

# ParsBrief

*Number 6*

*31 July 2004*

- The IHRC Statement on MKO
- Questions & Answers on MKO
- The Brief of United States Court of Appeals on MEK



### **The IHRC Statement on MKO**

IHRC, Islamic Human Rights Commission is deeply concerned at the latest inconsistent application of the definition of terrorism used by US and its allies. A ceasefire between US forces in Iraq and the Mojahedin – e – Khalgh Organization (MKO) , an anti – Iranian group responsible for attacks including bombings around the world , which have resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians.

The MKO were trained and funded in large part by the Saddam regime. IHRC expresses its concern that in addition to the ceasefire, the MKO have been allowed to retain their weapons. This continually blind – eye shown by the US and UK governments towards MKO terror camps is not only a shameful lack of consistency but a complete deficit of ethical motivations.

IHCR fears that the MKO will be granted carte blanche the freedom to continue its terror activities ...

IHCR notes that both the UK and US have designed the MKO as a terrorist organization. Indeed the MKO further participated in Saddam's brutal crushing of the Post – Gulf war and Shia civilian uprising.

### **Questions & Answers on MKO**

1 - What is Mujahedeen-e-Khalq?

Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) is the largest and most militant group opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Also known as the People's Mujahedeen Organization of Iran, MEK is led by husband and wife Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. MEK was added to the U.S. State Department's list of foreign terrorist groups in 1997 and to the European Union's terrorist list in 2002 because its attacks have often killed civilians. Despite MEK's violent tactics, the group's strong stand against Iran—part of President Bush's "axis of evil"—and pro-democratic image have won it support among some U.S. and European lawmakers.

## 2 - What are MEK's origins?

MEK was founded in the 1960s by a group of college-educated Iranian leftists opposed to the country's pro-Western ruler, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The group participated in the 1979 Islamic revolution that replaced the shah with a Shiite Islamist regime led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. But MEK's ideology, a blend of Marxism and Islamism, put it at odds with the postrevolutionary 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, MEK moved its headquarters to Iraq, which used MEK to harass neighboring Iran. During the 2003 Iraq war, U.S. forces cracked down on MEK's bases in Iraq, and in June 2003 French authorities raided an MEK compound outside Paris and arrested 160 people, including Maryam Rajavi.

## 3 - Who are MEK's leaders?

Maryam Rajavi, who hopes to become president of Iran, is MEK's principal leader; her husband, Massoud Rajavi, heads up the group's military forces. Maryam Rajavi, born in 1953 to an upper-middleclass Iranian family, joined MEK as a student in Tehran in the early 1970s. After relocating with the group to Paris in 1981, she was elected its joint leader and later became deputy commander-in-chief of its armed wing. Experts say that MEK has increasingly come to resemble a cult that is devoted to Massoud Rajavi's secular interpretation of the Koran and is prone to sudden, dramatic ideological shifts. After being released from police custody on bail, Maryam Rajavi was confined to the MEK compound in France, and the investigation continues. Massoud Rajavi was last known to be living in Iraq, but authorities aren't certain of his whereabouts or whether he is alive.

## 4 - Where does MEK operate?

The group's armed unit operated from camps in Iraq near the Iran border since 1986. During the Iraq war, U.S. troops disarmed MEK and posted guards at its bases. In addition to its Paris-based members, MEK has a network of sympathizers in Europe, the United States, and Canada. The group's political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, maintains offices in several capitals, including Washington, D.C.

## 5 - How big is MEK?

MEK is believed to have some 10,000 members, one-third to one-half of whom are fighters. Experts say its activities have dropped off in recent years as its membership has dwindled.

MEK has had little success luring new recruits and is composed mostly of its founding members.

#### 6 - What major attacks has MEK been responsible for?

The group has targeted Iranian government officials and government facilities in Iran and abroad; during the 1970s, it attacked Americans in Iran. While the group says it does not intentionally target civilians, it has often risked civilian casualties. It routinely aims its attacks at government buildings in crowded cities. MEK terrorism has declined since late 2001. Incidents linked to the group include:

The series of mortar attacks and hit-and-run raids during 2000 and 2001 against Iranian government buildings; one of these killed Iran's chief of staff

The 2000 mortar attack on President Mohammad Khatami's palace in Tehran

The February 2000 "Operation Great Bahman," during which MEK launched 12 attacks against Iran

The 1999 assassination of the deputy chief of Iran's armed forces general staff, Ali Sayyad Shirazi

The 1998 assassination of the director of Iran's prison system, Asadollah Lajevardi

The 1992 near-simultaneous attacks on Iranian embassies and institutions in 13 countries

Assistance to Saddam Hussein's suppression of the 1991 Iraqi Shiite and Kurdish uprisings

The 1981 bombing of the offices of the Islamic Republic Party and of Premier Mohammad-Javad Bahonar, which killed some 70 high-ranking Iranian officials, including President Mohammad-Ali Rajaei and Bahonar

Support for the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by Iranian revolutionaries

The 1970s killings of U.S. military personnel and civilians working on defense projects in Tehran

It's unclear how many attacks MEK has carried out: according to experts, the group's claims of responsibility for attacks in Iran are often exaggerated, and sometimes MEK is blamed by the Iranian government for attacks it didn't stage.

#### 7 - How is MEK funded?

When Saddam Hussein was in power, MEK received the majority of its financial support from the Iraqi regime. It also used front organizations, such as the Muslim Iranian Student's Society, to collect money from expatriate Iranians and others, according to the State Department's counterterrorism office. In 2001, the Justice Department accused seven Iranians in the United States of funneling donations—between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per day—collected at Los

Angeles International Airport to MEK. The money allegedly was for starving children in Iran; according to the FBI, it was used to buy arms.

8 - Did MEK have ties to Saddam Hussein?

Yes. Iraq was MEK's primary benefactor. Iraq provided MEK with bases, weapons, and protection, and MEK harassed Saddam's Iranian foes. Experts say MEK's attacks on Iran traditionally intensified when relations between Iran and Iraq grew strained. Iraq encouraged or restrained MEK, depending on its Baghdad's interests.

9 - Did U.S. forces crack down on MEK during the Iraq war?

Yes. In early April, U.S. forces bombed MEK bases. On April 15, though, the United States signed a ceasefire with MEK, the first such agreement between the United States and a terror group. The ceasefire reportedly instigated fierce debate among President Bush's national security advisers. Under pressure from the State Department, U.S. officials changed course and disarmed MEK, but pledged to guard MEK from attacks by Iranian forces or the Badr Brigade, an Iranian-backed group of Iraqi exiles.

10 - Have there been other anti-terror moves directed at MEK?

Yes. On June 17, French authorities arrested some 160 MEK members, including Maryam Rajavi, outside Paris. They accused MEK of conspiring to prepare and finance acts of terrorism from the group's French base, where authorities also confiscated \$8 million. All the suspects were subsequently released, including Rajavi, but many were confined to their homes while the investigation continues.

11 - When did MEK target Americans?

In the early 1970s, angered by U.S. support for the pro-Western shah, MEK members killed several U.S. soldiers and civilians working on defense projects in Iran. Some experts say the attack may have been the work of a Maoist splinter faction operating beyond the Rajavi leadership's control. MEK members also supported the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, in which 52 Americans were held hostage for 444 days.

12 - Do some U.S. lawmakers support MEK?

Yes. MEK—or at least its political wing, the National Council of Resistance—has enjoyed the support of some members of Congress for several years. In August 2001, 30 U.S. senators asked the Bush administration to reconsider MEK's designation as a terrorist group. Since September 11, some U.S. lawmakers have withdrawn their support; others have reiterated it.

The European Union added MEK to its roster of terrorist organizations in May 2002, despite some support for the group among European lawmakers.

### 13 - Why do some U.S. lawmakers support MEK?

Because it opposes Iran—a regime that the U.S. government says sponsors terrorism and seeks to acquire weapons of mass destruction. MEK has reportedly provided the U.S. government with valuable intelligence about Iran's nuclear program. Over the years, MEK became more palatable to many in Congress by abandoning its Marxist doctrine and recasting itself as a pro-democratic, pro-capitalist organization that supports the rights of women and minorities. The group has a female leader and about half of its troops in Iraq are women. Some skeptics argue that the prominent role of women in MEK is less a reflection of the group's values than a publicity tool aimed at garnering support among Iranian exiles opposed to the Tehran government's religious restrictions on women.

Some terrorism experts also call for MEK's removal from the State Department terror list. They argue that MEK has not attacked Americans in three decades. They also say that placing the group on the terror list was a misguided conciliatory gesture to Iran and that MEK instead should be supported as a legitimate source of resistance to the Iranian government.

### 14 - Does MEK have support in Iran?

Very little, according to experts and press reports. Iranians criticize MEK for accepting support from Iraq, carrying out attacks against Iran on Iraq's behalf, and murdering Iranian civilians.

### 15 - Does MEK consider itself a terrorist group?

No, and it has protested being labeled one by the U.S. government. In 2001, MEK was granted a hearing by the State Department after a U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals found that the group's due-process rights were violated when it was denied the chance to oppose its terrorist-group designation. MEK's place on the terror-group list was subsequently reaffirmed by Secretary of State Colin Powell. However, the Washington, D.C., office of the National Council of Resistance remains open.

### 16 - Is MEK a cult?

We don't know, but it has some of the trappings of a cult. Members reportedly deify Maryam Rajavi; her photographs are found throughout MEK camps, and followers staged public self-immolations to protest her arrest. Members are said to undergo regular self-criticism sessions. They also reportedly are required to divorce; children are separated from their parents and

sent to Western nations for adoption by Iranian families. When they reach 18, some of them return to join 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,” according to a New York Times Magazine account.

TERRORISM : Q&A website

### **The Brief of United States Court of Appeals on MEK**

The United States Court of Appeals, on July 9th, 2004 refused the fourth petition of National Council of Resistance to appeal the existence of this organization in the list of State Foreign terrorists. The court has stated the complete text of its order on its website. In the following lines you can read a brief of this order:

United States Court of Appeals  
District of Columbia  
Argued April 2, 2004  
Decided July 9, 2004

No. 01 – 1480

Petitioner: Nation Council of Resistance of Iran  
Respondents: Department of state and ColinLPowell, secretary of State  
Case: Petition of the Review of Foreign Ministry Orders

Paul F.Enzinna argued the cause and filed the brief for petitioner, Martin D. Monsker entered an appearance.

Douglas letter, Litigation Counsel, U.S. Department of Justice, argued the cause for respondents. With him on the brief was Peter D. keisler, Assistant Attorney General.

Circuit Judges: Henderson, Garland and Roberts

Roberts, circuit Judge: this is the fourth court in a series of related cases concerning the biennial designations by the Secretary of State of the Mojahedin – e – organization (MKO) and its aliases as a foreign terrorist organization.

... National Council of Resistance, after the arguments and investigations according the administrative records, is concluded as an FTO (Foreign Terrorist Organization) with the governing statute and all constitutional requirements. We therefore deny the petition for review.