

ASSOCIATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF MOJAHEDIN-E KHALQ

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: Iran: Exiled Armed Group Abuses Dissident Members *Opposition Group Seeks Recognition and Support in Western Capitals*

"Members who try to leave the MKO pay a very heavy price. These testimonies paint a grim picture of what happened to members who criticized the group's leaders."

Joe Stork, Washington director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa division.



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

The 28-page report, "No Exit: Human Rights Abuses Inside the MKO Camps," details how dissident members of the shadowy Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) were tortured, beaten and held in solitary confinement for years at military camps in Iraq after they criticized the group's policies and undemocratic practices, or indicated that they planned

to leave the organization. The report is based on the direct testimonies of a dozen former MKO members, including five who were turned over to Iraqi security forces and held in Abu Ghraib prison under Saddam Hussein's government. "Members who try to leave the MKO pay a very heavy price," said Joe Stork, Washington director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa division. "These testimonies paint a grim picture of what happened to members who criticized the group's leaders." One former high-ranking MKO member, Mohammad Hussein Sobhani, was held in solitary confinement for eight-and-a-

half years, from September 1992 to January 2001. The MKO then turned him over to Iraqi authorities. He was held in Abu Ghraib prison until 2002, when he was forcibly repatriated to Iran. The witnesses also reported two cases of deaths under interrogation by MKO operatives.

In 1997, the U.S. government classified the MKO as a "foreign terrorist organization." The European Union included the MKO in its list of "terrorist and terrorist organizations" in 2002.

Meanwhile the MKO's political wing, the National Council of Resistance, which is based in France, continues to lobby the



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EDITORIAL



A non-Iranian friend of mine who has had contact with the Mojahedin for over twenty years, said to me that whenever she met with them, no matter how friendly or benign the meeting first appeared, she was always left with a profound sense of unease afterward and that her recent experience of being in their company was like 'being struck by a hit-and-run driver'... 'I was left reeling and in pain but I never knew from where I had been struck or how.'

This woman had only minimal contact with the Mojahedin organization and they treated her with – what was for them – great respect and care. Imagine then how it must have felt to have been a devoted member for many years, but then because you had criticized some aspect of the organization or other and asked to leave, you ended up in the hell of Abu Ghraib prison.

The new Human Rights Watch report is a valuable starting point for what must become a thorough and unflinching international investigation into the sinister activities of the Mojahedin organization.

The MKO states that HRW has never visited Camp Ashraf. But Joe Stork admitted that plans to visit the camp ten years ago were only put off because of controls imposed by the Iraqi regime which supported the MKO. This means that even ten years ago HRW had sufficient concerns about the repeated and consistent reporting of human rights abuses in MKO camps from former members to warrant a visit. It is a shame that it has taken the removal of Saddam Hussein to allow access to this highly secretive and suppressive organization. That access however is still extremely limited.

The witnesses in the report were fortunate to have survived Abu Ghraib prison and to have escaped Iraq. But over three thousand cult members remain imprisoned in Camp Ashraf by the

Rajavis under US protection.

Until those victims are released, the true depth of human rights abuses in the MKO cult will not be exposed. Interviews in this edition with two residents who recently fled the camp and returned to Iran will hopefully give a glimpse into the desperate conditions endured by all the residents. More investigation needs to be urgently undertaken to ascertain exactly what is happening in Camp Ashraf. It is because of the limited nature of the HRW report that former members are demanding a thorough investigation into the total organizational practices, and not just highlighting the treatment of dissenters. The primary and most straightforward request by those who were interviewed by HRW and other media about the human rights abuses they experienced inside the MKO is that those who support the cult – whether politicians or lawyers or other individuals – also take the trouble to speak to the victims about their experiences rather than simply repeating the MKO's specious mantra that they are all agents of the Iranian regime. Such undeviating repetitions of the official MKO line throw greater suspicion back on the MKO's apologists than on those who are offering actual evidence of abuse.

Unfortunately the MKO's hubris encourages it to emulate the actions and words of governments. But whereas Jack Straw's short description of the MKO as a 'nasty terrorist organisation' is backed

by years of painstaking research and reams of evidence of its activities, the MKO's own unsubstantiated description of each and every one of its critics as 'agents of the Islamic Republic' rings somewhat hollow.

One of the individuals cited in the HRW report, Mohammad Hossein Sobhani, has challenged UK parliamentarian Lord Avebury – who sits on the Human Rights Committee – after he questioned the inclusion of Sobhani as a witness. Mr Sobhani pointed out that Lord Avebury has based his judgement solely on the MKO's own words and asks Lord Avebury to meet with him and the other victims in person and thereby have access to the same evidence which HRW and others have taken the trouble to discover. He also points out that if HRW had investigated the MKO ten years ago as it had planned, then he and hundreds like him would have been saved from years of suffering in the MKO and Iraqi prisons.

The time for prevarication is over. True supporters of human rights must now have the courage and integrity to instigate proper and thorough investigations and cut through the political and propaganda smokescreens erected by the MKO to hide its crimes. ■

Human Rights Watch:

U.S. government and EU countries to remove this designation and lift the restrictions that have ensued.

From Washington to Brussels, the group is presenting itself as a "democratic alternative" to Iran's government. The MKO's political wing has presented itself as the Iranian "government in exile" and has called on the international community for recognition.

After the French government in 2003 arrested MKO co-leader Maryam Rajavi on suspicion of plotting terrorist activity on French soil, 10 MKO members and sympathizers protested by setting themselves on fire in Paris, London and other European cities. Two of them died. In January, 40 members of parliaments across Europe, as well as the European Parliament, publicly called for the removal of MKO's terrorist designation.

On April 14, several members of the U.S. Congress, both Republicans and

Democrats, attended the National Convention for a Democratic, Secular Republic in Iran, an event that an MKO-backed organization held in Washington. Among other members of Congress, Rep. Tom Tancredo (R., Colo.) has called for removal of the MKO from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. On February 10, a think-tank co-chaired by retired U.S. military officers, the Iran Policy Committee, called for the removal of the designation and for the U.S. government to actively support the group against the Iranian government.

"The Iranian government has a dreadful record on human rights," said Stork. "But it would be a huge mistake to promote an opposition group that is responsible for serious human rights abuses." The MKO was founded in 1965 as an Islamic urban guerrilla group to challenge the shah's government. In 1981, two years after the

Iranian revolution, the anti-clerical group went underground after trying to incite an armed uprising against Ayatollah Khomeini.

After exile in France, the group's leaders relocated to Iraq in 1986. During the Iran-Iraq war, MKO forces regularly attacked Iranian troops along the border and made several incursions into Iran. After the war ended in 1988, Iranian courts issued summary rulings to execute thousands of political prisoners, including many MKO members. The fall of Saddam Hussein's government in April 2003 put an end to Iraqi financial and logistical support for the MKO. After the U.S.-led invasion, the U.S. military disarmed MKO forces operating in Iraq. In July, the U.S. designated them as "protected persons" under the Geneva Conventions and confines more than 3,000 of them in their main military camp north of Baghdad. ■

REACTION TO THE HRW REPORT

The publication on May 19 of the 28 page report by Human Rights Watch on MKO human rights abuse aroused a great deal of interest and affirmation. It also sparked vehement denials by the MKO and its apologists. One of the first comments was that the findings of this report would clearly exclude the MKO from benefiting from financial backing by the US government under the proposed Iran Freedom Support act which is due for consideration.



The funding provisions in Section 302 of H.R. 282/S. 333-- The Iran Freedom Support act titled "Assistance to Support Democracy in Iran" state:

(a) Authorization- The President is authorized to provide financial and political assistance (including the award of grants) to foreign and domestic individuals, organizations, and entities that support democracy

and the promotion of democracy in Iran and that are opposed to the non-democratic Government of Iran. Such assistance may include the award of grants to eligible independent pro-democracy radio and television broadcasting organizations that broadcast into Iran.

(b) Eligibility for Assistance- Financial and political assistance under this section may be provided to an individual, organization, or entity that—

- (1) officially opposes the use of terrorism;
- (2) advocates the adherence by Iran to nonproliferation regimes for nuclear, chemical, and biological

weapons and materiel;

- (3) is dedicated to democratic values and supports the adoption of a democratic form of government in Iran;
- (4) is dedicated to respect for human rights, including the fundamental equality of women;
- (5) works to establish equality of opportunity for people; and
- (6) supports freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of religion.

Unfortunately some of the MKO's supporters have cited this as the motivation behind production of the

report. Lord Corbett in the UK practically accused HRW of such motives when he said in an interview with The Guardian newspaper, "All the people they interviewed are agents of Iranian intelligence. A bill is going through the US Senate allowing financial aid to opposition groups in Iran. People are desperate to stop the Mujahideen getting any of the money".

The MKO's political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran discovered another motivation: "These accusations only serve as a licence to the mullahs' regime to continue the execution and suppression of [Mojahedin] members and supporters in Iran."

However, in an interview with Radio Farda, Joe Stork, Director of HRW's Middle East and North Africa division, responded to critics saying, "Our point of view has been included in the report and we stand by it. The Mojahedin have not been able to bring even one fact to challenge the conclusions of our report. They couldn't prove even a fact against it. If they have said something new, please tell me."

From the other side, experts on the MKO say the Human Rights Watch report has highlighted only a small sample of abuse. Survivors' Report has a unique perspective in this respect. Comprising mostly former members, the Association for the support of Victims of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, among whom are those interviewed by HRW and The Guardian newspaper, says there is immediate need for further research into and exposure of the serious human rights abuses which are systematically and organically woven into the ideology of the Mojahedin. Such abuse is not limited to individual dissenters in the organization. There is a systematic denial to every single member to ALL the protections – in spirit and in practice – that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Is this an exaggerated statement?

This concept of systematic human rights abuse is touched upon in the HRW

report in its mention of 'compulsory divorces'. Unfortunately the abuses go much further than this and can be best understood by looking at the situation for individual members in the context of a modern form of slavery. In the MKO form of slavery, these people not only do not own their own bodies, but they also do not own their own minds or hearts. The manacles which imprison them are not physical but mental. These mental chains have been forged by years of psychological manipulation and deprivation under the banner of ideological demands, and have been sustained by a diet of lies and intimidation.

To begin to understand how such a situation can come about, it is useful to draw an analogy between victims of the Rajavi cult and victims of domestic violence.

Sufferers of domestic violence often do not see themselves as victims and are indeed judged as exercising complicity in their own abuse. But this comes about only because they have been manipulated by the perpetrator to regard themselves as the cause of their own suffering, having brought it upon themselves because of their weaknesses and waywardness. The relation between Massoud Rajavi and his followers – male and female – follows this same pattern. Like victims of domestic violence, Rajavi's followers are there because they have no other place to go, no safe haven to which they can escape. And here, surely, is a starting point, a framework from which to begin to quantify the human rights abuses which are taking place on a daily basis to the cult members. It is not something unknown, nor is it unquantifiable.

But it does need the serious commitment of human rights organizations and individuals to recognize that the HRW report indicates just the tip of an iceberg and not the whole problem. That is, the abuse is not limited to dissenting members, it is endemic in the organization and affects everyone.

Ironically, supporters of the MKO in

western parliaments believe – somewhat uncritically – that there is an army of around 3500 well-trained and willing combatants in Iraq which can be deployed in some way as an opposition against the Islamic Republic of Iran, perhaps for regime change. Hence the publicity urging removal of the MKO from western terrorist lists and efforts to have the organization officially supported through such initiatives as the proposed Iran Freedom Support act. Clearly the HRW report has raised serious questions about the nature of the group. In spite of this, some politicians are still keen to support it. Perhaps for these people it is not the human rights abuses per se which should be of concern, but more the effect that long term, chronic human rights abuse has had on the efficacy and effectiveness of the organization. If the US government really does propose to support the MKO it would be necessary for someone to ascertain the actual condition of the forces in Iraq.

Are the American supporters aware that the MKO in Iraq is on the verge of collapse?

Empirical evidence is needed at this stage rather than propaganda and political posturing.

It is impossible, of course, to rely on the MKO itself to describe the condition of its own forces in Iraq. For one thing, the MKO's rotating spokesmen Shahin Gobadi, Alireza Jafarzadeh, Farid Soleimani, Hossein Abedini and Ali Safavi, are operating in absolute ignorance of the current situation in Ashraf Camp. It is also true to say that they are themselves the victims of human rights abuses – all for instance have undergone compulsory divorce and other 'ideological conditioning'.

They are however, unlike dissenters, unaware of their own victim status and cannot therefore give any realistic evaluation of the organization on this issue. As far as they are concerned the organization continues to function as it has for the past two decades.

As a starting point for further investiga-

tion, the Personal Experiences at the end of this edition are excerpts from two interviews which Survivors' Report held with two ranking MKO members who were repatriated to Iran two months ago under supervision of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Both men are currently living at home with their families in, according to themselves, complete freedom. Looking at the connotation of these interviews, MKO experts agree. The issue is not about Iran, Iraq, US politics or terrorism or even human rights. The real issue is the survival of Massoud

Rajavi. The total MKO membership is being asked to perform tasks all of which are geared toward the single aim of saving Massoud Rajavi (who is still in hiding in Camp Ashraf) from prosecution for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In the end it is predicted that in Paris too, Maryam Rajavi has no alternative to facing trial except to run away to a third country where she will be forced, like her husband, to go into hiding. It is at this point, or the point at which she receives her prison sentence, that the MKO will be at its most dangerous in

the West. It is at this point that it will face chaos and disintegration.

The MKO is not a fighting force. It no longer has a role in Iranian politics, not even as a terrorist force. It is being held together in Iraq, with the connivance of some in the US, as an opposition to the Iranian regime on totally spurious reasoning. It is being held together as the result of increased human rights abuses. And in the end it is this, the human rights abuses, and not the decision of western politicians or judicial processes, which will finally determine the demise of the MKO. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Former MKO fighter awarded Queen's Medal in Holland

April 29, 2005-06-0

Massoud Jaabaani lost three brothers to violence in Iran. He also bears scars from his own involvement in MKO terrorist activity. Since escaping to the Netherlands he has researched and written extensively against terror and violence. On April 29, he was invited by the Mayor of Groningen to a ceremony in which Mr Jaabaani was awarded the Queen's Medal for achievement, along with a letter of appreciation for his cultural, social and political activities. The Mayor praised Mr Jaabaani's work and asked him to translate from Farsi his latest book 'the psychology of terror and violence' as a contribution to the healthy progress of society.

MKO disrupt court case

May, 2005

The court case against a member of the MKO's intelligence branch has begun in Germany. The defendant is accused of attempting to kidnap Mr Farhad Javaheriyar - a former MKO member and one of the dissidents imprisoned in Abu Ghraib - from the streets of Cologne in Germany. MKO members attended the court in a bid to intimidate Mr Javaheriyar and force him to withdraw his case. Tens of MKO members tried unsuccessfully to disrupt court proceedings and even threatened Mr Javaheriyar's lawyer. The next hearing will be in the month of June.

MKO clash with Danish police

Iran-Interlink, May 15, 2005

After it was reported that the Danish government has decided to expel a supporter of Mojahedin-e Khalq terrorist organization from the country, reports from various Danish media such as Ritswa news agency indicate that "after the Danish govern-

ment's decision to deport Behnam Torkzaban from that country, and when he was supposed to leave Copenhagen airport to Iran, about 30 angry supporters of Mojahedin gathered illegally in front of the airport and started protesting so that they caused disruptions at airport and frightened members of the public. After this violent move by Mojahedin-e Khalq, Danish police interfered and, confronting the lawbreakers, detained 21 of them on charges of violating the laws of Denmark and breaking public order." Reports indicate that police used tear gas, clubs and trained dogs and even weapons to confront the violent acts of Mojahedin-e Khalq. Other reports suggest that after the event the police are controlling the MKO's gathering places.

Germany keeps MKO on terrorist list

IRNA, May 18, 2005

The German government has maintained its ban on Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO), keeping the Paris-based organization on the annual terrorist list of Germany's domestic secret service, Verfassungsschutz, IRNA reported from Berlin. According to the 2004 Verfassungsschutz report, presented Tuesday by German Interior Minister Otto Schily, the MKO is held "responsible for serious terrorist attacks in Iran". The report also pointed to MKO's European-wide campaign to whitewash its brutal crimes by "portraying itself as a freedom-loving and democratic exile movement". The European Union and the US have both designated the MKO a terrorist group.

Khodabandeh and Bassam willing to testify against Maryam in French court

Iran-Interlink, May 23, 2005

Two years ago, Ebrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam, former members of Mojahedin-e Khalq, became victims of Rajavi crimes as the MKO used them in its international smuggling program. The two men were arrested just after the US invasion, carrying some of the MKO's stolen property from Iraq to Paris for Maryam Rajavi. Until they were moved to Iran, the

MKO denied its involvement and failed to alert international and human rights bodies. It is now clear that Rajavi's band denied their arrest for 2 months in order to continue its smuggling program and move another two million dollars which had been stolen from Iraq's Central Bank. A short time after the Khodabandeh-Bassam arrest in the border of Syria-Iraq, French Police searched the MKO's Paris headquarters and found millions of dollars and other stolen property along with piles of documents. The investigation is ongoing while millions of dollars of stolen property have not yet been accounted for. Maryam Rajavi and other leading cult members, who had been hiding in Paris, are now awaiting trial. Today, we were informed that both Mr Khodabandeh and Mr Bassam have announced that they want to take part in the process of investigation and in the trial of Maryam Rajavi in Paris as prosecution witnesses to testify about the contacts between Ashraf Camp in Iraq and the cult's leaders in Paris, the role of the Mojahedin in Saddam's security services, their activities in France and other countries and the direct contacts of Saddam's secret services with the cult and Maryam Rajavi in particular. They claim that they can bring evidence to the court which shows that the leadership of the organization directed all the MKO's illegal activities from Auverssur-Oise. Ebrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam have also referred to the evidence from Syria, the report of Syrian police, documents in Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, non-Iranian contacts at the international level and even some non-Iranian witnesses.

Canada adds Mojahedin-e Khalq to terrorist list

Canada Newswire Group, May 25, 2005

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness announces further action against terrorism OTTAWA, May 24 /CNW Telbec/ - Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Honorable Anne McLellan today announced that the Government of Canada has listed the following entities, pursuant to the Criminal Code: The Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) is an Iranian terrorist organization that was based in Iraq until recently. This group is determined to overthrow the current regime in Iran and establish a democratic, socialist Islamic republic. They support the use of physical force, armed struggle or jihad if necessary. The Government of Canada has determined that these entities knowingly engaged in terrorist activity. This brings to 38 the number of listed entities under the Criminal Code.

Further investigations demanded

May 25, 2005

On 25 May a group of ex-prisoners of MKO in Saddam's Abu Ghraib prison had a conference in Germany which was attended and covered by media. The group while welcoming the recent report from HRW demanded an official and international investigation into the allegations of extra judicial imprison-

ment, torture and execution of disaffected members, carried out on the order of Mr. and Mrs. Rajavi in the MKO's own camps and in Saddam's prisons.

Maryam Rajavi considering her escape route

IRNA, May 26, 2005

Ms. Esmi Khezr, The spokeswoman for the Jordanian Government denied strongly on Thursday that her government has accepted to allow Maryam Rajavi the 3rd wife of Massoud Rajavi the head of the Terrorist organization MEK to go to Jordan. She said to IRNA that the rumors put out by some media are completely false.

Mojahedin in Oil-for-Food scandal

The Weekly Standard, May 30, 2005

Republican senator Norm Coleman, is leading one of eight investigations into the corruption and mismanagement of the U.N.'s largest-ever humanitarian relief effort. The basic outline of the scandal is simple: Saddam Hussein used the Oil-for-Food program to circumvent U.N. sanctions imposed after the Gulf war and to enrich himself and his allies. He did this by bribing leading journalists and diplomats and demanding kickbacks from those who profited from selling Iraqi oil. ...The Coleman-Levin reports base their conclusions on a wide variety of evidence including documents from the Iraqi Oil Ministry and the State Oil Marketing Organization that record the transactions in detail. Investigators also conducted dozens of interviews with senior Iraqi officials, including Aziz and Ramadan, who supported and in many cases expanded upon the documentation. In early June, the Coleman-Levin committee will make available a ... report on the Iraqi regime's funding of terrorist entities. They will lay out a case study of the allocations provided to the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK), a terrorist group Hussein funded to conduct operations against Iran. Michael Scheuer, former head of the CIA's Osama bin Laden unit and author of Imperial Hubris, described some of the work the MEK did for Hussein in his 2002 book, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*. Osama bin Laden "may have trained some fighters in Iraq at camps run by Saddam's anti-Iran force, the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK)," Scheuer writes. "The first group of bin Laden's fighters is reported to have been sent to MEK camps in June 1998; MEK cadre were also then providing technical and military training for Taliban forces and running the Taliban's anti-Iran propaganda."

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INTERVIEW OF MASSOUD KHODABANDEH

by Alain Chevalerais, August 2004

Excerpt from 'Brule Vif' Published by Centre de Recherche sur le Terrorisme,
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Massoud Khodabandeh joined the organization (MKO) in the late 70s: “my policy was religious rather than political, while other members were attracted to the Marxist policies of the organization”.

When, for the first time, did you have an influential role in the organization?

- A few months after Banisadr and Rajavi left Tehran [1981]. Our mission was to transfer a radio station from Europe to Iran.

How did you act?

- I went to Germany and, along with Saeed Shahsavandi, purchased a 380 kilogram transmitter and we pretended that it would be used by the Afghans in their war against the Soviets.

Why did you lie?

- Otherwise they wouldn't sell it to us. Then, we took the system to the city of Sardasht in Kurdistan province. We had the support of the PDKI.

How did you take the transmitter from Germany to Iran?

- We used conventional methods. The destination we had registered in a transportation company was Afghanistan. First we paid export tariffs and taxes. Then, we asked for the help of a transportation company. I was technical deputy. We broadcast messages both for the MEK and the PDKI. Three years later, in 1985 I was summoned to France... later in 1985, I was in charge of protecting Firoozeh Banisadr (Rajavi's second wife).

What do you mean by protecting? Providing security or spying on her behavior?

- Both. I reported every day to Maryam.

So, you had close relations with Maryam and Massoud? Tell me about their personalities.

- Massoud is dreaming of leading the world and saving humanity from itself.

Isn't this an extremist analysis?

- No. Not at all. He believes he's different from other human

beings. I think all dictators think the same way.

What about Maryam? Was she the same?

- In order to become intellectually satisfied, something should be stirred in her mind.

So, she is clever and vigilant. She is greedy for power, although she knows that replacing Massoud in the sectarian hierarchy of the organization is impossible. So, she is influencing him and convincing him that she is the only one who realizes his glory.

Did you accept Massoud's dreams?

- One has to understand the atmosphere in which the MEK maintains the dependency of its forces. When I entered the organization, I estranged my whole family. I believed I would never leave the organization. I didn't have money, a job, or even an ID card because my passport had been confiscated. I was fully in the hands of the Mojahedin. I couldn't imagine believing that I don't belong to the regulations and schemes imposed by Massoud. I felt that questioning oneself and allowing doubts is very disturbing and futile. These methods and conditions are known and that is what is meant by a cult. They are present in all cults.

You are not the only one who has brought up such a comparison. Give me an example.

- According to the laws of the organization, Maryam is the mirror for all the members.

We looked at her and found our own mistakes.

Well, what if you don't find any mistakes in yourself?

- Impossible. From the MEK's point of view, you should always look for weaknesses, mistakes and sins. You should always consider yourself a sinner, a wrongdoer, even if you don't know the nature of your mistake.

But why?

- In order to keep the members under control. In order to

force them to accept the leaders' answers on all issues, and to turn them to robots which work for the organization without thinking.

Why does Maryam have the role of a mirror?

- Since she is the only one who realizes Massoud. She is now at the final stage of fully understanding him.

This is an almost religious comment, isn't it?

- Of course. The Rajavis try to show themselves as extraordinary people, holy people, and prophet-like ones. They don't live among ordinary people. They live isolated and protected in their apartments and you can never see them except in ceremonies such as praying (only in the role of imam). You never see them thirsty or sick or in home clothes. Maryam always wears carefully-selected dresses that show her superiority to others and her majesty to all human beings.

Is Massoud's personality also this strong to influence all people?

- In a sense, yes. Since he is clever and has planned all his life around creating such an image. However, the existence of gaps in his personality is strange. For example he always wants to imitate the people he once praised, such as Yasser Arafat and Saddam Hussein. Arafat sat crisscross due to a back problem and Massoud sat the same way although he had no back problem. Saddam appeared most of the time in military uniform, carrying a pistol. Massoud wanted to do the same. But he is 20 centimeters shorter than Saddam. So his gestures became really ridiculous.

Why don't his members rebel against him while his orders are so abnormal? I mean forced marriages after the operation of Eternal Light and then forced divorces and banning sexual relationships.

- Because, in the view of his supporters, he is above good and evil. His superhuman condition eliminates the need of proof for his extremist acts. There are several similar examples in the history of Shias.

It's strange because each time we find many similarities between the MEK ideology and the history of Shias.

- This is our Iranian culture. We live with such a situation in Iran. It's not different for Massoud.

... What's strange for me in the structures of the Mojahedin is the place of 'women'. How do you explain the large number of them at the top of the organization?

- The effect of Marxism on Massoud justifies this in part. According to Communism, the class of 'workers' should

advance the revolution. Since this class was not present in his organisation, Massoud looked to women. He said that they have been mistreated as a social class. Another reason is that recruiting members is difficult.

There are not enough men. This method of his forces men to the edges and to suffer insult so that they don't think of getting to power.

Is the MEK a terrorist movement?

- There's no doubt that it is.

Why?

- I refer to the laws of the UN to answer this. An organization is called terrorist when it targets civilians on one hand and employs violence to achieve its political, individual aims on the other. These measures match the activities and ideologies of the MEK.

So, why do they claim that they're not terrorists, but a resistance group?

- Resistance against what? As far as I know they have no external armed struggle against Iran.

According to what they say, they're resisting the Islamism of Tehran regime.

- First of all, to oppose the regime in Tehran I don't think armed struggle is a good thing for changing the regime because it stops progress. It only worsens the situation. I think to bring change to Iranian society, minds should change. Violence is not good.

During 20 years, the Mojahedin has achieved nothing by armed struggle except strengthening the regime. They have been the best supporters of the regime.

Elsewhere, I heard that the MEK and Al-Qaeda are the same. Don't you think this interpretation is extremist?

- Not at all. Both organizations use mental manipulation to use their members and send them to their deaths. This is both their weakness and their strength. Strength because they have people who are ready to fight for them to their death. Weakness, because they have to keep their members in isolation for a long time. So, they need land. For Al-Qaeda this land is Afghanistan, and for the MEK it was Iraq. None of them could train their members in a free country with moral restrictions.

But we see that cults grow also in free countries. For example, in Europe, they manipulate their members and supporters.

- That's right. But without taking them to the point of committing terrorist suicide attacks. It's simple because in these cults absolute isolation of the members is impossible.

What other similarities do you see between these two organizations?

- Neither of them has principles. They consider themselves above the law.

But Al-Qaeda says that it is acting according to the Koran and its members, like those of the MEK, don't drink alcohol and don't eat the foods banned by Islam.

- They say what they want. Al-Qaeda, like the MEK, uses Islam as a tool to serve its own goals. Bin Laden and Rajavi pretend to be Muslims but they don't follow Islam most of the time. When they send people to death, it's not for religion but for power.

You think all Muslims are convinced by the comments of Massoud Rajavi and Osama Bin Laden?

About Rajavi I don't know. But about Bin Laden, it seems that in Muslim societies most of the people have sympathy with him?

- Not for a long time. Today, the terrorist acts of Al-Qaeda have also targeted Muslim countries. This proves the lack of

principles in this organization. Rajavi kills Iranians; Al-Qaeda kills Arab Muslims. When the Soviet Union was in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda was at the Americans' side. Now, it's fighting against Americans. The Mojahedin were the friends of Mr Khomeini and performed terrorist operations against Americans. Then they served Saddam Hussein against Iran. Now, they're trying to get under the flag of the USA. Now you say these people have principles?

- Another similarity between Al-Qaeda and Mojahedin is the culture of 'committing suicide'. They take advantage of Islam to justify themselves. In Islam, a martyr is the one who has been killed while defending his faith, not a person who kills himself willingly. The Mojahedin, like Al-Qaeda, awards a high value to committing suicide.

Meanwhile, there are ordinary and holy martyrs. On the tombs of those who set themselves ablaze in June 2003 the word "Holy Martyr" has been written.

You want to say that they acted according to the motivations of the organization?

- No, they acted according to orders. Maryam had asked her supporters to sacrifice themselves if she or Rajavi are arrested. It was done as a religious ceremony. ■

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES: INTERVIEW WITH ALI MORADI

May 2005

Ali Moradi had been a sergeant in the Iranian army at the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. He was captured early on and spent nine years as a POW in Ramadi camp. He was among a group of Iranian POWs recruited into the Mojahedin shortly after the ceasefire by promises of marriage and paid work. This is an extract from a longer interview conducted after his return to Iran.

After Maryam returned to Iraq in 1997 the Rajavis imposed more radical changes to combat what Maryam called our bourgeois mind-set. Under the new rules, a gender apartheid was introduced so that men and women were physically separated. Now there were only all male units and all female units both of which had 3 or 4 women commanders. All were completely separate. A man and woman were no longer allowed to be alone in the same room. We were not allowed to speak to women unless authorized for work purposes. In the autumn of

2002 when the US stepped up its threats against Iraq, Massoud and Maryam held a meeting for all the combatants. They analyzed that in 2005 the Khatami government would be toppled by a popular uprising and we must ready ourselves for a final operation. Just about everybody had questions at that point. What would we do if the Americans attack us? The answer came, 'We will attack Iran' with everything we have', said Massoud. Now I have to say that most members

don't actually expect to die, but Massoud Rajavi boasted that we would go like Ashura (marking the martyrdom of Imam Hossein with his followers). This was the Black Phase and it was clearly a suicide mission for the whole organization. The next news we had from the leadership was that Mohammad Mohaddessin had written to the UK Foreign Office and the US Department of State and had announced our neutrality. In another meeting, Rajavi read a message to us which said that the US and UK had agreed not to attack

our camps. Within a month two of our camps had been attacked by the coalition forces and around fifty combatants had been killed. According to Rajavi's orders the NLA should now launch its final all-out attack on Iran. But they did not move. Most people, I can say 95% of people felt devastated then. Everyone had the same thoughts in their minds. 'I gave my life to this struggle, what has happened to my aims now?'

Worse was to come when Hossein Abrishamchi, (brother of Mehdi Abrishamchi who is subject to the French judicial investigation into the MEK's terrorist activities in France) and Mojgan Parsii (nominal head of the MEK in Iraq) negotiated first a ceasefire then total disarmament with General Ordinerio of the US army. Within a week the MEK's armour and weapons was collected and the US surrounded Camp Ashraf to where all the MEK's combatants were rounded up and sent. (A cache of weapons had been hidden by the MEK, but US air forces soon discovered it.) Again, the combatants felt devastated. Everyone began questioning what had happened to the organization, what was the future, what about the aims I had given my life to, what about the overthrow of the regime. Remember too that at this point we still had no idea that around 250 leading members had escaped Iraq and fled to Europe, including Maryam Rajavi. In the chaos which followed the US and coalition invasion of Iraq, the combatants enjoyed a little freedom, and we began to talk and discuss the event and the possible outcome for the organization. After the American forces rounded everyone up into Camp Ashraf they began to interview everyone. The first interview was to establish the name, origin and other basic information so that an ID card could be issued. The second interviews were held to collect DNA information from each resident of the camp. The third interviews were held by representati-

ves of the US Department of State. They were asking everyone for information. One thing that we were asked in every interview was 'where is Massoud Rajavi', it was a question for all of us as much as for the Americans.

In the third interview we were asked where we would like to go once we left Iraq.

The MEK had told everyone to answer that they want to stay in Iraq, but most people disregarded this and insisted they wanted to go to another country. The MEK had told everyone that if you go to Iran they will torture you and hang you and that you can't go to Europe because they won't accept you. In spite of this, during the first interviews around 115 asked directly for help from the US forces to get out of the camp. These were taken to the North of the camp where the US army had its barracks.

To date, over 600 MEK residents of Camp Ashraf have taken refuge with the US forces in the North camp. From these, over 250 have been repatriated to Iran and the others remain. The only reason it had been possible for these people to escape to the North camp was because MEK commanders do not have guns and cannot stop them.

People want to leave, but they are afraid of the unknown. They don't have any real information. No one has told them where they can go, that they have alternatives. The Mojahedin told us that it would not allow the Red Cross to visit our camp.

Hossein Madani told me personally that 'we have tried everything we can, including lobbying them intensively in Switzerland, so they will not come to our camp'. It was a deliberate policy to prevent people from asking to leave. But I had a PoW card from the Red Cross, so I was able to go to the North camp and ask for refuge with the Americans. I had nothing left to keep me there. I had no family, I had lost my aims, and worst of all

was the deception of the MKO which I could now clearly see.

I would say that right now around sixty to eighty percent of the people in the camp are dissatisfied and would leave if they could. The conditions inside Camp Ashraf are really severe. The control over the members has become even more rigid after the protected persons status was given. You are not allowed to talk to one another. If two people get together and start talking, suddenly someone will pop up and start interrogating them and accusing them, 'what are you talking about, you are undermining the leader ...' There is no news from the outside world. We have no real information and now I know that all the news they gave us about Iran is wrong. I mean ALL of it. In the camp if anyone expresses any questions about anything they are taken into a group of about twenty people who talk to that one person to convince them. They have confiscated everyone's documents too to make it hard to get out. The US army haven't been very helpful either. In the north camp they told us they had to make sure people wouldn't be a terrorist threat if they go to Europe, but how do you want to prove that. But people still escape, and the MKO commanders have no guns so they can't stop them. I know several of the top people have run away; Said Jamali, Khalil Ramazanpour and Alireza Ahad are all in the North camp. Davoud Baghervand came back with my group and is now in Iran.

I think that everyone in the MKO has questions about their future, even the leaders. Many want to leave but they have nowhere to go. Around 80% of those who had the courage to leave did so after they had been visited by their families. That's why the MKO is so afraid to let the families in the camp.

When it comes to the point that they can't deny a family visit, they take you aside and

have an intensive meeting to prepare you. I met with Fereshte Yegahni for one and a half hours before a visit from my brother. She told me, 'your brother will tell you lies.

The Iranian government has sent him. Be very careful as this is a political activity by the regime. Don't see him as your brother, you must believe that you are talking to the regime. Don't cry, and don't let him persuade you to leave.'

This was unacceptable to me. I saw my brother and shortly after that meeting I went to the North camp, determined to get home. I wrote to Colonel Georgis and the Red Cross and told them I want to leave and go back to Iran.

Conditions in the North camp are very difficult, they gave us non-halal meat, pig meat, and there is no air conditioning. In every twenty four hours we have to line up five times on parade. We weren't able to have contact with our families because the Americans told us that letters would be censored by the country receiving them, which in our case was Iran, so people were afraid to write, though we did get letters. When I finally got to go home I remember looking down from the airplane window as we took off, at the flat ground of Iraq. When we flew over the border and I saw the mountains of Iran with the snow on them, I was so happy I just wanted to jump straight out of the plane and land in the snow of my homeland. At the airport in Tehran I expected hostility, but people came forward to greet us and welcomed us warmly. For two days I was really fearful. I thought this had just been for propaganda. But as the kindness continued for five and six days, only then did I believe it.

I am now home with my family. I have had no problems since I came back to Iran.

They have tried to help us here as much as possible. But in the end I have wasted years of my life with that organization. I have no wife, no

children, I have no job and no wealth. I have nothing. And now I know I lost all my life for the selfish ambition of one man. When I was in Camp Ashraf everyone in the camp was asking the same question 'Where is Massoud Rajavi?' The last time I saw him was the day before the US invasion of Iraq. He has not been seen or heard from since that time. That's over two years. For his followers at all levels of the MEK hierarchy, this has become the major issue. When anyone asks, Rajavi's commanders say it's for security reasons. But no one accepts that. A leader should be at the front of his forces, not run away at the first sign of danger.

Rajavi always boasted 'I am the leader and I am the first in line for sacri-

fice'. But the combatants are now comparing him with Sattar Khan, Mirza Kuchik Khan, Mousa Khiabani and other rebel leaders who died fighting alongside their forces. Rajavi's commanders say his disappearance is for security reasons, but no one has any doubt that Rajavi has just run away to save his own skin. People in the camp feel totally betrayed. This has been the worst betrayal, no one can trust anything anymore. Morale is so low in the camp that that even if Rajavi should reappear before them tomorrow, the vast majority of forces in Ashraf Camp will refuse to follow him.

Everyone now has questions only about their own future. ■

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES: INTERVIEW WITH A FORMER MEMBER OF THE MKO'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE – NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

May 2005

After Saddam's downfall all our garrisons were bombarded. They had convinced us that the US was not our enemy but inside ourselves we felt differently. After all, we had been singing anti-American songs and shouting anti-American slogans for many a year.

Our forces returned to the garrison and were disarmed. The US forces freed the people of Iraq and for a while we kind of felt saved too. The atmosphere in the camp opened up a little and we had some freedom. At this time a lot of people abandoned the garrison and went to the US camp and didn't return. Soon after the disarmament the organization closed the atmosphere again. Even though they didn't have guns, the commanders kept the organization intact using Rajavi's methods of fear

and intimidation. We all saw how we had lost everything, our whole struggle had come to nothing and morale was very low.

The most important thing that happened during these two years has been the visits of families. The organization was severely opposed to contact with our families. Even a phone call was not allowed. I tricked them and said I would ring my family and ask for money – the organization is always desperate to get money. I called my

brother and he convinced me to come home.

The organization described the family visits as an emotional war. They said our families had been sent by the regime to destroy us. They told us the Iranian Intelligence Ministry had motivated our families to come to Iraq. For this reason, many people were afraid to speak to their own families.

One of the things that gave us courage to leave and go to the American camp was that we had been given recognition as people. I'm not talking about the protected persons status, I mean that the Americans interviewed us and wrote down our names and gave us an identity. Now we could not just disappear. In the beginning the Americans were not good with us, but after the protected persons status their relations with us improved. When we went for interviews the MKO told us, 'don't tell the US that you want to leave, defend the MKO in front of the Americans.' But in our hearts we all wanted to leave.

A month after the protected persons status was granted, the MKO set about destroying all its documents.

Particularly those relating to the relations with the Iraqis and with the US. We destroyed all our military schedules and destroyed the books and songs which were against the USA.

More than anything else, Massoud Rajavi's disappearance destroyed morale in the organization. We were all thinking that if he's the leader why has he left. We felt betrayed. We watched the video of Ebrahim Zakeri's [Rajavi's former head of MKO intelligence] funeral in Paris. We showed no reaction, but in our hearts we were all stunned to see the organization's top people all there in Paris. They had all run away.

Rumours started that Massoud must also be hiding in Europe. No one knew what to think, but no one dared discuss it. Only, everyone knows in all our hearts that the organization is finished. When the families started coming to

visit, the MKO told us they are the representatives of imperialism and we must destroy them. The families became our new enemy rather than the Islamic Republic. They told us stories about the US camp.

They said the Americans had killed two of our people and thrown the bodies away.

They said they would make us immoral if we went there. People stay because of this.

And because they don't have any place to go. The Americans said we had four options, to stay in Iraq, to go to Iran, to apply for asylum in another country or to leave through international organizations. We were always asking, 'where are the international organizations, where is the Red Cross?' But the MKO wouldn't let them come into the camp. They told us we have to stay there. They tried to make the members forget about the other three options.

Even so, the men have the courage to escape now the leaders don't have guns. They can apply to leave and go to the north camp. But the situation for women is desperate beyond description. In the time I was there I only saw three women who had dared to come to the north camp. That's out of over six hundred people. What they told us was really shocking. Even these women who escaped did so believing that they would be raped by the Americans when they got to the north camp. That's how bad things are.

The younger women are controlled by the older women and they are under observation all the time. There is strict gender separation in Camp Ashraf. Men and women are not allowed to speak to one another. They have separate vehicles. Let me tell you how absurd and at the same time shocking this is. When they want to put petrol in their vehicles the men and women have separate times. The men go between 8 and 9 am. Then there is a gap of twenty minutes before the women can visit

the petrol pumps from 9.20 to 10.20 am. The reason for the gap is so there is absolutely no possibility that men and women meet one another at the station. That is how the situation is.

The Mojahedin really has two faces. In spite of all their external propaganda, the situation of women in the organization is really worse than anything you can imagine.

I saw Maryam Rajavi in the last Women's Day celebration. She released a symbolic white dove. In my mind when I imagine her, I see this dove in one hand and her other hand is like a claw grasping my neck and viciously strangling me. I can't even compare Massoud Rajavi with Khomeini or Saddam Hussein. No matter how cruel those regimes were they were only fighting with their enemies. In the end, Rajavi crossed the boundary and tortured his own people. He killed and tortured his own people and he exploited women. I can never forgive him for this. ■

SURVIVORS' REPORT

Association for the Support of Victims of Mojahedin-e Khalq ©2005

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