-Food scandal

The Weekly Standard

May 30, 2005

Republican senator Norm Coleman, is leading one of eight investigations into the corruption and mismanagement of the U.N.'s largest-ever humanitarian relief effort.

The basic outline of the scandal is simple: Saddam Hussein used the Oil-for-Food program to circumvent U.N. sanctions imposed after the Gulf war and to enrich himself and his allies. He did this by bribing leading journalists and diplomats and demanding kickbacks from those who profited from selling Iraqi oil.

...The Coleman-Levin reports base their conclusions on a wide variety of evidence including documents from the Iraqi Oil Ministry and the State Oil Marketing Organization that record the transactions in detail. Investigators also conducted dozens of interviews with senior Iraqi officials, including Aziz and Ramadan, who supported and in many cases expanded upon the documentation.

In early June, the Coleman-Levin committee will make available a ... report on the Iraqi regime's funding of terrorist entities. They will lay out a case study of the allocations provided to the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK), a terrorist group Hussein funded to conduct operations against Iran. Michael Scheuer, former head of the CIA's Osama bin Laden unit and author of *Imperial Hubris*, described some of the work the MEK did for Hussein in his 2002 book, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*. Osama bin Laden "may have trained some fighters in Iraq at camps run by Saddam's anti-Iran force, the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK)," Scheuer writes. "The first group of bin Laden's fighters is reported to have been sent to MEK camps in June 1998; MEK cadre were also then providing technical and military training for Taliban forces and running the Taliban's anti-Iran propaganda." ...

Iran Wants the Return of Mojahedin

Mehr News

Zebari: Iraq agreed to add to the charges of Saddam.

"Baghdad has agreed with Iran to add invading Iran to the charges of Saddam and his aides," Iraqi foreign ministry announced yesterday.

According to AFP, two sides have agreed that Iraqi former leaders should be tried for war crimes, crimes against humanity and military invasion against Iran and Kuwait.

In addition to the request for adding these charges to Saddam's case, Iran has asked for the return of hundreds of MKO members, still under the supervision of the US in Iraq. Washington claims that they have been disarmed and are no longer considered a threat for Iran.

Besides, Iraq has asked Tehran to give back fighter planes that has been sent to Iran before the Gulf War.

It's notable that Saddam and 11 of his Ba'th party leaders are in US custody. They're charged with attacking Kuwait, suppressing Kurds and Shiites and ... but nothing had been mentioned of attacking Iran.

MKO in Canadian Blacklist

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada

OTTAWA , May 24, 2005 -- Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Honourable Anne McLellan today announced that the Government of Canada has listed the following entities, pursuant to the Criminal Code:

The Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) is an Iranian terrorist organization that was based in Iraq until recently. This group is determined to overthrow the current regime in Iran and establish a democratic, socialist Islamic republic. They support the use of physical force, armed struggle or jihad if necessary.

The Kahane Chai (Kach) is a group of Jewish terrorists whose overall aim is to restore the biblical state of Israel . To this end, the group aims to intimidate and threaten Palestinian families and mount sustained political pressure on the Israeli government.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the group Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), espouses an Islamist, anti-Western ideology whose political or religious objective is to overthrow the administration of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and to create an Islamist fundamentalist state. Since 2002, Hekmatyar has reportedly established a base, recruited new members and initiated mobile training camps with Al Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan .

The Government of Canada has determined that these entities knowingly engaged in terrorist activity. This brings to 38 the number of listed entities under the Criminal Code.

"Canada is committed to taking all necessary steps as part of the international effort to bring terrorists to justice and to ensure terrorists are denied access to funding," said Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan. "The listing of entities is an important part of that ongoing effort."

Any person or group listed may have its assets seized and forfeited. There are severe penalties, including up to ten years imprisonment, for persons and organizations that deal in the property or finances of any listed entity. In addition, it is a crime to knowingly participate in, contribute to, or facilitate the activities of a listed entity.

Under the Criminal Code, the Governor in Council may list an entity on the recommendation of the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Recommendations made by the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness are based on a rigorous evaluation of the facts and the Governor-in-Council must approve the listing. Once approved, the decision is published in the Canada Gazette.

The Act also provides an explicit appeal process, including a provision that a listed entity can apply to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to be removed from the list.

A separate mechanism for listing entities exists pursuant to Canada's United Nations Suppression of Terrorism Regulations (UNSTR) under the responsibility of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. These regulations enable Canada to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1267 and 1373, which, among other things, calls on states to freeze terrorist assets without delay.

Like the Criminal Code, the UNSTR requires all Canadian financial institutions to freeze the assets of a listed entity and places a prohibition on fundraising activities. Entities are added to the schedule to the UNSTR where there are reasonable grounds to believe that the entity is associated with terrorist activity.

Regardless of whether an entity is listed under the Criminal Code or the UNSTR, any individual participating in terrorist activities as defined in the Criminal Code can be investigated and prosecuted under the statute.

The names of listed entities under the Criminal Code, and background information can be found on the Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada website at www.psepc.gc.ca under National Security, Listing Process.

Neocons' Pet Iranian Revolutionaries Accused of Torture

Antiwar.com

Jim Lobe

An Iranian rebel group that is aggressively campaigning for Washington's support as part of a "regime change" strategy in its homeland has committed serious abuses, including torture and prolonged isolation, against dissident members, according to a leading human rights watchdog.

The group, the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), insists that it should lead a U.S.-backed effort to bring what it has termed democratic rule to Iran. Last month, it organized a rally, attended by several powerful Republican lawmakers and billed as the "2005 National Convention for a Democratic, Secular Republic in Iran," at Washington's historic Constitution Hall.

But MEK's own human-rights record during its almost 20 years as an armed group sheltered and supported by former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein belies its professed commitment to democratic rule, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a 28-page report, "No Exit: Human Rights Abuses Inside the MEK Camps," released Thursday.

Joe Stork, Washington director of HRW's Middle East division. " it would be a huge mistake to promote an opposition group that is responsible for serious human rights abuses."

The report comes amid rising tensions between Washington and Tehran focused primarily on U.S. charges that Iran is building a nuclear weapon, a development that President George W. Bush has described as "unacceptable."

The U.S. administration has not yet explicitly endorsed "regime change" in Iran, but hardliners based primarily in Vice President Dick Cheney's office and at the Defense Department have made little secret of their belief that such a policy should be adopted. Their only question is how best to achieve that goal.

Since the March, 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, where the MEK had been based since 1986, the group has tried to persuade Washington that it holds the key to overthrowing the Islamic Republic next door.

It has been backed in this quest by right-wing lawmakers, a group of hardline neoconservatives and retired military officers called the Iran Policy Committee (IPC), and some U.S. officials – particularly in the Pentagon – who believe that the MEK could be used to help destabilize the Iranian regime, if not eventually overthrow it in conjunction with U.S. military strikes against selected targets.

While the group's supporters in the Pentagon so far have succeeded in protecting the several thousand MEK militants based at Camp Ashraf near the Iranian border from being dispersed or deported, they have failed to persuade the U.S. State Department to take the group off its terrorist list, to which it was added in 1997 based on its attacks during the 1970s against U.S. military contractors and its participation in the 1979 seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran. The European Union (EU) also cites the MEK as a terrorist organization.

After a year-long tug-of-war between the two U.S. agencies, a truce between State and the Pentagon was apparently worked out. MEK members at Camp Ashraf were designated "protected persons" under the Geneva Conventions.

Since then, the Pentagon has recruited individual members of the MEK to infiltrate Iran as part of an effort to locate secret nuclear installations, according to recent articles published in The New Yorker and Newsweek magazines. At the same time, nearly 300 members have taken advantage of an amnesty in Iran to return home, leaving a total of 3,534 MEK members inside Camp Ashraf as of mid-March, according to the HRW report.

In this context, the MEK and its supporters have been campaigning hard for the group to be "de-listed" by the State Department as a terrorist group. That appeared to be the principal demand of last month's rally, which was addressed via video-conference by MEK's co-president, Maryam Rajavi.

The group, one of whose Washington representative, Ali Safavi, described it as "Tehran's greatest and most feared nemesis" in a recent Washington Times column, also claims a commitment to democracy.

In another column published by the International Herald Tribune in January, Rajavi, who also heads the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a MEK front group, stressed that she was "committed to holding free and fair elections within six months of regime change, to electing a constituent assembly and handing over affairs to the people's elected representatives."

Those claims are likely to invite greater skepticism in light of the new HRW report, which is based on a series interviews between February and May 2005 with 12 former MEK members currently living in Europe.

They testified to a pattern of torture, beatings, and prolonged detention in solitary confinement at military camps in Iraq after they criticized the group's policies and what they called its undemocratic practices, or indicated that they planned to leave the organization. Two of the interviewees said they had personally witnessed the deaths of two prisoners under interrogation.

Those who wished to leave the organization were held incommunicado in special units in the camps, they said. If they held a high rank in the MEK, they were held for years; one of the interviewees reportedly was held for a total of eight and a half years; another for five years.

The most brutal treatment was meted out to suspected dissidents in secret prisons located within the MEK camps, according to the report. Four of the witnesses, who were suspected of dissident views, testified that they had all been severely tortured and forced to sign false confessions asserting that they had links to Iranian intelligence agents.

Three of them witnessed the death of Parviz Ahmadi, a former unit commander, in February 1995, shortly after a particularly severe beating. His death was reported three years later in the MEK's publication, Mojahed, which described him as a "martyr" killed by Iranian intelligence agents.

Five of the witnesses were eventually transferred to Abu Ghraib prison during the 1990s and released by Saddam Hussein's government in 2001 or 2002.

The testimonies included in the report also lend weight to the view that the MEK is more of a cult than a political movement. They suggest that the group's exile in the early 1980s, followed by the marriage of Masoud and Maryam Rajavi in 1985, set off a series of phases in what the

husband-and-wife team declared was a permanent "ideological revolution" that the couple embodied.

These included compulsory divorce of married couples, regular self-criticism sessions, renunciation of sexuality, and absolute mental and physical dedication to the leadership. "The level of devotion expected of members was on stark display in 2003 when the French police arrested Maryam Rajavi in Paris," HRW said. "In protest, 10 MEK members and sympathizers set themselves on fire in various European cities; two of them subsequently died."