

THE THIRD WAY

Anne Singleton

The context of this third way is that the MKO's forces amount to between 2-3 thousand ageing combatants, whose average age is over 45 years old, and in addition, according to the US State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism 2004, "a significant number of MEK personnel have "defected" from the Ashraf group, and several dozen of them have been voluntarily repatriated to Iran."

Recent public and political debate over Iran's nuclear power program, has polarized in some circles around proposals for regime change and how this might be achieved.

On 13 April, the Middle East sub-committee of the US House of Representatives discussed legislation relating to Iran. The Iran Freedom Support Act (HR 282) defines its purpose as, "To hold the current regime in Iran accountable for its threatening behavior and to support a transition to democracy in Iran." The legislation calls on the White House to support pro-democracy forces that oppose the Iranian regime.

In a similar vein one US think tank called the Iran Policy Committee states that "in consideration of the perceived threat to the US from Iran, the question is, what means should the President use to decrease threats posed by Iran:

- Continued negotiations, including positive and negative incentives
- Future military action
- Support for the Iranian opposition

These options are neither mutually exclusive nor logically exhaustive; but they do reflect courses of action being considered in Washington."

The report concludes that "Washington should consider a third alternative, one

that provides a central role for the Iranian opposition to facilitate regime change."

This introduction of a third alternative sounds familiar. We have heard about it from other circles:

Andrew Mackinlay, MP,
Speaking at the Symposium of
Parliamentarians and Jurists,
March 22, 2005

"Mrs. Rajavi, when she spoke in the European Parliament, quite rightly in my view, rejected the European Union's policy of engagement - or appeasement, as some of us would call it. But, as a proud Iranian woman, she also rejected any prospect of external aggression, and I applaud that. She pointed to a third way: facilitating the men and women of Iran themselves to change their country's regime and bring about justice and democracy."

Dr. Rudi Vis, MP
House of Commons, Hansard Daily
Debates, March 24, 2005

"Mrs. Rajavi... rightly rejects the appeasement approach that France, Germany and the UK want to follow. She also rightly rejects the war option. She presented a third option—change brought about by the Iranian people and the

Iranian resistance.

It is difficult to understand the appeasement road. Why would anyone be in favour of a regime that has no human rights, has a nuclear weapons program, exports terrorism and fundamentalism and has killed 120,000 [sic] of its own people? It is also difficult to understand the war option, particularly after Iraq. I would add that there are few similarities between the societies of Iran and Iraq.

Mrs. Rajavi's third way is surely the preferred option. It requires the proscription of the PMOI to be lifted as soon as possible."

Are we to assume then that the political debate in the USA about a third alternative is somehow linked to the Mojahedin promoting itself under the banner of the third way?

In April, Tom Tancredo (Republican, Colorado), acting as co-chair of the Iran Policy Committee also called for an end to the State Department's designation of the Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) as a terrorist group.

When we are talking about 'a central role for the Iranian opposition to facilitate regime change' or even the 'transition to democracy in Iran' surely what



Welcome to the May 2005 edition of Survivors' Report.

Survivors' Report is now one year old. However, rather than congratulating ourselves on getting it this far and resting on our laurels, we prefer to take the view that not enough has been done yet to expose the realities surrounding the Mojahedin Khalq cult and its leaders.

Survivors of the Rajavi Cult began writing this publication in English, and now also in French, with the determination to get information into the public arena. This is highly specific information and to that extent we are proud of our 'propaganda' document. From the start we knew that by concentrating only on the Mojahedin we would leave ourselves open to accusations of benefiting the Iranian regime by attacking its enemy. But we believe the opposite is true. We have seen that the regime benefits from the continued existence of the Mojahedin with its extreme agenda of violence and totalitarian leadership because it allows the

exclusion of the peaceful, democratic opposition as well as the reformists inside the regime while the hardliners and the Mojahedin take the ground and create false extremes. Removal of the Mojahedin from the equation will facilitate the emergence of real democratic opposition to the clerical rulers both inside and outside Iran. But simply publishing information about the Mojahedin has never been our only aim.

We are determined that among the talk of terrorism and politics and fundamentalism, the voices of the victims of this organisation should also be heard loud and clear.

Above all else, we want the world to recognise that the Mojahedin has committed and continues to commit grave violations of human rights against its own membership.

In this, it seems we have been very effective. The Mojahedin is now not only recognised internationally as a terrorist organisation, it is also acknowledged as a cult and as having sinister internal behaviour which is under investigation by more than one international human rights body. In the meantime, Survivors' Report will continue to expose the Mojahedin and its leaders. We thank you for your support. ■

needs to be clarified is what opposition should benefit from US governmental support? And in what ways it is anticipated that such opposition will oppose the regime in order to bring about regime change?

There are many, many individuals and groups, both inside and outside Iran who are actively seeking Iran's transition from clerical rule to secular rule and who seek the inclusion in a democratically elected government of representatives for the many different political, social and economic views which already exist in Iran.

Why then do we see promotion of the terrorist Mojahedin organization and a lack of recognition and support for more peaceful move-

ments of change in Iran?

One reason could be that the Mojahedin has had millions of dollars made available to it by Saddam Hussein for its propaganda activities in the West. The Mojahedin's success has always come at the expense of other groups whose efforts are not so lavishly funded and who do not practice the same totalitarian structure internally, and who do not employ a system of modern slavery in order to push forward their agenda. In spite of this discrepancy however, there has been no lack of information about the Mojahedin available to western politicians. The US State Department has now published its 2004 Country Reports on Terrorism. There is no reason to suppose that other governments take a different view.

Perhaps the real problem for politicians who support the Mojahedin is that they believe their own governments have designated the MKO as terrorist for political reasons, as part of deals with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In this case, only the Mojahedin's own words will have resonance for those determined to support the Mojahedin as the only alternative to the current regime.

Maryam Rajavi introduced her Third Way as a rejection of both appeasement and military intervention by a foreign power. She told her Western audience, "...There is a third option: If foreign obstacles are removed, the Iranian people and their organized resistance have the capability to bring about change. This is the only way to

prevent foreign invasion. ...the People's Mojahedin, (a member of the NCRI) the pivotal force within the Resistance..." For elucidation we can read the following article (translated from Farsi) by the Mojahedin's own theorist, Bijan Niabati, called the Third Way. In it, Mr Niabati says "The Third Way as the Mojahedin explain it [externally] means democratic changes in Iran through the Iranian people and the Iranian Resistance! In more understandable words, instead of a military offensive (as in the case of Iraq) or the policies of fruitless appeasement and ambiguity to achieve "regime change", it is better that the concerned world open the way for the Iranian Resistance and stop supporting the regime of the Islamic Republic!

The pure Farsi translation of this policy would be:

To arm the National Liberation Army again in a bid to move to topple the regime, and of course with air support from the Americans! No joking and no Taarof! [politesse]" [writer's emphasis]

For two decades, at the peak of its strength, the Mojahedin was poised to topple the regime in Iran with the backing of Saddam Hussein. The current demand for air support from the Americans betrays both its incompetence and its lack of independence. The Mojahedin is now desperately looking for a new sponsor. Yet the article concludes, "One should fight back with all force against any possibility of an American military assault." Does this not echo its violently anti-imperialist past?

What Bijan Niabati succeeds in doing in this article is to reassure the Marxist members of the Mojahedin – the ideological membership – that in spite of its false western face, the leadership – both Massoud and Maryam Rajavi – have not abandoned the core values and ideological beliefs of the organization, which are couched here in the ex-Soviet, Marxist style which is the inter-

nal language of the Mojahedin. The real context of this Third Way is that Maryam Rajavi has been investigated by the French Judiciary on terrorism charges and will soon be brought to trial along with several other leading MKO members in France.

The context of this Third Way is that the MKO's forces amount to between 2-3 thousand ageing combatants, whose average age is over 45 years old, and in addition, according to the US State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism 2004, "a significant number of MEK personnel have "defected" from the Ashraf group, and several dozen of them have been voluntarily repatriated to Iran."

With increasing disaffection and desertion among even the Mojahedin's closest supporters and members, can we assess the Third Way as anything but a desperate plea for survival at any cost.

The Third Way!

**By Bijan Niabati
April 16, 2005**

Last Thursday the large Congress of Iranians was held in Washington. The organizers of this meeting were the "Mojahedin Khalq Organization", sponsored and supported by the "Enterprise" Institute and "Michael Ledeen" himself. Last year, a concert in Washington was also organized and sponsored by the same people...

My enemy's enemy is my friend!

I have written articles about the "Enterprise" Institute before and in an article *The confrontation of two analyses in the Paris show*, 9th Mordad 1382 (July 31, 2003) I mentioned that: "Regime change is something that has been decided upon. The problem is, an acceptable alternative to take power". The commissioning of such an alternative or a "desirable alternative" has been the aim of this Institute. The problem it faced on one side was that forces

acceptable to it, the monarchists and liberals, had neither a viable organization to accept leadership nor had they the "means and tools" to bring about regime change. And on the other side, the forces which were unacceptable, the Mojahedin and their allies in the "National Council of Resistance", not only had amazing organizational capability and a charismatic leader and an experienced, controllable, mechanized army which would put it in position as the only serious force outside the ruling regime of Iran, but it also had the potential and the tools for toppling the ruling regime of Iran!

The line taken by this Institute therefore in the last one or two years has always been to gather together the totally dependent figures of the Monarchists with the totally independent forces of the Mojahedin Khalq.

On the other side, for the Mojahedin, who were under the crushing pressure of nine foreign powers, and which the only superpower of the world had decided to physically destroy, for the Mojahedin to choose the pragmatic policy of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" would be the peak of their political awareness and expertise if they would be successful without giving up their "hegemony" whatever the price! I wrote in my article two years ago at the height of the 17th June attacks: "for the Mojahedin, whatever else may be considered as negotiable, the issue of "hegemony" is not negotiable! If not, there would not have been any need for the 'Ideological Revolution'."

The ideal for the Mojahedin is to be recognized by the Americans by their military might in the context of the "National Liberation Army" and their one voice political alternative under the name of the "National Council of Resistance"!

This ideal is as real! as the other side's ideal, which is [to emulate] the role of "the [Afghan] Northern Alliance" but this time against Iran by the Mojahedin! As important and vital as it is for the

Mojahedin to keep their "revolutionary democratic" hegemony, it is as important and vital for the Americans to see the imposition of a "dependent Bourgeois anti revolutionary" as a real test of trust for the Mojahedin and nothing else. " (*The confrontation of two analyses in the Paris show*, 9th Mordad 1382 (July 31, 2003)

Referendum!

The desired method for the Americans for a controlled change in the regimes in the region is to start a Velvet Revolution. It means that either the dictatorial regimes should accept the basic fundamental of referring to the vote of the people and prepare their societies for the attack of "liberal democracy" or they will be sidelined!

Recently, I heard a sentence quoting "Ali Abdullah Saleh" the president of Yemen saying that "Either we will cut and dress our hair ourselves or they will shave it for us"!

Relative to the above, the presence of "Richard Perl", theorizer of the hawks in the present American administration, participating in last year's concert in Washington to preliminarily introduce and emphasize the [Mojahedin's] "referendum" as a so called solution presented by the Mojahedin, was to try to present it in a framework of non violent (read anti-revolutionary) line of action. In this respect, the Mojahedin, by presenting the tactic of "referendum" purchased its ticket to enter the present political checks and balances.

After entering the scene, contrary to the expectation of many whose mouths were slaving in anticipation of the fall of the hegemony of Mojahedin!, the Mojahedin not only did not accept the disgrace of sitting with the counter revolutionaries supported by "Enterprise", but by introducing the "Third Way" to the European Parliament, they consequently entered the international equation over the problem of Iran in a much higher level.

The Mojahedin had sent the message to the other side that if there is going to be any cooperation, the condition is that your deals must be only with us. Certainly do not ask us to sit down with any other group or force!

The reaction of the "Enterprise" institute was the premature and knee jerk "Referendum" proposal by "Mohsen Sazgara" with the support of "Reza Pahlavi"

under the umbrella of "Michael Ledeen". Not forgetting that in the last few years, there has been a history of contacts between the so called reformists inside the regime and the buried remnants of the Monarchists.

The only result they got from this program, was that the "Reza Pahlavi" card was burned by "Sazegara".

Current events are being pursued with new offensives by the Mojahedin on two fronts at the same time. Preparing the atmosphere for removing the name of the Mojahedin from the list of terrorism, and gathering international support for the Third Way! If the Mojahedin is successful in respect of the Third Way, they will be standing on the same principles they were insisting on before the occupation of Iraq.

What is the Third Way?

The Third Way as the Mojahedin explain it means democratic changes in Iran through the Iranian people and the Iranian Resistance! In more understandable words, instead of a military offensive (as in the case of Iraq) or the policies of fruitless appeasement and ambiguity to achieve "regime change", it is better that the concerned world open the way for the Iranian Resistance and stop supporting the regime of the Islamic Republic!

The pure Farsi translation of this policy would be:

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from the Americans! No joking and no Taarof! [politesse]

This is exactly what the Mojahedin are counting on. If this happens, I believe that the victory of the Mojahedin in an election after the fall of the regime is also guaranteed!

Because it would have all the legitimacy which will go to a force which has brought the dawn with the fall of the regime. In this respect, the guarantee given by the Mojahedin to the other side for a free and fair election after the regime toppled is such a small point that it would not bring any change in the power equation of after the downfall.

In another words, "the technique of bringing changes" to a dialectic relation, would be only in the hands of the force which is the instigator of the changes. One is not after the "reform" of this revolutionary force which will enjoy a hegemonic role.

By the same logic, it is obvious that any other proposed solution, that is, the dreamlike way of Referendum or the direct military intervention of America, would lead to the creation of any force except a revolutionary force!

The arguments about what this force, which would topple the regime and whose name would come out of the ballot boxes, would do with the International Monetary Bank or the World Bank or even how would it stop the rule of capitalism in "civil society" and in general what its balancing mechanisms would be in the long term program of a "United Middle East" and ... is another matter.

The proposed "referendum" solution cannot work. A velvet revolution in Iran can also be dismissed as a dream. One should fight back with all force against any possibility of an American military assault. The "Third Way" is the most logical way to confront the religious monster ruling Iran and is the end to a nightmare which has been expanding for more than a quarter of a century. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Killing Dissidents in Camp Ashraf, Iraq

[Irandidban.com, April 27, 2005](#)

Several instances of killing dissidents in Camp Ashraf have come to light during interviews with MKO defectors who have returned to Iran. The former members expressed willingness to testify in any court as to identities of the murdered members.

Alireza Spandar Fard, said in the interview:

“After they tortured me they took me to the cemetery in Camp Ashraf camp and told me that I should join the army or they would bury me there. They also said that they would write on my tombstone 'Martyred Mojahed' so they could take advantage of my death. Even when we were in the US camp, some our friends showed a mass grave to the Americans. They dug the place and found 7 to 10 bodies. The bodies had been limed to catalyze the decomposition of the bodies. Killing members was easy for the Mojahedin. If someone opposed them, he would be submitted to Iraq's Estekhbarat or would be killed. They said explicitly that nothing was needed except a packet of lime.”

Dar Mohammed Dahani, from Baluchistan, has taken legal action against Mojahedin. He says they (Mojahedin) killed his nephew Omar Dahani right in front of his eyes. Mahmood Akbari, from the city of Uromia, testified that one of his friends Alireza Saremi from Mashhad had been killed by the Mojahedin and is buried in the cemetery of Camp Ashraf, where “Martyred Mojahed Alireza Saremi” can be seen on his tombstone. Alireza Spandar Fard also reports of two suspicious suicides (a man called Soheil and a woman called Mohammadi.

Rajavi's Cult is disintegrating more rapidly than expected.

[Brussels, April 25, 2005](#)

The gathering of Mojahedin supporters in Washington DC in March was attended by three hundred people. Many of the historical neoconservative supporters of the organization - who have been hoping to find a way to use the MKO combatants in the event of military intervention in Iran - refused to participate. In a damage control project, the MKO staged another mass gathering in Brussels on 25th April 2005. The organization did not announce the number of participants, but some sources have put the number as low as seventy six people. The event was covered by the local news agency Belga which also omitted participating numbers, but quoted the Mojahedin as having gathered support from 12 members of parliaments from different countries. The organization has downplayed the failure of its event by blanking it from its Persian websites. But in order to keep face, it has resorted to Photoshop techniques to produce a retouched photograph on some of its English websites, while diverting visitors' attention away to the video link to Paris and Maryam Rajavi (whose trial on terrorist related charges is expected to start in the near future). The rapid decline in support for Maryam Rajavi on the one hand and the increasing

support for the victims of the cult among the opposition groups outside Iran, as well as western politicians and human rights personalities, is being viewed by many experts as highly significant. Reports suggest that in the face of this new phase of disintegration, the Rajavi Cult is having doubts about continuing with another pre-arranged carnival event organized for Sweden.

Mercenaries for sale!

[London, April 20, 2005](#)

A half page advertisement appeared in the Guardian newspaper advertised Maryam Rajavi's willingness to work as a mercenary in an imaginary pre-emptive war against Iran in exchange of taking her cult off the terrorism list. In a letter published the following day, the Iranian Embassy in London complained about the advertisement. But analysts believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran benefits when any attention is diverted away from the true democratic Iranian opposition toward this organisation which sided with Iraq in the 8-year war between the two countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran prefers to accept this cult as its opposition rather than democratic peaceful organisations which unlike MKO have roots in the Iranian community inside and outside Iran. The MKO has previously spent money stolen from the Central Bank of Iraq on lavish advertisements, most notably in the International Herald Tribune. And Fox News frequently airs their willingness to be used by whoever would like to wear the dirty shoes of Saddam Hussein.

Kidnap case brought to trial

[Germany, April 19, 2005](#)

A court started its preliminary procedures in a case against two MKO agents who tried to kidnap Mr. Farhad Javaheiyar from the streets of Cologne in Germany last year.

The Judge interviewed one of the accused (the whereabouts of his accomplice is as yet unknown) and asked questions about his involvement. The MKO had brought some of its agents into the court to intimidate Mr. Javaheiyar and on some occasions threatened him, which was of course added to the complaints. In Iraq, Mr. Javaheiyar had been handed over by Mr and Mrs Rajavi to Saddam's Intelligence agency and had been imprisoned in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison for refusing to cooperate with the anti-human expectations and orders of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi. It is believed that the kidnapping attempt by the MKO had been a futile attempt to silence Mr. Javaheiyar. Since his arrival in Europe, Mr. Javaheiyar has written many articles and books about his experiences in both MKO and Iraqi prisons. The trial is expected to continue over the next few months. ■

INSIDE OUT

Interview with Ebrahim Khodabandeh

March 2005

"The PMOI leaders must realize that year after year the situation in Iran has changed. Now the third generation after the revolution is stepping into Iran's social and political scene. Does the organization and its leaders believe they really understand their demands and their values clearly? I doubt it."

Introduction

Ebrahim Khodabandeh was a member of the Mojahedin-e Khalq organization and the National Council of Resistance of Iran. In 2003 he was arrested in Syria with a colleague whilst on an organizational mission to smuggle money and documents out of Iraq to take to Europe. After seven weeks in a Syrian jail, the men were transferred to Evin prison in Iran.

The two men were immediately put in contact with their families in Iran and have been allowed frequent home visits. Neither men have been subjected to ill treatment and are expected to be tried in the near future on charges relating to smuggling activities. Recently, Ebrahim Khodabandeh has spoken about his experiences with the Mojahedin and National Council of Resistance. Survivors' Report conducted this interview with him while he is still in prison.

You have worked for the NCRI in political circles in Europe. Could you explain the kind of work you undertook and evaluate how effective that work was?

Since the autumn of 1993 - that is when Maryam Rajavi, the president elect of the NCR, moved to Paris and from the time that the US State Department report first categorized the PMOI as a terrorist organization - all the PMOI's diplomatic and international relations have been conducted under the banner of the Council rather than the Organization. All the PMOI offices were ostensibly closed and in their place presidential offices of the NCRI were opened and we introduced ourselves as members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NCR.

The main purpose of our activities was to get political support at any possible level for the Council and its president elect and to get condemnation for the Iranian regime's violations of human rights. In this of course, the situation of women in Iran, the imposition of religious codes on society and the lack of democracy were our winning cards. We introduced the NCR, a coalition believing in feminism, secularism and pluralism, as the sole alternative to the Islamic fundamentalist regime of Iran.

After the terrorist attack of 11th September 2001 in New York, the political atmosphere in Europe changed completely and maintaining security became the primary goal. Terrorism was introduced as the immediate challenge facing the European Union. As a consequence of its sabotage activities inside Iranian cities conducted from Iraq, the PMOI was listed by the Terrorist Act 2000 in Britain and later in the European Union as a terrorist

organization. The Organization was politically cornered and its diplomatic activities were made ever more difficult.

Although the Council still had some effective support amongst parliamentarians due to their past connection and also due to their ignorance about events, it did not have any contact within the British government whatsoever. In fact, all foreign affairs departments everywhere were closed to its members. On one occasion, some British Labour MPs were asked why they had once supported the PMOI which their Government denounces as a terrorist organization. Their answer was that as MPs in the opposition they had no information about the hard facts, but that in Government they have access to intelligence which clearly demonstrates that the Organization is terrorist in nature.

In my opinion, the only effect our hard work collecting signatures ever had was just to lift the morale of our supporters to some small extent by advertising the worldwide support we had gained. This of course was to cover up our weakness in getting any results from our policy inside Iran of conducting military operations in the cities. The signatures collected from parliamentarians, which our department of International Relations had become so expert in, had no significant value in the real diplomatic world and had no effect on the policies of statesmen toward the organization in the relevant countries.

The NCRI describes itself as an alternative to the present ruling regime in Iran. What role does the NCRI play in Iranian politics today? Do you believe the NCRI can be instrumental in changing the constitution of Iran into secular democratic government?

The NCR is certainly the most organized and the most publicized alternative to the Islamic Republic outside Iran, so it definitely plays some role in the Iranian scene, although its effectiveness is deteriorating through time. In my opinion, they have failed to acknowledge the changes in Iran over the years since Khomeini's death. They still assess Iran's political scene as they used to analyze it two decades ago. Imprisonment, apart from all its hardship, has the benefit that one has enough time to study, think and look freely at one's past - something I had stopped doing once I joined the organization - and come to fresh conclusions. I have had the opportunity to read more books during the one year and nine months I have been in Evin prison than in my whole life before that. The memoir of my long standing dear friend from back in Newcastle, Dr Massoud Banisadr and 'Saddam's Private

Army' by my sister-in-law Anne Singleton, fascinated me the most and opened up my mind. Everything I have observed and read about the current situation in Iran was completely outside my knowledge and expectation. I have been speaking in detail with some individuals, inside prison as well as outside, who had been sent by the Organization from Iraq to perform terrorist activities in the cities using mortars, missiles, bombs and grenades. Those in prison were all treated equally well regardless of their political stance or their willingness to be cooperative or not. In these operations, there had been some civilian casualties. No one understood why the Organization started using violence again after a long period of military silence and after the political reforms in Iran had begun bearing fruit.

I believe the NCRI cannot change anything from outside Iran while insisting on armed struggle and the total overthrow of the regime entirely by outside forces and by relying only on foreign support. I believe that a long-standing struggle has been developed inside Iran and many people have paid the price so that now we are at the stage that Evin prison today is nothing like the Evin prison of the 1980s. This struggle, regardless of who sits in the Majlis or in the government, will continue and will find its way forward. And women and young people play a decisive role in this movement. I believe the slogans of the NCR have been masterminded for a western audience rather than the people inside Iran. Religion has strong roots in Iranian society and it is a total illusion to think that secularism can be established overnight in Iran with a bloody revolution.

Why do you think the MKO has been listed as a terrorist entity?

The organization announces this as a deal by western countries to appease the religious dictatorship in Iran and says billions of dollars are at stake. This may or may not be true. It is possible, as the PMOI insists it is, that other organizations fit the terrorist category but have not yet been labeled terrorist. But this does not alter the fact that until the spring of 2001 – that is when Iran launched 80 missiles at the NLA garrisons in Iraq just before the presidential election, and consequently the Iraqis stopped MKO combatants crossing the border to Iran any more - the Mojahedin used to send operational teams from Iraq to Iranian cities to perform sabotage activities which clearly endangered the lives of ordinary people. They may call themselves freedom fighters, but the world today recognizes this sort of activity as terrorism. We must also take into account the fact that the organization had stopped its military operations in Iran for a long time and then these actions were restarted when the results of social and political reforms, which started just after Khomeini's death, were quite visible. I should like to ask the organization whether the Islamic Republic today is the same as in the 1980s. Is the role and power of the Supreme Leader today exactly as it was 15 years ago? Can a person be executed now as easily as those who faced instant trials and executions when Khomeini was alive? You may have once thought that the armed struggle was some how justi-

fied. Would this apply to all time and all places regardless of the situation? Britain was a kingdom at the time of Henry VIII and today still, it is a kingdom. Was the monarch then the same as the monarch today? You could compare Iran today with Western Europe or North America which have more than a hundred years experience of parliamentary democracy and then instantly conclude that the regime in Iran is not democratic and must be toppled by force. But, if you see it instead with an open mind and take into account the best interests of the Iranian people, you will compare Iran today with its past and realize that it is more or less similar to about 80 percent of the world and realize that it takes time and needs tranquility to gradually change to better circumstances. Personally, I do not find it important whether the organization has a terrorist identity in the west or not. In the same way that I do not think all the foreign support the organization may obtain is of any help. What actually matters lies inside Iran. The struggle for democracy inside the country is alive and moving and will find its way forward, and it is up to everyone else to make adjustments to that fact. The Mojahedin may once have claimed rightly that they led this struggle, but I can clearly see today that they have been left far behind in this struggle because they wanted to achieve everything from abroad.

Why do you think the MKO has been described as a cult? Would you agree with this, and what assessment can you make as to the danger posed by such a structure?

The exceptional skill of the organization and its leaders has been to convince all its members and even the supporters that they are totally incapable personally of distinguishing between right and wrong in every aspect of life, and that they should therefore rely entirely on the ideological leadership to guide them towards the right path. A person under the leadership of Rajavi - who plays the role of Big Brother in the Organization - must give his whole heart to him; should only believe in him, hate whoever he hates and love whoever he loves. A member of the PMOI does not actually care what exactly is going on in Iran and in Iran's political scene. All that matters to him is what the leader – to whom everyone must be completely devoted – desires and demands of him. Ideology in the PMOI is just another name for the leader and his requirements. So that the person who is more devoted to the wishes of the leader is said to be more ideological. When I first arrived in Evin prison, I had the most tremendous fear of thinking freely on my own about my own observations. After so many years in the Organization, I had developed the habit of allowing others to decide for me on every single matter, and it was quite frightening for me to open up my sealed mind, think freely, and decide by myself what is right and what is wrong. It took me more than a year before I slowly managed to come to the decision to try to analyze the external world independently. For some people, it might even take much longer than that to realize they are capable of and entitled to decide for themselves. A member of the PMOI has the potential of doing

absolutely anything demanded by the organization. He could turn up being a terrorist harming innocent people like the many cases of people who were sent from Iraq. They were ready to sacrifice themselves just for the sake of pleasing the leadership without knowing why, for what purpose and based on what strategy they should do what they had been asked to do. I believe one has every reason to be alarmed by such capability, and by such power granted to one individual called the ideological leader.

The NCRI has been described as the political wing of the MKO. Can you explain what that means and what role the NCRI has in relation to the MKO particularly in the light of the MKO's involvement in armed attacks.

The simple fact is, that there are some individuals and some organizations affiliated to the Council which differ ideologically from the Mojahedin. Nevertheless, the higher fact is that all these bodies have more or less agreed to the domination of the PMOI over the Council's policies. Therefore, in real terms one should say that the political stance of the NCR is no different from that of the PMOI. The Council is chaired by Massoud Rajavi the Supreme Leader of the Mojahedin and Commander-in-Chief of the NLA, and is also financed by the Mojahedin. The members of the Council - other than the Mojahedin - are, at least as far as the methods of struggle against the Iranian Regime are concerned, sympathizers of the PMOI. Therefore, the Council has always served the Organization to take away its bitterness and present a more acceptable face to the outside world. The Council of course has always unequivocally approved the Organization's armed attacks inside the country.

The NCRI has stated it believes in regime change. Can you explain how it hopes to achieve that regime change?

Right up to the verge of the allied invasion of Iraq, the strategy of the organization to topple the Iranian regime was based on the National Liberation Army, which was situated in Iraqi territory. All of us believed that one day, when the time was ripe, the NLA would make its final victorious move towards Tehran and would overthrow the regime and establish a democratic state. Now the Army has been disarmed it is practically ineffective and no means of armed struggle remains. I was arrested in Syria before the outcome of the war in Iraq was known to me, and at present I have no idea how the organization hopes to achieve regime change. In my opinion, the regime in Iran today cannot and must not be changed through the kind of bloody revolution which is promised by the organization. Enormous changes have occurred in Iran through all these years, and despite anything that may happen in future in the political scene and whoever might be in government or sit in parliament (Majlis), reform, both political and social, will be carried forward and no one can stop that. Some months ago, I was watching a women's program on one of the state television channels.

It broadcast an interview with a woman who had been a member of parliament more than five years ago. She described how

she, along with some of her colleagues in the Iranian Parliament, tried to pass a bill to bring an end to men's absolute right to divorce their wives, and on the other hand give some rights to women, such as the right to apply to the court to divorce their husbands. She explained what obstacles they had faced and how difficult it had been for them to persuade others to even talk about it. She eventually managed to win some support in the media, mobilized some women's organizations, and forced parliament to discuss the issue. It seemed rather obvious that the Guardian Council would overrule the legislation even though the Majlis might approve it. Instead, thanks to the atmosphere created by media reports and the support of even some of the clergy, the legislation finally came into effect and made a big change to the life of the Iranian women. It may not look like a big deal compared to the laws of Western Europe, but it was worthy to fight for this step forward. The woman of course did not qualify for the next parliamentary election, but other women took her place. According to the teachings of the PMOI, she is a traitor because she sat in the regime's Majlis and legitimized it and therefore is liable for assassination. According to instructions issued by the PMOI to Iranian women, she should have immediately left her family and moved to Iraq to join the NLA. There she should have devoted herself to the leadership and then come back to Iran to perform a sabotage operation with a grenade and a cyanide capsule and then eventually been martyred in the path of Rajavi. However, I could not resist admiring her courage and her will to struggle and to stand up for women's rights and face tremendous hardship and accept all sorts of risks, in order to struggle in an arena that most men might not be prepared to set foot in. She received neither applause for her efforts, nor gained any advantage for herself. And when she was arrested once and put in jail, no one committed self-immolation. But I think that Iran needs more of these types of women. If people like her can influence parliament and state television, no matter how hard that may be, and can be effective socially and politically, what can justify taking mortars onto the streets. I see many similarities between the hardliners in Iran and the PMOI. Through the years they have served each other in many ways. Certainly they owe much of their success to the implied cooperation between them. Unfortunately because of this, the movement to introduce reform in Iran has had to challenge both parties. It is true to say that today neither of these two could exist without the other. I therefore suggest that it would be much wiser to take one little step to where you know it is safe to put your foot, which would definitely be a step forward, rather than to jump to a place you do not know or how you will eventually land. Certainly, change in Iran will not come about overnight. It will take time, effort, patience, and hard continuous work inside Iran over the long-term in order to achieve peace, freedom and justice.

How would you describe the quality and breadth of the MKO's political activities in the West in the past decade?

I would say that under the leadership of Massoud Rajavi the

organization has always performed superbly tactically but extremely naïvely and ineffectively strategically. In short-term projects, both military and political, they have managed to produce amazing results. But they have always failed to predict or control the outcome of their actions in the long-term. That is why, even though immense energy has been expended and many achievements have been obtained, the organization always somehow lands back at square one. I believe that it is time for the leadership to review the past two decades and learn some lessons. Political achievement can fade in a matter of days if it is not part of a realistic overall strategy. The PMOI leaders must realize that year after year the situation in Iran has changed. Now the third generation after the revolution is stepping into Iran's social and political scene. Does the organization and its leaders believe they really understand their demands and their values clearly? I doubt it. The more I think about it, even though the Machiavellian policy of the organization brought it some short-term successes from time to time, it has never got to the roots of the problem. Nor did that policy help out the organization with its internal conflicts, nor disguise its lack of clear policy for the struggle toward democracy in Iran.

How would you characterize your current involvement with the NCRI and MKO?

I am not sure that I understood the question rightly. Anyway, until now I had devoted my whole life to the organization. To me the NCR, the PMOI, or the NLA did not really matter. All I had faith in was Rajavi, whom I worshiped like a God. I never allowed myself to think of him as a person who could ever make any mistakes. I did not allow myself to think freely. I could say that I sort of switched off my mind to everything and only ever believed what he said. It was much easier for me to continue that way, just as some long term prisoners decide not to think about what has happened in the past quarter of a century. However, I eventually decided that I would begin to think freely. It was not an easy experience and it could have been rather dangerous mentally. All through the time that I have spent in prison I was never afraid of being tortured or executed, but I always had the fear of making mistakes. When I at last concluded that the organization and its decision makers have made mistakes, I could not force myself to remain silent for the sake of stopping the regime taking advantage of what I say. I hope that one day I will have the opportunity to discuss these matters directly with them, face to face. My advice to my friends in the organization would be that they should not ignore their criticisms of the organization and they should be brave enough to express their thoughts and take them up until they reach some final and decisive conclusions.

Can you say how much support the MKO has inside Iran. In your experience do they have the same level of support inside Iran as outside?

It would be very difficult for me to answer this question since I

have no means of surveying public opinion on the organization. It is too hard to estimate the quantity of support they enjoy outside Iran let alone inside Iran. All I can say is that the situation in Iran has changed to such a great extent over the years that it does not now warrant the armed struggle that the organization is so insistent on. Many young people in Iran, at least in the cities, have access to the Internet, satellite television and foreign radio broadcasts and publications. The criticisms made against the regime in the publications outside Iran are often repeated in even sharper tones in the papers inside Iran. Many Iranians have managed to travel abroad, and many Iranians who left the country because of the situation prevailing in the 1980s are now moving back to Iran. These people of course bring new demands and expectations with themselves. The organization's policy has always been to stop Iranians returning back to their own country and even label it a betrayal of the Iranian revolution. I totally reject this attitude and I think that on the contrary, Iranians should be encouraged to come back to Iran and this would certainly enhance the movement for reform and democratization of the political systems inside Iran. None of the families that I have met approve of the organization's armed struggle, particularly because all of its operations have been launched from Iraq with the aid of Saddam Hussein's army. The people inside Iran have strong feelings against Iraq's toppled dictator. I believe the organization's cooperation with the former regime in Iraq has damaged the image of the organization to a very great extent.

If Iranians do not accept the MKO's claims to support democracy, do you think this means that Western politicians are being deceived?

I would categorize Western politicians in two groups. Ineffective ones such as those in parliament and effective ones like those in the Foreign Office. The first group could be easily deceived since they are not necessarily expert in every field and do not have access to enough information. However, I believe that if all the parliamentarians in the world supported the NCR it would not make much difference to the political situation in Iran. The second group could not easily be deceived, but they do follow their short-term interests. In the West, this group has its own relations with the Islamic Republic and from time to time, they have found the NCR a useful tool. The NCR gained its relative popularity among Western public opinion in the past due to the mistakes made by Iranian diplomats rather than its own efforts; the sort of mistakes they no longer commit, having gained in maturity and experience through the years. Support for the NCR among western politicians has, as a result, gradually declined. Unfortunately, as the Iranian regime has moved towards moderation and self-control the PMOI has shifted to a more extremist policy. After the horrifying events of September 11th, it was possible for the Islamic Republic to take advantage of the PMOI's mistakes and to corner them politically on the international scene. ■



IN COMMAND

Steve Novotny, military police, talking about Camp Ashraf

UNO Alumni - (University of Nebraska at Omaha Alumni Association)
By Anthony Flott

(This item has been edited for reference to the Mujahedin at Camp Ashraf.)

"Prior to the mobilization, I read every word of the Geneva Convention that applies to taking care of prisoners to establish my basis"

One gets the feeling after spending only a short time with Steve Novotny that this is a guy John Wayne probably would have liked.

He's a police officer and second-generation war veteran. A deadeye rifleman who competes in shoots across the country. At home, a United States flag hangs on one corner of his garage, a U.S. Army flag on the other. The art on his bedroom wall includes a map of Iraq with the hostile Sunni Triangle neatly delineated in red. On other walls hang a sword and its scabbard and photos of military buddies. On a cluttered table rests a thick book of military quotations. Novotny himself doesn't say much. The 48-year-old UNO graduate's look, though, speaks volumes. His military-issue flattop is gray but cropped as high and tight as a fresh recruit's. His mug is stone granite and as likely to crack a smile as any of the faces on Mt. Rushmore. Certainly there was nothing to smile about this past May when Novotny, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve, testified before a Congressional committee on Reserve readiness in the fight against terrorism. As could be expected, talk then turned to the infamous Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal.

While there has been plenty of blame to go around, none of it has fallen on Novotny's shoulders. In fact, Novotny not only escaped fault but also was praised for his command at one of the detention facilities, Camp Ashraf. He

was one of the few bright spots in Taguba's investigation, earning commendation near the end of the general's 51-page report. "His soldiers were proficient in their individual tasks and adapted well to this highly unique and non-doctrinal operation," Taguba wrote. ...Novotny and a handful of others, Taguba wrote, "Overcame significant obstacles, persevered in extremely poor conditions, and upheld the Army Values." Novotny testified that same day before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations. After Novotny's testimony Virginia Congressman Ed Schrock singled the Nebraskan out for praise as "One battalion commander who did his job very well in the detention business, better than anyone else, I would imagine. I think we ought to thank him for that." Military officers, lawmakers and aides broke into applause. Novotny deflects the praise. "I felt that all the soldiers that came under my command, active duty and reserve and National Guard, did a tremendous job," he says. "I was proud of them all no matter where they came from. I felt this (Congressional testimony) was an opportunity to represent the entire military, the Army, and also my command, and get the word out about what actually happened where we were at."

A Bad Bunch

The 530th's "highly unique and non-doctrinal operation" of which Taguba wrote is one of the prisoner of war successes—and there are plenty of them—overshadowed by Abu Ghraib. Novotny's battalion operated Camp Ashraf, about 45 miles northeast of Baghdad and hou-

sed not with Iraqis, but with Iranians. Specifically, the People's Mujahedin Of Iran (PMOI), a militant, Marxist-Islamist organization founded in the 1960s. Iran-Interlink, an anti-Mujahedin organization, notes on its website that the PMOI was founded "based on revolutionary armed struggle to free Iran from capitalism, imperialism, reactionary Islamic forces and despotism." That armed struggle began in the 1970s when it killed U.S. military personnel and U.S. civilians working on defense projects in Tehran.

The PMOI later participated in the 1979 revolution deposing the Shah and is suspected by some to have supported the American embassy takeover in November later that year. As the Ayatollah Khomeini grew in power, he saw the PMOI as an increasing threat. A crackdown on a Mujahedin march on parliament in 1981 killed more than 30 PMOI and began arrests and executions of that group's members.

Soon, the PMOI was expelled from Iran. It found refuge first in France, then Iraq. PMOI leader Massoud Rajavi eventually established his Mujahedin forces in about a dozen camps in Iraq. Saddam Hussein provided financing and weapons as the PMOI fought against fellow countrymen during the Iraq-Iran war. Known by numerous other aliases (i.e., the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization, the National Liberation Army of Iran, etc.) the PMOI was listed by the U.S. State Department in 1997 as a terrorist group. "They're a very, very bad bunch," an official with the anti-Saddam Iraqi National Congress said in a March 2002 National Review article.

But today, as the Iran-Interlink website

notes, the Mujahedin "has become more cultlike . . . more closed and insular." By many accounts it is has become a cult of personality centering on Rajavi and his wife, Maryam. The former, whereabouts and welfare unknown, is the self-proclaimed ideological leader of the resistance movement; the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran named the latter as president-elect for the future Iran.

French police in Paris on terrorist charges arrested Maryam Rajavi in June 2003. She was released while remaining under investigation, but not before followers staged hunger strikes and 10 PMOI members had set themselves on fire, two of them dying.

Maryam Rajavi's election culminated the organization's astonishing feminization as women assumed many of the organization's top leadership positions. New York Times writer Elizabeth Rubin visited the camp in 2003 and talked of "a fictional world of female worker bees. Of course, there are men around; about 50 percent of the soldiers are male. But everywhere I turned, I saw women dressed in khaki uniforms and mud-colored head scarves, driving back and forth along the avenues in white pickups or army-green trucks, staring ahead, slightly dazed, or walking purposefully, a slight march to their gaits as at a factory in Maoist China."

Still, it likely came as a surprise to U.S. soldiers encircling Camp Ashraf in the spring of 2003 when they encountered female tank commanders.

Blooming in the Desert

Camp Ashraf, as the National Post (Canada) newspaper noted, is not really a camp at all. "Blooming out of the Iraqi desert, near the border with Iran, it has a convention centre, two museums, a pool, park, garden, hospital and university. It covers about 50 square kilometres, and has its own electrical substation."

It is no oasis, though. The camp sits on the fringe of the hostile "Sunni Triangle" near the city of Baqubah, today known

as the IED capital (improvised explosive device) of Iraq.

American troops bombed a PMOI camp near the Iran-Iraq border in April 2003. A cease-fire was signed shortly thereafter, followed by surrender of the camp in May.

By one count, noted the Christian Science Monitor in December, the PMOI surrendered to U.S. troops 300 tanks, 250 armored personnel carriers, 250 artillery pieces and 10,000 small arms. Novotny and the 530th arrived in Iraq about the same time Camp Ashraf was being bombed. The battalion's first assignment was 24-hour patrols around the perimeter of Camp Bucca (Named for Ron Bucca, a New York fire marshal and Army special forces reservist who died in the Sept. 11 World Trade Center attacks) near the Persian Gulf port of Umm Qasr in Southern Iraq. The 530th also maintained traffic control points, secured a water purification unit and guarded a tanker and its crew caught trying to smuggle oil. "Those are things you don't think about and aren't in the rulebook," Novotny says of the last assignment. "When somebody drops a mission off like that to you, you're not going to get any support." In June, Novotny assumed command of the entire facility, which at one point held about 8,000 Iraqi prisoners of war.

It was not Novotny's first service in Iraq. He also served six months during Desert Storm as a captain with the 403rd military police company, a unit he had joined less than half a year earlier following a 12-year active duty career. His Desert Storm duties as an assistant operations officer and enclosure commander included ID processing of 12,000 refugees and the construction and manning of a POW compound that at times held up to 4,000 prisoners.

That's about how many Mujahedin members the 530th secured when in October they were transferred from Camp Bucca to Camp Ashraf. There Novotny oversaw up to 800 reserve, active duty and national guard troops who processed PMOI members into a

terrorist database via fingerprinting, palm printing, DNA collection and retinal scans.

It was perhaps the oddest of assignments in the nearly dozen prisoner of war camps.

The Mujahedin, notes Novotny, were allowed to procure their own food, get their own water and fuel and sign contracts. "They were pretty much taking care of themselves."

In fact, he adds, "their attitude towards us was that we were their guests at the facility.

They never acknowledged that we were detaining them or they were our prisoners."

The group's cultish aspects manifested themselves during discussions between Novotny and Mujahedin leaders. "The leaders were very well dressed. Very well behaved," Novotny recalls.

"Manners impeccable. They were very much on formality, as far as protocol, how people interacted with each other, how the discussions and meetings would progress."

A request Novotny might have of the Mujahedin that, with cooperation, should have taken no more than five minutes could drag on for hours. Meetings began with tea and cookies then lengthy, informal discussions that had little to do with the matter at hand. Novotny, for instance, would be asked to express sympathy for the recent earthquake in Bam, Iran, that had killed tens of thousands of Iranians.

"They're our prisoners, and they would refuse to talk if we didn't go through this formality every time," Novotny says. "Just like the North Koreans; very regimented in what they do. If you throw them a curveball, they'll sit there and look and they won't know what to do because you've thrown them something different than what they're used to. I would say that they are so far along that they actually set down as a staff or as a committee and came up with different proposals, like, 'If the Americans do A, we're going to do B. And they would develop a position

paper on it." The meetings became excruciating when Novotny began processing the group's members.

"Somebody would say, 'I think I shouldn't have to do the DNA because only criminals have to do DNA, as in your country, and I don't believe that is right. So I refuse to do anything because you're making me do the DNA swab.'"

More discussions would follow. "Then you would see . . . handlers. Just like a dog handler you'd see snap his fingers, you would actually see a handler nod his head, that person would get up and go through the line. Then the next person would go: 'I do not believe that you have shown enough sympathy toward my group. My group has only one goal, and that is to free our country of Iran from the total regime situation that it is and to get rid of the regime that's oppressive towards all people. I feel the United States and the PMOI have the same goals and objectives and I do not understand why you're holding us in this facility.'"

More discussions. "Then you would see one of the handlers nod his head, the guy would get up and go. After they did five or six people like that, then the majority would get up and go through a line. Then the next group would come in. Same thing.

"You're repeating the same thing over and over. I felt I was a POW myself sometimes. Finally, I put one of our captains in charge and let him suffer through that."

At the extreme, the group's leaders would make innuendos that its members might commit suicide or that they could not guarantee the PMOI wouldn't take action against U.S. soldiers. The 530th also had to deal with a group of about 150 defectors from the main PMOI body, some of whom were causing dissension in the camp.

Novotny responded with a 5 a.m. raid on PMOI quarters during which about 40 of the defectors were bagged, taken away and detained from the rest of the camp.

And so Novotny's days went from

November until February when the 530th got its orders to go home. They returned to the United States in early April.

In July the Mujahedin was granted "protected status" under the Fourth Geneva Convention, though it remains listed as a terrorist entity. The new Iraqi government wants it expelled and Iran would love nothing better to get its hands on the PMOI, but as of September 2004 its fate was undecided.

Novotny, meanwhile, has returned to his Papillion home and duties as an Omaha policeman and school resource officer at Omaha Burke High School.

A 1974 Omaha Bryan High School graduate who also earned degrees from Kemper Military School and College in Boonville, Mo., and from UNO (BGS, 1986), Novotny had to get clearance to discuss his experiences and still was hesitant to do so after receiving the green light. Part of that is due to the negative publicity surrounding Abu Ghraib. "It was terrible," Novotny says of the scandal. "Terrible." Because of it, all military police are tainted in the eyes of some. "I guess that's one thing that kind of irks me is that, again, we're focused on six people, and there were thousands who worked there honorably to take care of these prisoners."

Soldiers who, as Novotny saw, played with the children of a woman whose husband had abandoned her, asking their families back home to send clothes and toys. Or medics who provided care to wounded Iraqi soldiers. Or hungry prisoners who were fed. Weekly coordinated visits between families and POWs despite the extensive planning and efforts required to do so by U.S. troops. "That's one thing that the press never puts out is the number of soldiers in the story," he says. "The stories behind those folks who were killed protecting those prisoners in that compound. And there have been other people, other MPs who were patrolling and protecting that prison, and also those persons inside who have been killed since the end of hostilities.

Then there are the efforts of Novotny that earned General Taguba's and Congressional praise. How was he able to maintain control when commanders at Abu Ghraib, apparently, failed to do so?

Novotny addressed that at the Congressional hearing in May. The first step, he says, was providing his troops proper training and instruction at Fort Riley, Kansas, prior to the battalion's deployment. "Prior to the mobilization, I read every word of the Geneva Convention that applies to taking care of prisoners to establish my basis," Novotny said before the Congressional committee. Whenever situations arose, says Novotny, training our guidance would be developed and made public for the soldiers to adhere to. Follow-ups were made to ensure standards were being enforced. At the end of his panel's testimony, Rep. Schrock offered Novotny his praise, but it's something the UNO graduate today still deflects. "They key was flexibility and having trained people who were qualified to do their job," he says. "We were successful because of the quality of people that we had. It just wasn't one person. And I've said over and over and over, it wasn't me. It was the total group, the total spectrum that we had, the good people that we had from the Omaha area, from Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas. That's what got us through. That's the reason why we were successful."

Hey, even John Wayne needed help every now and then. ■

SURVIVORS' REPORT

Association for the Support of Victims of Mojahedin-e Khalq ©2004

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