

AMERICA'S GLADIATORS IN IRAQ

Massoud Khodabandeh

Years ago slavery was abolished in the United States of America and president Abraham Lincoln left us with the well-known axiom that 'You can fool all of the people some of the time. You can fool some of the people all of the time. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time'. It seems however that we are somehow approaching this latter condition. Tens of decades have gone by and yet an evolved form of American slavery persists. This time it manifests itself in Iraq.



The American masters, having 'won the war in Iraq' have openly declared their victory and their concomitant right to the spoils of war. These spoils of war, whether oil, land or Saddam's palaces, or whether the infrastructure and rules of the new government, is something we expected long before the start of the war. The new and unexpected development is the exploitation as slaves and gladiators of a group of people captured by the Americans during the war. What is even more shocking is that these slaves are not even Iraqis! These are Iranian born, many holding European and American passports.

3800 Mojahedin-e Khalq's forces inside Iraq were captured by the Americans at the beginning of the war and since May 2003 have supposedly been disarmed under the terms of a ceasefire agreement and confined to Ashraf

camp, their main base. Since a ceasefire agreement was reached it was assumed that these fighters would be eventually accorded prisoner of war status under the Geneva Convention. But even when the Iraqis themselves demanded the expulsion of this group from their country, the Americans did nothing to designate or remove the group.

Somewhat belatedly, at the end of July 2004, the US accorded individuals of the Mojahedin protected status under the Fourth Geneva Convention. It was hoped by observers that this status would finally, after a year of uncertainty, allow the individual members of the Mojahedin to enjoy visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross, representatives of various UN agencies and perhaps most importantly to enjoy contact and visits from their own families.

Weeks have passed and the rights of the individuals in Ashraf training camp under the Fourth Geneva Convention have been completely ignored, even flouted by those responsible for their safety and wellbeing – whether the Iraqi interim government or the US forces which continue to give the Mojahedin much needed protection inside their camp.

Humanitarian organisations and families been denied access to the individuals, and the Americans have mostly refused to help the inhabitants of the camp. Indeed US forces have failed to dismantle the MKO's command structure and to allow the individual members to be just that, individuals. Against every principle the detainees still have no way to meet their families without being supervised by the MKO's commanders. The ICRC and UN are forced to back off until such conditions

EDITORIAL



Disturbing reports emerged from Iraq last month that American forces deployed Mojahedin units to quell the fighting in Najaf. In spite of protection under the Fourth Geneva Convention the group's individual members have still not been given the opportunity to speak to the ICRC or UN agencies, and remain subject to the cult's weird command structure.

As Massoud Khodabandeh points out in his article this month, this has left them vulnerable to exploitation as 'gladiators' in the current fighting in Iraq. Of course, the gladiators have been put up for hire by Mojahedin leader Massoud Rajavi. Maryam Khoshnevis' explores the rationale behind this in her article.

Last month we published a review of Masoud Banisadr's book, *Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*. We make no apology for including another review of the same book in this month's edition. Amir Taheri is a highly respected Iranian journalist

and his excellent review encapsulates the typical Iranian opinion of the Mojahedin.

On the political front, Mr Win Griffiths, MP has been active in promoting the possibility of a reconciliation between the Mojahedin and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran-Interlink has asked him to take an initial step by facilitating meetings and discussions at preliminary levels with other Iranian opposition groups. It is hoped that with such dialogue, the place of the 'Iranian Resistance' can be established in Iranian politics and the move to reconciliation begin. ■

America's Gladiators in Iraq

are removed from the interviews which they want to conduct with the captives. There is evidence that individuals are still subjected to imprisonment and torture in the camp by the MKO leaders when those people refuse to accept their outrageous orders and commands. The Americans of course turn a blind eye.

The American forces are led by the Bush administration which it seems has long ago waved goodbye to any international laws and treaties that might govern its behaviour.

This same force has refused to accept the basic rules of war and the Geneva Conventions for its detainees in Guantanamo Bay. This same force shocked the world with prisoner abuse in Saddam Hussein's notorious political prison Abu Ghraib.

In this situation, on 4th August, several news reports leaked out the news that Mojahedine Khalq operatives were being used by the Americans to quell the fighting in Najaf.

A British Commander of the Royal Training Centre revealed in an inter-

view with Radio Free Iraq that "members of Mojahedin-e khalq will be present beside Americans in attacking Najaf."

According to this report, Colonel Ali Hussein added: "there are detailed documents and reports on US military's use of Mojahedin in armed suppression of Najaf and attacking this city." The English-Arab commander stressed that "these people will be used in street fights in Najaf."

According to Fars News Agency, 80 Mojahed militants, wearing Iraqi uniforms, have assisted US forces in suppressing the protests in Sadr City. One of them, called 'Bizhan' was among the dead. His body was in the hands of people for three hours.

Al-Mohit website quoted Rahman Amshavi, spokesman of Karbala Police Unit as saying: "an Iranian captured in Karbala has confessed that he has entered Iraq with the help of Mojahedin-e Khalq in order to prepare a terrorist operation against the interim government." He continued: "this Iranian had two Iranian and Norwegian passports."

Now, according to the American administration, these people are members of a "foreign terrorist group who were being financed, housed, trained and backed by Saddam Hussein of Iraq". It was well known that the group's past missions included the suppression of Kurdish and Shiite uprisings against Saddam in 1991 at his behest.

Inside the USA the MKO - and all its aliases - is treated in law as a terrorist organisation, the membership, support and financing of which is illegal and punishable in Federal courts. Inside Iraq, however, the situation is somewhat different and the relation between the two parties has taken the colour not of enmity but of slavery.

Did these MKO combatants volunteer for this mission? Were they paid for this mission?

Could they refuse to perform this mission without fear of imprisonment and torture?

No.

Certainly the most important of the detainees in Ashraf camp is the head of the group Massoud Rajavi. And rumour has it he is especially protected

by the Pentagon. As the head of a terrorist organisation for the past 25 years he is by any account a wanted man, not only in Iraq but in a majority of the countries of the free world.

Yet under the 'protection' of the Americans, the individuals in Ashraf camp who, according to announcements from the group itself, include many people who no longer wish to continue their cooperation or association with the group and its terrorist activities, are forced to stay in the same camp and under the same com-

mand of the same terrorist leaders. Clearly a major reason for keeping these people captive in the camp is to provide cover for Massoud Rajavi who would be isolated and exposed should his forces leave. In this situation it would be next to impossible to avoid being brought to justice for his crimes. By maintaining his organisation as a cover, he might just be able to escape his fate.

But, the open use of these unknown (the Americans have not given a list of the names of these detainees to the

ICRC or any other body) individuals as slaves (for they are used forcefully and are unpaid) and as gladiators (using them to fight in places like Najaf, Mosul, Faluja and Karbala in order to spare professional American soldiers) in this day and age by the administration of a super power which insists on portraying itself as the advocate of democracy and freedom in the world could not be more damaging to the path of humanity, civil rights and democracy in the whole world, including the United States of America itself. ■

A LETTER TO MR WIN GRIFFITHS, MP

August 9, 2004



Dear Mr Griffiths,

During your recent trip to Iran, you put forward the idea that a process of reconciliation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the 'Iranian Resistance' begin to take place. Whether this proposal was a message sent directly from the Rajavi's or whether it was your own initiative, it is certainly a desirable approach for all concerned.

Reconciliation first requires that all parties be willing to be involved. Your proposal when put to officials in Iran was not rejected, indeed as we all witnessed, it was greeted with a cautious agreement and this represents an optimistic basis for starting talks.

But it is not only the Iranian govt which has grievances against the 'Iranian Resistance'. You know that the Rajavi's have many critics and not many friends. There is not a right thinking Iranian organisation or personality, inside or outside Iran which has not expressed abhorrence over Mr and Mrs Rajavi's cooperation with the former regime of Saddam Hussein during his imposed war against the Iranian people which included using weapons of mass destruction against Iranian soldiers.

In spite of the fact that the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MKO) is listed as a terrorist entity in the USA, the European Union, including the UK, and in many other countries, we do not believe this is an obstacle to beginning the process of gradual

reconciliation. Rather the 'Iranian Resistance' which includes the MKO, needs once and for all to establish its credentials and its position in Iranian politics in order to proceed to dialogue of the nature that you suggested. As you are aware, for the past two decades the Mojahedin-e Khalq organisation and its political front the National Council of Resistance of Iran have claimed to exclusively represent the Iranian people's opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran under the title 'Iranian Resistance'. In addition to the armed wing in Iraq under the patronage of Saddam Hussein, the 'Iranian Resistance' has introduced a President and Ministers poised to form an interim government after regime change. However, this 'Iranian Resistance', led exclusively for the past twenty five years by Mr and Mrs Rajavi, has, in its entire history after their departure from Iran in 1980 refused any form of dialogue with any other opposition force whether inside or outside Iran.

Except inviting them to work under its hegemony from Iraq.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly given this history of antagonism, many of these opposition groups, including the Monarchists, Republicans, Islamists and Marxists, and many other personalities, have at different times invited representatives of the 'Iranian Resistance' to take part in open and constructive dialogue. Unsurprisingly, the most recent demand from other Iranian forces has been that the 'Iranian Resistance' issue a simple apology for its involvement in the war against their own country. These demands have fallen on deaf ears up to now. Disaffected members of the Mojahedin and its National Council of Resistance, some of whom held very high positions in the organisation and have now taken their place among the respected personalities and groups in opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran, have also on several occasions invited the 'Iranian Resistance' to an open debate wherever and whenever is suitable.

ble. This invitation has also fallen on deaf ears. For two decades and more the 'Iranian Resistance' has attached pejorative labels to all other different organisations according to its own needs on different occasions.

It has insisted that all its critics and ex members are in some way connected to the Intelligence Ministry of Iran. And this accusation has been the scapegoat which allowed the 'Iranian Resistance' to pretend to itself that it is the only opposition to the regime of Iran. This accusation of course has never had any currency except inside the closed doors of their camps in Iraq.

Iran Interlink, as a forum for disaffected members of the Mojahedin, is in close contact with the majority of opposition groups based inside and outside Iran, as well as many respected human rights and humanitarian organisations across the globe. We have placed the proposal for open dialogue with the 'Iranian Resistance' before many of these opposition groups and personalities and all have agreed this in principle so that its actual place in Iranian politics can be clarified.

Through your mediation we would again like to invite Mr and Mrs Rajavi as lea-

ders of the 'Iranian Resistance', or their representatives, to take part in a free and open live discussion with other opposition groups and personalities, on the basis of their claim that: the 'Iranian Resistance' is an independent and democratic opposition which is working to bring freedom and democracy to Iran, in addition to any other issues which they would like to bring to the table including their ideology, strategy and their tactics over the past 30 years. The place and format for this long overdue debate could be on independent Iranian Radio and/or Television channels in the west or places like the House of Parliament, European Parliament or in western media channels. We are completely open to suggestion as to the time and the place of such a debate which could take place on the 'Iranian Resistance's' own satellite television channel if desired. We can introduce you to representatives from well known opposition groups and personalities in the US and/or Europe who might be invited to this discussion, but again we are also open to suggestions from you or Mr and Mrs Rajavi, even if the invitation to discussion should extend only to their own critics and former members.

We would like to nominate your good self to chair this debate, as a respected member of parliament in the UK who has knowledge of and sympathy with the 'Iranian Resistance'. However, again we are entirely open to Mr and Mrs Rajavi or your own suggestions that any other chairperson be appointed for the debate. As a respected parliamentarian who has been in contact with this group for the past 25 year we would very much appreciate that you take this invitation to the leadership of the 'Iranian Resistance' so that the 25 year game of hide and seek be finished.

We really believe that the 'Iranian Resistance' needs to have the courage and will to answer the numerous criticisms and claims against it in a live, open and free discussion so that the people (and perhaps yourself) can decide for themselves. This discussion will establish a base line for the future and could even bring about a change in the views of the many Iranian opposition organisations which see the 'Iranian Resistance' only as a dangerous, autocratic and closed personality cult and as such will not accept it as having a place in Iranian politics.

Thank you. ■

INTERVIEW WITH GERMAN RADIO DEUTSCHE WELLE



Concurrent with the opening of the trial in a German court of those Americans alleged to have been involved in prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison, a number of ex Mojahedin members were interviewed by Voice of Germany radio which broadcasts in Persian and Arabic languages.

The interviewees, Ardeshir Parhizkari, Akbar Akbari, Ali Ghashghavi, Farhad Javaheiyar, and others, during a 3 hour meeting in Bonn, gave their own accounts of prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib prison, and how they were 'deposited' with the infamous Mokhaberat by Massoud Rajavi, and subjected to torture

and mistreatment. These former MKO members told reporters about conditions in prisons inside the Mojahedin camp and in Abu Ghraib. They stressed that if American soldiers are being tried for such crimes, then certainly Massoud and Maryam Rajavi should be put on trial since their crimes and the conditions of

torture and murder were at their worst possible during the rule of Saddam. (Massoud Rajavi is currently detained in Ashraf camp in Iraq under the protection of US forces. Maryam Rajavi is awaiting trial in Paris on terrorism charges.) ■



CAN THE MOJAHEDIN-E KHALQ FIND ANOTHER SADDAM HUSSEIN?

Maryam Khoshnevis

The survival of the Mojahedin-e Khalq organisation rests on two parameters; one internal and one external. The internal parameter is MKO top man, Massoud Rajavi. He uses tools to perpetuate his organisation such as the Ideological Revolution and the suppression of his forces under the banners of 'organisational discipline' and the 'rights due to an Ideological Leader'. Rajavi has introduced himself as the unique Ideological Leader for the MKO followers and as God's deputy on earth.

As such, it is claimed that to cross the sacred boundaries which surround him is an unforgivable sin. He claims to have sacrificed himself by carrying his followers' sins in order to free the energy and potential of these forces which are so desperately needed for 'the struggle'. He claims he is able to carry the total burden of all their unresolved problems to the point that there would be nobody in the cult who has not traversed to the heaven of ideological revolution. Rajavi crushes any kind of materialistic dependence in his followers in order to allegedly purify 'the struggle'. At the same time he has ordered the suppression of any internal human desire so that 'the struggle' would be more and more clear and visible. And he breaks every normal and accepted rule in order to construct new rules for his cult. He also describes every alteration as a victory so that 'the struggle' could continue.

In simple words, and to clearly understand the role of Massoud Rajavi and the place he occupies in his cult as well as the mentality of his followers, it is enough to quote from his wife Maryam Ghajar Azodanloo (Rajavi) while she describes her husband: "...having doubts about God may be forgiven as God is invisible. But due

to the visibility of Massoud, having doubts about his uniqueness cannot and will not be forgiven".

Accordingly it is clear that Massoud Rajavi represents the only internal guarantee for the cult for the duration of its life. But of course Rajavi alone is not enough to prolong the life of the cult. He needs a complimentary factor in the shape of an external guarantor. Previously, this role was played by Saddam Hussein and his fascist regime. The Mojahedin engaged in their battles and historical victories with this insurance. It is not hard to imagine that without the bases, training, logistics and other forms of support provided by Saddam, the National Liberation Army could not exist. It is not hard to imagine that without the arms provided by the Iraqi army by order of Saddam, the strategy of armed struggle and deploying terror teams into Iran would not have been possible. If the money donated by the Mokhaberat and Estekhbarat of Iraq under Saddam had been removed, the financial life of the Mojahedin would have come to an end long ago. And if it were not for the similarities between Rajavi and Saddam's way of thinking, their co operation would have not lasted all those years. The direct role of Saddam's regime in

the survival of Rajavi's cult is to the extent that Rajavi refers to his benefactor in conversation with the Iraqi General Saber as follows:

"...tell his Excellency (Saddam); our fates have been tied together. Our fates are one. Our bloods are mixed and you know that I am not exaggerating.

I wish we could have performed our duties better than we have done... I think the relations between us and you; between Iraq, the government, the Ba'ath party and the head of all of them Mr President (Saddam) on one side and the Iranian Resistance and the Mojahedin and the Liberation Army on the other side... I don't think that our relations could be described as simple political relations and could not be analyzed as such, and I think it is more like a complete brotherhood between us. Such brothers that would never come short for each other whatever the circumstances.

Whatever is against you, naturally would be against us and vice versa. The blows we receive are to both of us, just as the advances are related to both of us. Concerning our situation, I say one word. Personally, in my mind and in my heart, I can never distinguish between our interests and your interests. They are completely dissol-



ved in each other. In reality our interests have been woven into each other.

Therefore I would like to ask you to send our regards and best wishes to the President (Saddam) and tell him there is no needs for your consideration and for your thanks. Tell his majesty on my behalf that we are in your house and we are with you and we will be with you as far as we are able to be so..."

This external guarantor of the Mojahedin-e Khalq was conclusively destroyed when we witnessed the fall of Saddam. Massoud Rajavi, who is the MKO's internal factor integral to its survival, disappeared because he could not face the world and could no longer hide or justify his mercenary activities for Saddam Hussein. Saddam will never come back and as for Rajavi, he will not be coming back either.

Unless, that is, he finds another partner like Saddam to join in matrimony. Rajavi will not have the chance to step out of the other rat hole otherwise. The survival of the cult then is in the hands of the guarantor who may replace Saddam, the one who will take the MKO on as a mercenary force and allow Rajavi to proudly announce that he is preparing for another war with the backing of another external guarantor.

It should be obvious by now that any force of any kind and form that involves itself in a strategic treaty with this cult, cannot escape from the fact that history will forever judge it as the like for like replacement for Saddam Hussein, the notorious dictator of Iraq. ■

OUR CITIZENS NEED SECURITY AND TRANQUILLITY, NOT TERRORISTS

Ms Mette Tegnandern, Norway



Although I had some general knowledge about Iran from the news, I had not heard of the Mojahedin-e Khalq organisation until I first met the man who was to become my husband. He told me from the beginning he had been a member of this organisation and spoke about its history in the recent events of Iran. He also told me

that he had travelled from Iran to Iraq to join the liberation army there and that his aim had been to free his country from the grip of a cruel and suffocating religious rule.

It was not until I had known him a while and we had become close that he was able to gradually involve me in the secret suffering he endured while serving the Mojahedin. And sincerely, if it had not been for the terrible and traumatic experiences that he told me of, I would never have believed that such an organisation could exist or could do such things to its own people.

From the beginning of what I heard about the Mojahedin, even before I knew of my husband's personal story, it was clear that the leader Massoud Rajavi was just treating people like him as commodities and spilling their blood as though he was spending money from his bank account. I was shocked to learn that once people joined the Mojahedin they were not allowed to leave and not even allowed to contact their families. I still genuinely cannot understand how people can be made to divorce their wife or husband or to give up their children to strangers for adoption. How is that possible?

My husband was one of those who, after a while, decided he wanted to leave the organisation and go back to

his ordinary free life. But he wasn't allowed to leave.

When he kept insisting and resisting the efforts to make him change his mind, the leaders put my husband in their own prisons for two years and even sent him to the horrifying prisons of Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. He was tortured frequently during this whole period. Now, with the evidence left on his body and soul, the autocratic, violent, inhuman nature of the Mojahedin is not a matter of dispute.

My husband showed me pictures of Maryam Rajavi looking very glamorous and smiling benignly. He then told me about the women in Iraq who obey her and that it was they who ordered him to be beaten and imprisoned. With this public face and this hidden reality, what boundaries does this organisation accept? Very few it seems.

As a citizen of a free and democratic country in which my rights and freedoms and my way of life are protected by laws, I find it regrettable that even up to the fall of Saddam Hussein, some politicians and human rights organisations in the west were giving their sup-

port to this mercenary outfit. It is shocking to realise that with this smiling face of Maryam Rajavi they were able to fool people into believing that it was a democratic and humanitarian organisation even when they were living right in the pocket of the notorious dictator Saddam Hussein. Still, I had not myself discovered the depth of brutality of these people until I began to meet more people who had managed to run away from the Mojahedin's Iraqi camps and prisons. The Mojahedin's treatment of political opponents and their own dissatisfied members is simply horrifying. Accompanying my husband, I started to meet others and to listen to the horrifying stories of these cult victims, and to hear about the miseries that the Mojahedin leaders had created under the protection of Saddam in Iraq. As a woman who has been brought up in a western democracy, I have wept many times to see how this organisation has misused the total trust of the people

who had given every thing they had with no expectation of anything in return. The torture and brutal mistreatment of the same people by the cult leader is truly shameful, unjust and a black page in the history of humanity. A few years ago, Mojahedin agents attacked a prominent journalist in Germany. He is a friend of my husband and is based in London. He was attacked while delivering a speech. The attack was so severe that he ended up with a broken nose and broken teeth. Dr Alireza Nourizadeh is among the outspoken critics of Rajavi's cult. The Mojahedin still threaten their opponents and on occasion attack them in European cities. Their critics and ex members simply do not enjoy the normal security which is the basic right of anybody in these countries. They live in fear of the agents of the cult. This is unbearable. This is supposed to be Europe, not the country of Saddam Hussein. Why do our governments tole-

rate such groups which threaten the security of others. When I decided to write about these things it even crossed my mind that I too might be under threat for speaking out. But when I thought of how preposterous it was that a citizen of a free country should fear attack from agents of a terrorist group, I became determined to add my voice in protest. These shameful events are not something happening on another planet. They are happening now in European countries. Surely the security of our citizens is much more important than the presence of such a dangerous cult in our cities. The political personalities who have supported them for whatever reasons must seriously rethink their actions. Getting support from Saddam is one thing, but getting support from representatives of the European electorate is another. Our citizens need security and tranquility, not terrorist organisations. ■

NEW BOOK - FOR HISTORY TO JUDGE

Collected transcripts from videotapes secretly filmed by Saddam Hussein's Secret Services



Discussions between Massoud Rajavi and his lieutenants on one side, and the head of Saddam's Security Services on the other side, reveal the Mojahedin leaders plotting terrorist activities and receiving money in millions for their activities inside and outside Iran, including their involvement in the suppression of Kurdish and Shiite rebellions in 1991 by order of Saddam. Published by Iran Interlink with a DVD of the original secret film, this book is in Persian. The English version and subtitled DVD in English will be out next month. For further information contact info@iran-interlink.org ■

ESCAPING A MAZE OF HATRED

by Amir Taheri



Book Review of 'Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel' - Author: Masoud Banisadr

Let's say it right from the start: this book is a masterpiece and a must-read for anyone interested in such subjects as sects, thought control, terrorism, and totalitarianism. This book is a masterpiece not because it is well-written. In fact, it is not.

Banisadr's style, a mixture of business reports and women's magazines' confessions, at times exasperating. Nevertheless, it is a masterpiece, perhaps, because it tells a moving story, what am I saying, a shattering story, honestly and unencumbered by the artefacts of literary style.

"Masoud: Memoirs of An Iranian Rebel" could remind some readers of Arthur Koestler's classic "Darkness at Noon", an account of how Communism can turn perfectly sane and well-educated men and women into delusional maniacs. To tell the truth, however, I find "Masoud" even more moving, if only because the ideology that destroyed Masoud's life was more bizarre than Marxism-Leninism.

Masoud Banisadr, the writer of these memoirs, is a 51-year old Iranian-born science graduate who joined the Mujahedin Khalq (People's Combatants), one of a dozen or so guerrilla groups fighting the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Mujahedin had a special appeal because they mixed Islamic themes, which had become popular in Iran in the 1960s, with leftist slogans that had attracted some Iranian intellectuals between the 1940s and 1960s. The Shah called them "Islamic-Marxists", a label which, though not accurate, was not of the mark either. By 1978 when the Islamic revolution was bursting on the Iranian scene like a tsunami in a lagoon, the Mujahedin were regarded as selfless, and ruthless, fighters for the cause, whatever it was. They had murdered dozens of people, including bank officials, ordinary policemen, provincial clerks, and, more spectacularly, several American military technicians hired by the Shah.

During the revolution, the Mujahedin acted as the vanguard of the movement. They attacked and burned banks, restaurants, bookshops, cinemas, and other "places of sin".

They also assassinated army officers, policemen and gendarmes. Throughout the revolution, which took less than a year to triumph, the Mujahedin praised Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini as a political idol. They invented the slogan "God is Unique, Khomeini is the Leader!" (Allah Wahed! Khomeini Qa'ed!) All along, however, the Mujahedin leaders believed that Khomeini, an old and apparently frail cleric, would seek no political role after the Shah. When the revolution triumphed, it was only natural for the Mujahedin to expect a seat at the high table. By the spring of 1979, however, it had become clear that the new revolutionary regime would not only refuse the Mujahedin even a side-chair but also regarded them as something of a nuisance. Struck by hubris, the Mujahedin leaders persuaded themselves that Khomeini had "stolen" their revolution. They could not admit that it was Khomeini's leadership and charisma, and not Mujahedin acts of terror, that had mobilised the masses and ensured the victory of the revolution. Emboldened by a few allies in the new revolutionary establishment, notably a prominent mullah called Mahmoud Taleqani, the Mujahedin embarked on a policy of provocation against the new revolutionary regime which, in time, persuaded Khomeini that the only way to deal with them was to destroy their organisation.

While all that was happening, Masoud, our memoirist, was a student in England working on a Ph. D in a scientific subject.

He had been attracted to the Mujahedin in 1977 and militated on their behalf in one of their many front organisations known as the Muslim Students Society in northern England.

AN IDEAL CATCH

Masoud was the ideal catch for the Mujahedin.

He had had a turbulent childhood marked by his parents' divorce and remarriage. Both his father and his step-father had been army officers who neither wanted to nor did manifest any hostility towards the Shah. Masoud, however, grew up in an atmosphere created by two decades of intense anti-Shah propaganda by the regime's many enemies: from the Tudeh (Masses) Communists to disgruntled mullahs and passing by the leftist guerrilla groups already mentioned. Together they had created an anti-Shah culture based on a number of lies, misrepresentations, and hallucinations. They dreamed of revolution not only as a means of getting rid of the Shah but also, perhaps especially, to sort out their inner contradictions.

During the revolution the Mujahedin had told Masoud to love Khomeini and hate the Shah. He had done so with exceptional devotion. He recalls how he had not been able to go to sleep without cursing the Shah and praying for Khomeini. But when the Mujahedin broke with Khomeini, the ayatollah became their chief object of hate. Masoud was told to hate Khomeini and start loving the Mujahedin leader Masoud Rajavi. He did so without any qualms. Suddenly, it was Khomeini that he cursed and Rajavi that he prayed for every night.

Masoud Banisadr had missed the revolution in Iran and felt almost cheated. This

was why the idea of a second revolution, this time against Khomeini, a revolution that would give him a chance to prove how selfless a fighter he is, appealed to him.

To sum up Masoud Banisadr needed four things to give his life meaning: A set of lies that he could believe as absolute truth. These had been provided by the Shah's enemies for years. A new version of them was now manufactured by Khomeini's enemies. The Shah had been presented as an "American agent". It was now Khomeini's turn to be accused of being in cahoots with the Americans and the British. Someone to worship and someone to hate. Until 1979 the Shah had provided the hate figure while Khomeini had represented the love idol. After that Khomeini became the symbol of hate and Rajavi of love.

The illusion that there was an historic or even a divine mission that one had to undertake on behalf of one's nation, if not mankind as a whole.

A cocoon in which to escape from the real world and build an alternative universe. The Mujahedin offered precisely such a cocoon.

From 1977 until he broke with the Mujahedin nearly 20 years later, Masoud Banisadr was a prisoner in a parallel world created by one of the most ruthless sects seen in the last century. As a member of Mujahedin he was ordered to burn all his books, notes and documents, which he promptly did. The typical Mujahed was ordered not to read anything not authorised or published by the Mujahedin. He could not even read the Koran unless asked to do so by the orga-

nisation with its own commentaries. The Mujahed could not go to cinema, unless on an organisational mission; could not watch television or listen to radio except those controlled by the organisation, and had to refrain from forging any relationship with "outsiders." The Mujahed's children had to attend special schools controlled by the organisation.

The idea was to totally isolate the Mujahed from the outside world and gradually kill his critical faculties. He was to be left with a single view of the existence: the fiction created by the "Supreme Leader" Masoud Rajavi and his aides.

At a later stage the Mujahedin were ordered to stop loving their wives or husbands and children because that would reduce from their love for Rajavi. But then Rajavi decided that that, too, was not enough. He ordered all Mujahedin to divorce their wives or husbands. Once they had complied, the "Supreme Leader" ordered the Mujahedin to eliminate their natural sexual desires. Special agents would check the Mujahedin's urine sample to see if it contained "traces of sexual excitement", whatever that means.

At a still later stage the male Mujahedin were ordered to transfer all the top jobs to their female colleagues and accept the superiority of women over men. In the meantime, Masoud Rajavi had divorced his second wife, a daughter of Abol-Hassan Banisadr who had briefly served as President of the Islamic Republic under Khomeini. But Rajavi was not bound by the rules he fixed for others. He asked his number-two Mahdi

Abrishmachi to divorce his wife, Maryam Azodanlu-Qajar; and the latter promptly complied. A few days later Rajavi announced that he had married Maryam, Abrishmachi's divorced wife. The Mujahedin were ordered to celebrate the event as a great revolutionary and historic event, which they did without zeal. The idea was to show that Rajavi was the only person who was above all laws, man-made or ordained by God.

The Mujahedin not only accepted whatever Rajavi did but also went out of their way to present his deeds as sacrifices on his part. He had fled from Tehran to Paris, hidden in women's clothes aboard a hijacked aircraft, and presented his escape as "the most courageous act of heroism", and the Mujahedin had believed him. And when Rajavi signed a "treaty" with Tareq Aziz, then one of Saddam Hussein's top aides, to help Iraq in the war against Iran, the Mujahedin hailed the move as "a great patriotic act." Needless to say the Mujahedin had no qualms to take up arms, enter Iran under the wing of the invading Iraqi armies, to kill Iranians and burn their villages in the name of their revolution. Rajavi had told them to hate America for years. But, after 1983, he urged the Mujahedin to do all they could to win Washington's support, including collecting information for the CIA. In the lexicon created by Rajavi, treason meant patriotism, and freedom was nothing but blind obedience of the chief.

The reader might assume that Banisadr wrote his memoirs to unmask and discredit Rajavi. Paradoxically, however, Masoud Rajavi emerges from this book with a less ugly image than that of his followers, including our talented memoirist.

DOING WHAT HE DID BEST

After all, Rajavi did what he knew best: building his personality cult. When he was propelled into the leadership of the Mujahedin in 1979, Rajavi was a 30-year old ex-student who had spent six years in prison. He had virtually no higher education and his political experience was limited to a few armed attacks on isolated gendarmerie posts and a failed



attempt to kidnap the American ambassador in Tehran. Nevertheless, he was hailed by tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of young Iranians, most of them students or graduates, not only as a political leader but also as a saviour. In other words, it was those young enthusiasts who had a problem not Rajavi. All that Rajavi did was to comply with an old Iranian dictum: if the people act as a donkey, just ride them! Masoud Banisadr, our memoirist, was roughly the same age as Masoud Rajavi. He was better educated than Rajavi because he had completed his university course, obtained a PH.D, and learned English. He had also more practical political experience because he had organised a student union, managed fund-raising events, and lobbied British parliamentarians, journalists and trade union leaders. And yet, Masoud Banisadr regarded Masoud Rajavi as almost a god. He was ready to lie, cheat, betray and even kill for Rajavi.

Banisadr was not alone.

Almost all the Mujahedin cadres were better educated and more experienced than Rajavi. But Rajavi was able to play with them like toys. He would order them to divorce their wives and they would do so without protest. He would tell them to hate each other and use abusive language against their closest comrades, and they would do so with zeal. He would ask them to laugh or to cry, and even, quite literally, to dance for him and they would do so like circus bears.

So: who was it who had a problem? Rajavi or those who helped build his personality cult?

Lacking education and experience, Rajavi acted on animal instinct. He realised that the revolution, which many had dreamed of but few had really wanted, had produced large numbers of rootless people looking for a measure of certainty. Rajavi was clever enough to know that only well-educated individuals could be deceived in a big way. Ordinary people, the illiterate peasants and semi-literate workers, could be deceived in small matters, but never on big ones, if only because they lacked the imagination

needed to believe big lies. For example, no Iranian peasant shed a tear when Stalin died in 1953 while many Iranian poets wrote qasidas to mourn the Soviet dictator. No Iranian peasant or worker joined the Khomeinist movement until after the Shah had shown that he was no longer able to play the role of the "father."

At one point in 1988 Rajavi boasted that the Mujahedin were the only organisation in which people with university degrees were a majority. He was more right than he had imagined. His sect included famous poets, writers, entertainers, footballers, and scientists. Among his worshippers were a grandson of the late Dr. Muhammad Mussadeq, the idol of anti-Shah bourgeoisie, several of Khomeini's closest former advisers, and numerous defectors from various Communist outfits.

Now put yourself in Rajavi's place.

You see that so many people, all of them your superiors by education and experience, come every day to worship you as an idol. They tell you are the greatest, the cleverest, the bravest, the best-looking, the most blessed of the human species EVER created.

What would you think?

If you have a sense of humour you might think that they are pulling your leg. But if you suffer from egomania, as Rajavi did, you would believe that you are doing them a favour by letting them worship you.

During the last 20 years of their activity, the Mujahedin caused the death of at least a quarter of a million Iranians. Their hit-squads and suicide-bombers killed hundreds of officials, religious leaders, and personalities of the Khomeinist regime. In their border attacks on Iran, from bases in Iraq, the Mujahedin killed large numbers of innocent Iranians. In turn, the regime executed thousands of Mujahedin members and sympathisers. Masoud Banisadr's memoirs are particularly chilling because he makes it clear that there is no complete cure for political self-deception. Masoud Banisadr managed to get out of the Mujahedin after almost 20 years. But he has not managed to get the Mujahedin out of

himself. He still defends their criminal project and has difficulty hiding his hateful admiration for the sect.

The reader would be astonished that Masoud Banisadr still considers himself to be "in love", not physically of course, with Maryam, Rajavi's third wife who was appointed by the latter as "President of Iran."

Is it because Maryam symbolises the mother-figure that Masoud Banisadr had always craved for? More importantly, Masoud Banisadr has not cured his initial ailment, the need for someone to hate irrationally and someone to love beyond reason. Today, his object of hate is Masoud Rajavi. And, if my reading is correct, his new object of love is Dr. Mussadeq. Fortunately for Banisadr, Mussadeq is dead and would not be able to ride him as Rajavi had done. The final chapters of this book read like a thriller. We see Masoud Banisadr trying to escape from the clutches of the sect. At one point he narrowly escapes being kidnapped by Mujahedin goons at Baker Street in London, and shipped to Baghdad...

'Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel', Masoud Banisadr

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The review can be read at www.benador-associates.com/article/6169

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PERSONAL EXPERIENCES:

THE ABU GHRAIB PRISON THAT I KNOW

Ali Akbar Akbari Sharbaf



Ali Akbar Akbari Sharbaf
in the Abu Graib prison summer 2001

Looking back I clearly remember that even while I was entering the prison I had not understood or recognised the true nature of this barbaric couple. I did not know exactly how they had been surviving on the consumption of the blood of the children of my country. It is reminiscent of the ancient story of Zahak whose shoulders were kissed by the devil whereupon two voracious snakes grew, one on each shoulder. Then the devil, posing as a doctor, came to his bedside and told him 'if you feed these snakes a human brain each every day for some time, they will die'. So year in, year out without end, Zahak killed the children of the people of Iran and fed the brains to the snakes on his shoulders. And now this same story is being repeated by Rajavi and his wife who, for getting a grip on power - and what a dirty way of achieving power - are killing the best children of this country. They are selling them in bunches to the likes of Aghid Hashem and Naghib Mohammed [two agents of Saddam's Secret Services]. I clearly remember my last day in Ashraf camp when they were going to hand me over to the Security Services of Saddam. On that day, a well known dirty and corrupted

As I passed through the gates of the notorious Abu Ghraib prison, I could not believe that this was really me, standing at the edge of where the world finishes.

Abu Ghraib prison, a name that sent shivers down the back of any Iraqi, was in front of me and I, with over twenty one years history of serving the Mojahedin organisation, had to start a new existence in this prison and wait for the leadership of the organisation, especially Maryam, the sensual wife of Massoud Rajavi, to decide in what way they will eliminate me.

woman called Mahvash Sepehri together with Batool Rajaie and Javad Khorasan from the so called officials of the organisation, along with some of the well known torturers of the organisation including Farhad Olfat, came to me and asked me to put my head down and by accepting the rank of deputy of section, go back to my work. After a year of imprisonment and torture in solitary confinement I had only one answer and that was to spit on the floor at their feet. After a few days in Abu Ghraib prison, I discovered what 'Falgheh' meant. But I had no idea that I would become famous in Abu Ghraib together with Abass Yazdani as a 'loyalist' of the Falgheh. The Falgheh was a specially made machine for torturing the prisoners. Every Iranian prisoner and in particular every ex member of the Mojahedin had to be tied to this equipment. The so called 'deposits' of Rajavi, were informed by our torturers, that we had to feel the machine in such a way that we would understand more deeply Rajavi's sacrifices, and we would witness with our whole being that our Mojahed leader is paying the highest price by accepting the torture of his ex members. It did not take long for me to expe-

rience this machine. In one of those hot Iraqi afternoons my name was suddenly shouted out by one of the prison guards. I reported to him and without a word he started to beat me with a big wooden club. My head was broken and blood poured from several places on my body. He did not stop and a few moments later two other guards joined him. Nothing was said. Only severe beating. I was losing my strength very quickly and then I don't know what happened. There was some unfamiliar sound and then I was up. At first I thought that I must be dreaming, but the pain was so real that I forgot what I was thinking about. I was covered in blood. My jaw was dislocated. Lying me on the floor they started again and I could feel their boots kicking every part of my body while I was screaming. In that situation the one thing I did not know was that I would be spending the next three months living in a toilet. The guards made me stand on my legs. Only at that time was I informed that I was accused of trying to escape the prison and that there were others who had allegedly been trying to help me and that I would not tell their names! They were beating me

*Fahrad Javaherijar Akbari Sharbaf Hassan Sadeghjan
in the Abu Graib prison summer 2001*



up to tell them the names of people who did not exist.

It was clear that the real reason for my torture was that I had been trying to give hope to the other prisoners and had been trying to convince them that one day they would be freed and so we should not give in to the demands of the torturers to go back to Rajavi.

They had found out about this.

The laughable accusation of trying to escape was something they would routinely use to cover whatever real purpose they had to beat people up. Naturally there were people who were unable to put up resistance and under torture would start saying anybody's name in the vain hope that they would reduce the torture. I would not co-operate in this charade and would not give any names. I could not even bring myself to give the names of the people that I knew had been the cause of my situation. That was why I had to be tortured to the end. Every torturer and every prisoner knew that these were false allegations but again, everybody knew also that the system of torture and beating had to continue.

My name had come up and in the end they moved me to 'Mahjaz'. This was a toilet with no water where they would not give you clothes, food or anything else. There was no light in it either. For three months in the worst heat of Iraq I had only 3 glasses of water per day for all my needs. I had no food for the first four days and then I received one piece of bread per day. I had to sleep by the

side of the same toilet bowl which had been used over and over and had never been cleaned. The concrete floor was not big enough to stretch out my legs while lying down to sleep.

Living in this condi-

tion for three months was barely possible, but every day too after counting the prisoners, the guards would come and in groups of three to five would beat me up and haul me off to the prison yard. There in front of others, they would tie me to the 'Falgheh' and beat me on my feet with a very thick wooden club and I would scream and shout. After a while, it became a routine. Every morning I had to run into the yard with a guard beating me on my back. I had to lie down in the middle of the yard so that the chosen prisoners of the day could tie my feet onto the 'Falgheh' and keep them up so that the guards could beat my severely injured feet with their special clubs. Seeing me under torture had become a normal thing even for my friends. It was just another routine among hundreds of other scenes in Abu Ghraib. But it was very different for me. For me it was constant torture and constant fear of the next torture session. Many times I could see that while I was under torture the other prisoners were talking to each other and laughing. I could not blame them as I could remember that before me, it had been the turn of Abass Yazdani, and I used to go and watch even though I did not want to. And now it was my turn. On one of these regular torture days, my foot broke and I passed out. When I came round I saw that they had bandaged my foot. They had not touched my other wounds. But breaking my foot and losing my nails meant the torture was stopped for some time. I spent about three years

in Abu Ghraib prison on the direct order of Massoud Rajavi, during which for only three months was I exempted from torture.

All these barbaric activities were taking place because Rajavi had decided that he no longer wants to have any ex members.

Today Rajavi is serving the Americans in rebuilding the Secret Services of Iraq. He is also serving shoulder to shoulder with the new torturers in Abu Ghraib prison. Both Saddam and Bush know that Rajavi, who does not have any mother country, would do any dirty work to please his masters and that is why his sell by date can always be renewed. He resembles an infamous torturer during Iran's Safavid Empire [1501 - 1722].

This man remained in his position after the attack by Ashraf Afghan and went on to serve in Nader Shah's court. One day on his way to work he saw the head of Nader Shah on a spike. He approached the people whom he was to kill that day - the ones who killed Nader Shah the night before - and asked them to give him fresh orders for the new victims to be beheaded. He stayed in his job even after the death of Nader Shah. Similarly, Massoud Rajavi will always have some customers up to the last day of his life. That is, of course, unless someone does not bring him to justice sooner. ■

SURVIVORS' REPORT

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