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UN to probe shooting of 34 Iranian dissidents in Iraq

By Jonathan Manthorpe, Vancouver Sun, April 22, 2011

Why they were killed is a matter of bitter and angry disagreement for the investigation to sort out

During the night of April 8, there was a hail of gunfire at Camp Ashraf, about 60 kilometres north of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, in which 34 people were killed and another 325 wounded.

The victims are Iranian dissidents who fled their country in the early 1980s and were given refuge in Iraq by Saddam Hussein, then at war with the new Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini in Tehran.

But why these people were killed and wounded two weeks ago, and by whom, is a matter of bitter and angry disagreement that a United Nations investigation will try to sort out.

The Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki admits its troops killed three of the Camp Ashraf Iranians when they threw rocks at army vehicles.

But the Baghdad government says the rest were shot by the Camp Ashraf guards themselves.

This plays to widely circulated reports that the People's Mujahideen Organization of Iran (PMOI), which controls the 3,400 people in the camp, has become a cult.

Former members and human rights organizations have reported the leadership bans anyone leaving on pain of death and maintains prisons where torture is frequently used.

Some escaped PMOI camp inmates claim the organization recruits young people from overseas Iranian communities, including Canada.

The youths go to Camp Ashraf for a "tour" of several weeks and in many cases have not been allowed to leave or have chosen not to.

Some human rights organizations have documented dozens of cases of both teenage boys and girls remaining at the camp after their "tours."

In 2004, Canadian officials visited the camp to interview a young woman, 17-yearold Somaye Mohammadi, on behalf of her Iranian-Canadian father, Mustafa Mohammadi, who believed she was being held against her will.

The purpose of the interview was frustrated when PMOI officials refused to allow the Canadian diplomats to interview the young woman in private.

A 2006 report from Toronto's Centre for Thought, Dialogue and Human Rights in Iran names seven Canadian girls and three boys among the dozens of teenagers at Camp Ashraf.

Their status now is unknown.

The PMOI is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States and Canada, and until recently was on a similar European Union list.

But supporters of the PMOI, including among the Iranian diaspora from which the group draws its funds and considerable political support, say the attack on Camp Ashraf was a planned and purposeful massacre by Iraqi troops on behalf of, or as a favour to, the Iranian government in Tehran.

PMOI leaders, such as Massoud Rajavi and his wife Maryam, point out that like Iran, Iraq is now ruled by the country's Shiite Muslim majority after the 2003 ouster by the U.S.-led coalition of the secular Sunni Muslim regime of Saddam Hussein.

This scenario carries some weight because in July 2009, six months after the Americans handed over control of Camp Ashraf to the al-Maliki government, Iraqi security forces raided the camp.

Eleven Iranians were killed and 500 injured.

The al-Maliki government has said PMOI will no longer be allowed to mount operations against Iran from Iraqi soil.

In the past few days, Baghdad has said that all camp members must leave Iraq by the end of this year, either for Iran or some third country.

The PMOI was founded in Iran in 1965 by a group of Islamic Marxist college students opposed to the corrupt and degenerate rule of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

But the group has always, and continues to arouse, strong emotions not least among American movers and shakers.

Some, such as hard line officials in the administration of former president George W. Bush and including his vicepresident Dick Cheney, see the PMOI as a liberation movement and a useful ally against the Iranian regime.

Officials claim to have received from PMOI important intelligence about Iran's nuclear development program.

Others point out that PMOI began life as a vehemently anti-American organization that used terrorist attacks to kill at least six Americans in Iran during the reign of the Shah.

This view holds that nothing much has changed, that despite the PMOI claiming to have become purely a political party, its ideology remains antipathetic to American and western civic values.

Iran with the PMOI in power would be no better than the Islamic regime now ruling in Tehran, says this view.

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Iraq: Ashraf camp victims killed by own guards

Agence France Presse, April 15, 2011

Deaths resulting from an Iraqi army raid on an Iranian opposition camp on its soil were caused by the camp's own guards firing on residents attempting to escape, an Iraqi spokesman said Thursday .

The comments from Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh came shortly after a United Nations spokesman in New York said 34 people were killed in the April 8 raid on Camp Ashraf, the residence of the People's Mujahedeen of Iran (PMOI), in Diyala province north of Baghdad .

"Our Iraqi security forces believe that this (the deaths) has been done by their (the PMOI) guards killing those who were willing to escape from the camp," Dabbagh said in a text message to AFP, adding that the government was investigating the issue .

"Similar methods have been used before by them " .

Deputy UN spokesman Farhan Haq earlier told AFP in New York: "We are aware of 34 bodies at Camp Ashraf and nearby " .

A spokesman for the camp gave the same death toll, but Iraqi security and hospital officials have said three died .

The PMOI used Camp Ashraf, which houses some 3,500 people, as a base for launching attacks on Iran during the rule of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, but US forces disarmed the group after the 2003 invasion of Iraq .

Dabbagh also said that Iraq was willing to provide "all logistical support to facilitate the desires of Camp Ashraf residents who want to leave Iraq " .

On Monday, Dabbagh said that the PMOI had to leave Iraq by the end of the year .

MKO defectors offered suicide option

PressTV - Apr 20, 2011

A Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) defector says any member of the terrorist group who wishes to leave has no choice but to commit suicide with a cyanide pill.

Speaking at a press conference at the Iraqi Defense Ministry in Baghdad on Tuesday, former MKO member Maryam Sanjabi said, "When I was appointed as a senior member of the MKO leadership council, I was told that I could never leave the organization. Otherwise, I had to kill myself by taking a cyanide pill.

"It is a custom within the organization to exterminate its defectors. Such a measure on occasions has been emphasized by [MKO leader] Massoud Rajavi. Two members of the MKO leadership council were killed some 2 years ago when they wanted to desert the organization."

"Even some members of MKO leadership council are currently held in captivity in Camp Ashraf because they have sought to defect. MKO members are afraid to disclose what is happening to them for fear of their lives."

Having lived in misery and under pressure for many years, Sanjabi surrendered herself to the Iraqi forces deployed near the camp last week.

"None of the residents of Camp Ashraf have the right to contact their families... The only thing that can separate a member from the MKO is death," she said.

"The leaders of the camp have spent millions of dollars to train the residents of the camp on how to launch attacks and even encounter the Iraqi security forces," Sanjabi added.

On Tuesday, three MKO defectors gave an account of their ordeals during their stay at Camp Ashraf in Iraq.

The spokesperson of the Iraqi Defense Ministry, General Mohammed al-Askari, said in a Tuesday press conference in Baghdad that the three former MKO members had escaped from Camp Ashraf and surrendered to the Iraqi security forces, a Press TV correspondent reported.

The official said that the defectors have provided the Iraqi government with the evidence required to shut down the camp according to international law.

The former members of the terrorist group say the residents of Camp Ashraf are totally cut off from the outside world and are often tortured and traumatized for any show of dissent. Consequently, they are afraid to escape.

Abdullatif Shadvari, a former MKO member, who escaped from the camp two months ago, earlier said, "The punishment of those who try to escape from Camp Ashraf... is execution."

On April 8, at least 34 people were reportedly killed in clashes between Iraqi security forces and MKO members residing in Camp Ashraf.

Iraqi forces say there is evidence that the people have been killed by the organization itself.

On April 11, Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said the cabinet is determined to shut down the camp.

The group fled to Iraq in 1986, where it enjoyed the support of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and set up Camp Ashraf in Diyala Province near the Iranian border.

More than 3,000 MKO members are residing at the camp. In addition, the MKO sends elements to Iran on spy and terrorist missions.

The organization is also known to have cooperated with Saddam in suppressing the 1991 uprisings in southern Iraq and the massacre of Iraqi Kurds.

The MKO is listed as a terrorist organization by much of the international community, and is responsible for numerous terrorist acts against both Iranians and Iraqis.

Iran has repeatedly called on the Iraqi government to expel the group, but the US has been blocking the group's expulsion by pressuring Baghdad against such a move.

German Human Rights Commissioner calls on Ashraf Camp Leader (to forego violence
and grant access to Camp residents)

German Human Rights Commissioner, April 23, 2011

press release

Human Rights Commissioner on the situation in the Iraqi Camp Ashraf

date of issue 20.04.2011

Markus Löning, the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid at the Federal Foreign Office, issued the following statement today (20 April):

Zusatzinformationen“According to information confirmed by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), 34 people were killed and numerous others injured when Iraqi security forces forcibly entered Camp Ashraf.

I find this deeply regrettable, and I urge the Iraqi government to immediately commence an independent investigation into these events and to enable the injured to receive medical care. Iraqi security forces are called upon to proceed responsibly and with a sense of proportion, and without endangering any more lives.

At the same time I appeal to the leaders of Camp Ashraf to forego violence and to grant an independent investigation commission full access to the camp. The leaders of Camp Ashraf must enable all of the injured to receive medical care, and must ensure full protection of the rights of the camp's inhabitants. This includes the right to leave the camp.”

Some 3500 members of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (MKO) and their family members currently live in Camp Ashraf. During the Iran-Iraq War, the MKO fought under Saddam Hussein against Iran. They are viewed as a strictly hierarchical organization which has never distanced itself from terrorist violence. It has often been reported that inhabitants of the camp have been prevented by their leaders from leaving Camp Ashraf.

The camp came under US control after American forces disarmed the MKO's military units in 2003; responsibility for Camp Ashraf was handed over to Iraq at the beginning of 2009. The Iraqi Government is eager to establish full state sovereignty over Ashraf, and to dismantle the camp structures.

Politicians in Diala renew rejection to Mujahideen Khalq presence

By Haleema Al-Azzawi - Aswat Al Iraq - April 7, 2011

Politicians in Diala province on Wednesday renewed their rejection to the presence of the Mujahideen Khalq organization in the Iraqi territories because of its interference in the internal affairs.

Speaking to Aswat al-Iraq news agency, Awad al-Rabie, a member of the municipality council of Abi Saida district, said “the council has proof and evidence that assert the involvement of the Iranian opposition group in supporting the armed groups, in addition to their continued attempts to flare up sectarian unrests in the country.”

He accused them of violating human rights in the Ashraf camp, as well as interfering in Iraqi internal affairs.

The Iranian opposition organization of Mujahideen-e-Khalq has been based in Camp Ashraf in Diala province, 57 km northeast of Baghdad, since 1980s during the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war.

Many political parties in the Iraqi government have been striving to drive the organization out of the Iraqi territories claiming that the Mujahideen-e-Khalq fighters took part in suppressing the Shiite uprising that broke out in southern Iraq after the second Gulf War in 1991 against the former regime.

The West has its own good and bad terrorists

Pravda.ru – April 16, 2011

Iran's Foreign Ministry is demanding that the European Union stop supporting the terrorists carrying out attacks against the Islamic Republic. Iran's Foreign Ministry press secretary, Mehmanparast Ramin, said that the EU should stop providing asylum for terrorist organizations like Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK).

The Iranian Foreign Ministry's announcement came after an April 8 attack by the Iraqi army on the mujahedin camp at Ashraf in Iraq that resulted in 34 people killed.

For their part, the Western and Iraqi media exploited the attack as a manifestation of Iranian aggression. And Iran's Foreign Ministry accuses them of supporting "terrorists who have killed more than 12,000 people." However, the West says that Iran is directing the activities of Shiite terrorist groups like Hezbollah.

Center for the Study of Modern Iran Director General Rajab Safarov explained why the West is supporting Mujahedin-e Khalq:

The Mujahedin-e Khalq (People's Opposition of Iran) is the most reactionary, capable and militarized of all the opposition groups. It periodically carries out terrorist attacks against the Islamic Republic. In fact, the West, the United States and the EU have been strengthening it and using it for their own purposes in an attempt to destabilize Iran. This is an Iranian-style "fifth column" in a multiple combination play against Iran.

The West expects to use the MEK to make Iran an obedient tool in its hands. The "mujahedin" have been actively collaborating with the West for more than 20 years. They previously had one main master/benefactor—Saddam Hussein—Iran's sworn enemy, who would not hesitate to use them for his own purposes when it suited him.

Despite receiving broad financial, political and information support, this group has very little credibility among the Iranians themselves and mainly relies on marginal

organizations, criminal elements, Iranian emigrants and Arab mercenaries. It is hampered by the fact that it openly fought against its own people during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The Iranians will never forget that, and the overwhelming majority considers the "mujahedin" traitors.

Now that Hussein has been overthrown, they are supported entirely by the West, as well as by puppet Arab regimes. The EU and the United States fund the MEK and make little effort to hide the fact. Their camps remain in Iraq, and American instructors provide training for the mujahedin. The United States has provided them with up-to-date equipment, which they use to carry out terrorist attacks for their own purposes. So after Saddam they were orphans for only a short time.

And the fact that the "mujahedin" are located in Iraq has been a real stumbling block in Iran-Iraqi relations during recent years. It is interesting that the West never tires of accusing Iran of meddling in Iraqi affairs, even though it does everything it can to see that Tehran reacts adequately to threats emanating from there. Under the circumstances, the Iraqi army is obviously forced for reasons of national security to make regular raids into Iraqi territory to destroy these terrorists, and each time they do so the West condemns it.

The current Iraqi government has been promising Iran for several years that it would eliminate the mujahedin camps, but nothing has been done yet. One of their justifications is that there are supposedly a large number of them; they have numerous families in Iraq, and if pressure is applied to them, they will disperse across Iraq and begin taking revenge. However, Western support for the mujahedin is an important factor keeping them in place.

In 2009, the EU legalized these terrorists when it removed them from the list of terrorist organizations. But that did not prevent it from accusing Iran of supporting terrorism. That is a blatant instance of the application of double standards: if Tehran does something, the West calls it terrorism. But it is not terrorism if the mujahedin with blood up to their elbows attack Iran. However, that is intrinsic to the way the United States and the EU understand "democracy."

We should add that the Iranian mujahedin feel at home both in the Iraqi camps and in Western countries, where they have delegations. It is revealing that the recent execution of the Dutch national Zahra Bahrami for involvement in their activities caused relations between Iran and The Netherlands to deteriorate sharply, and Amsterdam recalled its ambassador from Tehran.

The mujahedin are not simply a group of militants. In addition to the military wing—the National Liberation Army of Iran, or NLA—there are also political structures responsible for contacts with the West and obtaining financial assistance.

The organization's political wing is located in Paris. That was where the shadow parliament located itself in 1981. It consists of 570 members of various Iranian parties and factions, including members of the Communist Party of Iran, the Tudeh Party of Iran, the Fedayeen-e-Khalk and Howeyyat. There are also large branches of the MEK in the United States (Los Angeles, New York, Washington), Germany (Cologne) Italy and Canada.

The "mujahedin" also place great emphasis on conducting information warfare. They have numerous media outlets for that purpose, including radio stations like Radio-ye Iran e-Farda and Radio Sedaye Iran.

The organization's current leaders are Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, who travel among Washington, Paris and Baghdad. However, it would be a mistake to think that the mujahedin are evolving into a nonviolent organization.

Currently, they control more than 4500 fighters, most of whom are located in Iraq. But despite the Iranian terrorists' warm relations with the West, their relations with the Iraqi authorities are quite cool. The fact is that Saddam Hussein, who sheltered them, used Iranian emigrants, including the mujahedin, in punitive operations against the Kurds and Shiites; and American intercession is the only thing forcing the authorities to tolerate them for now.

The organization has an unusual history. It emerged in the late 1960s from student groups that had formed several years earlier. Its members were mostly the sons and daughters of Iranian merchants who were unhappy with the excessive Western influence during the Shah's time.

Their ideology gradually became a mixture of Marxism and Islamism, combined with a hatred for the West that appears unnatural at first glance. The organization very quickly became a terrorist group that initially fought a guerrilla war against the Shah's regime and his American masters.

In the 1970s, the Iranian mujahedin killed several American soldiers and civilians who were assisting the Shah. And they committed an act that was anathema to democracy in 1979, when they took part in the infamous attack on the American Embassy in Tehran. They had been instrumental in toppling the US puppet, the Shah. Whereas the people were brought out onto the streets by the ayatollahs, they and the fedayeen, who are now aligned with them, were primarily the ones who successfully fought the Shah's security forces (for example, they destroyed several of his helicopters over the course of several days).

However, the Americans quickly forgot their past transgressions; after all, when the ayatollahs monopolized power, they became a "clerical regime" that restrained Iran's growing influence during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, among other things.

The mujahedin quickly lost support within Iran itself: by the beginning of 1984, the ayatollahs' security services had smashed their underground, which had primarily been active in the cities. The mujahedin groups concentrated in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein formed them into units that fought their fellow Iranians.

But when the war ended, the Iranian mujahedin again turned to terrorist activities. They primarily operated outside Iran, begging forgiveness for their past offenses from American democracy. In April 1992, the organization attacked 13 Iranian embassies in various countries.

In June 1998, the mujahedin once again attempted to get a terror campaign going in Iran when they exploded three bombs in Tehran and killed the former warden of Evin Prison, Asadollaha Lajevardi.

And although they failed to rebuild their devastated clandestine network in Iran, they did not stop raids against the Islamic Republic. That provides a clear example of how terrorism and democracy can peacefully coexist. After all, the Western defenders of human rights need "their" bad guys to do their dirty work.

Of course, no one today denies the existence of Hezbollah-like pro-Iranian groups that fight their enemies using methods that are clearly not those of Mahatma Gandhi. As far as Iran itself is concerned, its approach looks more honest than that of the West. At least, unlike the Western countries, it does not array itself in democratic clothing.

And if the West is to avoid accusations of double standards, the genuine human rights fighters should not divide terrorists into "ours" and "theirs."

Will Giuliani invite MEK "freedom fighters" to relocate in Manhattan?

NIAC Insight – April 28, 2011

The MEK issued a statement late last week that not only casts serious doubt on their claims to have renounced terrorism but demands that they be allowed to come to the U.S. The group cites a disarmament deal they negotiated with the U.S. as the basis for the demand:

The Ashraf residents, in their two-day negotiations with (former Commanding General of U.S. Forces in Iraq) General Odierno on 9 and 10 May 2003, announced that after their

disarmament, upon conditions that the US is incapable of giving them protection in Iraq, they are ready to go to the US.

The referenced deal, negotiated after the toppling of the MEK's chief patron Saddam Hussein, apparently requires the United States to relocate MEK members in Iraq to the U.S. or E.U.:

...it is up to the US, in return to [sic] their disarmament and in accordance with the agreement signed with each of the residents, to transfer every one of them without exception to the US or European Union member States.

The fact that the MEK is designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization would prevent them from legally coming to the U.S., but an assortment of prominent U.S. politicians, lobbyists, and consulting firms are working to reverse that terror designation. However, the MEK statement also raises new questions about whether the group has truly renounced terrorism as they have claimed:

Hence, if in the future similar to the past, the goal of establishing various committees in Iraq's Prime Ministry is for the sole purpose of the residents' repression, killing and closing down Ashraf, there will be no choice left for Iran's freedom fighters other than resistance at any price.

So now that the MEK is threatening "resistance at any price" and demanding relocation to the U.S., the question is: will U.S. officials supporting MEK, some of whom have acknowledged receiving "substantial amount" of cash, invite these "freedom fighters" into their own backyards?

Perhaps Rudy Giuliani, who told an MEK conference in Paris last year that "the United States should not just be on your side...it should be enthusiastically on your side," knows of a good place in Lower Manhattan to relocate the group. Never mind that MEK leaders Massoud and Maryam Rajavi reportedly celebrated September 11th by broadcasting the attacks at Camp Ashraf. Rudy apparently has no problem with the Rajavis' declarations following September 11th that, "if (Al Qaeda) could do such a sophisticated military operation we must be able to do so in a much better manner," and, "wait and see the fruits of our revolutionary Islam!"

Or maybe Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX), the lead sponsor of a resolution calling for MEK to be removed from the U.S. terror list, could invite the group to Texas. I'm sure he would enjoy informing his constituents in Liberty County that 3,500 Marxist-Islamist "freedom fighters" will be moving in down the street.

Or who knows, maybe the MEK's U.S. supporters will be given pause by these new revelations, not to mention previous findings of torture and cult-like practices at Camp

Ashraf. Maybe they will be convinced to focus not on legitimizing the MEK's leaders but instead on the estimated seventy percent of Camp Ashraf residents that RAND estimates were brought there against their will and would leave MEK if given the chance.

But don't hold your breath. If officials are being paid "substantial" amounts of money to advocate on behalf of MEK and have a change of heart, they might have to give the money back.