

ASSOCIATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF MOJAHEDIN-E KHALQ

FIRST STEPS TOWARD DISMANTLING MKO INFRASTRUCTURE IN IRAQ UNDERWAY

For many years, members of the Association for the Support of Victims of Mojahedin-e Khalq have publicised the victimisation of individual members of the MKO and have asked that all the members who had for years been under the control of Massoud Rajavi's cult and Saddam Hussein's secret services, be subject to the scrutiny of international observers to ensure that their human rights are protected.



This demand had become ever more urgent over the past few months after the Iraqi interim government said it will expel the Mojahedin from Iraq. In all correspondence with the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UNHCR, the only obstacles to helping these individuals have been the uncertainty of their legal status in Iraq and the failure of the American forces surrounding Ashraf camp to dismantle the internal command structure of the Mojahedin-e Khalq which kept the members trapped in the cult's power. Organisations which could have rapidly helped resolve this situation have stated verbally and in writing that on one side the uncertainty of the captives' legal status and on the other side the limitations of their own

mandates have prevented them from engaging in the resolution of this problem as long as the Mojahedin is operating as a group and that they do not have access to individual members without prejudice. They have suspended their active role until such a time that they are able to interview the individuals independently and freely so that they can offer appropriate help according to each detainee's individual circumstances. It is with great joy that we have received (so far unconfirmed) reports that the Central Command of the Coalition Forces in Iraq has at last decided on the legal status of the detainees in Ashraf camp in Iraq. The reports suggest that the pronouncement was made directly to the prisoners of the camp by the coalition forces which now accepts

these individuals (now about 3000 people) as protected under the terms set out by the Geneva Convention. The office of the ICRC and the UNHCR have both been informed of this decision. The Association is determined to rescue the ordinary individual members from the tyranny of this notorious terrorist cult, and we welcome this announcement by the Command Centre of the Coalition Forces in Iraq and the due clarification of the legal status of these detainees. The following points should be made.

- 1 The announcement of the official status of these individuals and the consequent, inevitable dismantling of Saddam's Private Army is recognition and affirmation that the MKO army was a part of Saddam's army. We believe that the undeniable culpabili-

EDITORIAL



The best, and our favourite, piece of news about the Mojahedin has been the reported designation of the detainees in Ashraf camp as protected under the Geneva Convention.

After a year of campaigning by people from the Association for the Support of Victims of Mojahedin-e Khalq (ASVM) to get help to the MKO's ordinary members in Iraq and to ensure that the lea-

ty for war crimes and crimes against humanity should rest with the leaders of this cult who for over two decades have committed these crimes on their own behalf as well as on behalf of Saddam Hussein. We have credible evidence that ordinary members of the Mojahedin had no information concerning the collaboration between Rajavi and Saddam, even during the fighting and the war. Indeed, some individuals were imprisoned in Ashraf camp prisons as well as Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad because of their discovery of and refusal to be involved in the criminal activities of Rajavi and Saddam.

2 Again, thanking the Central Command of the Coalition Forces in Iraq for its latest clarification and the announcement the status of the detainees in Ashraf camp, we now see the opportunity for the families, friends and independent legal and other representatives to visit these individuals. Any obstacles put in the way of free and unfettered access by the families, friends, lawyers and representatives

This issue of Survivors' Report focuses on various views of the Mojahedin which have been expressed over the past month. The overwhelming message from nearly every quarter is that the Mojahedin conundrum needs to be resolved as quickly as possible one way or another.

ders are brought to justice, we are finally seeing some progress for our efforts. The main obstacle to helping the individuals there had been Massoud Rajavi's bizarre insistence that his terrorist organisation should not be dismantled. The US's continued intransigence over the detainees' legal status blocked our efforts to get help to the individual detainees. Officials from humanitarian organisations, primarily the ICRC, were denied the conditions needed to access and help individuals.

without the presence of the cult's agents and the pressure of MKO leaders, would be considered illegal and we will pursue such cases in Iraqi and international courts.

3 The small number of these detainees who have citizenship of other countries as well as individuals who can prove some family or other connection in western countries, and also the ones who wish to release themselves from the cult, if not having committed any criminal act and not charged, should be repatriated to their country of origin immediately.

Overwhelming evidence shows that the majority of these people have been under physical and psychological pressure to stay in the camp to be used as the hostages of Rajavi to save him from prosecution in any court of justice. We believe that the ICRC is aware of this and will act accordingly.

4 Considering the announcement of official status and considering the previous announcement declaring the illegality of all the different parts of Saddam's army, and the due dismant-

ment of the remains of Saddam's private army, we expect the ICRC and UNHCR to exert their power in observing that the total military and organisational command structure of the MKO as a military cult is dismantled so that individuals could be interviewed (or interrogated in the cases that they may have been charged) in a private place away from the pernicious influence of the cult leaders. From today any physical or psychological pressure imposed on these people by the cult leaders would be the direct responsibility of the American Forces as well as the Defence ministry of the USA and any mistreatment of individuals by the cult leaders or others in Ashraf camp can be pursued as the failure of the Americans in carrying out their responsibilities under the Geneva Convention. From today, the Association for the Support of Victims of Mojahedin-e Khalq will start a fresh program to arrange visits to these individuals through the auspices of the ICRC and UNHCR, in particular to the many for whom we have evidence of mistreatment and torture. ■

LETTER WRITTEN TO IRAN-INTERLINK

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Dear Iran-Interlink,

As you know, my father Ebrahim Khodabandeh, has appointed me to act as his sole representative in the United Kingdom and elsewhere while he is in prison in Iran.

It is in this capacity that I write on his and my own behalf to thank you for the help that you have given to us over the past year. My father has expressed his gratitude in particular for your visit to him in prison last month. He is certain this will help facilitate a fair and speedy trial for him and Jamil Bassam.

For my own part, as an English woman, although I knew my father was active with the Mojahedin or MKO, I did not have any real knowledge of or interest in Iran's politics other than the things I had read in newspapers. So, when I discovered my father had been taken to Evin prison in Iran in June 2003 after having spent two months in a Syrian jail, I was very distressed and frightened. The Mojahedin who visited my house that same day told me my father was being tortured and would soon be executed. They insisted I travel with them immediately to London and set fire to myself in front of parliament or my father had no hope. As you know this suggestion itself horrified me. These actions, my lawyer tells me, are illegal in Britain and I am pursuing this to make sure that these shocking practices by the MKO are stamped out in my country. You can imagine how shocked I was to discover that only a week or two after my own experience, that some MKO members actually did burn themselves and that some died. I have even heard that they drugged some of these victims before they committed these acts.

In this surreal atmosphere, I was grateful to the people at Iran-Interlink who helped me to find the right channels to establish the facts and to get help for my father, and I believe this was the

key to ensuring his good treatment.

For this past year I have had conflicting reports and advice. The Mojahedin always insisted that my father was still under torture and would be executed. So, when he telephoned me in September last year I was still confused about what was happening. But as we kept in touch over the following months I realised that he was actually being treated well and was able to visit his parents at home as often as he wished.

I am grateful for the help of Mr Win Griffiths MP who campaigned in the UK on my father's behalf and made representations to the Iranian embassy for me, and who also visited the Iranian embassy in London with me to talk to the ambassador about my father's situation.

I am also very grateful to Mr Griffiths that at your insistence he accepted the ambassador's invitation to visit my father in Iran and to see for himself the conditions of his capture. This visit accompanied by Sir Teddy Taylor was of great help to my father both in terms of morale and in establishing that he will receive a fair and speedy trial.

I want to thank Iran-Interlink in particular for giving me the courage to go to Iran and see my father in person.

In June this year I travelled with my husband and three children to Tehran. My husband and I were worried about what the situation would be like for us. The Mojahedin had told us so many scare stories that we thought the mullahs would be standing at the street corners oppressing women at every turn. In fact, the situation was very, very different from that we had been led to expect.

My father stayed with us every day at his mother's house where we were staying. This was the longest time I have ever been able to spend with my father since he was with the Mojahedin. He told me that as a member of the Mojahedin he wasn't allowed to meet with any of his family or have contact except when he was ordered to make me come to demonstrations and such like to make up numbers. He remembered with deep personal dismay the time when I was thirteen and he persuaded my mother and I to go to a demonstration in Brussels. My mother had stayed at the hotel and I was with my father in the middle of the city when he was ordered instantly to go to Paris. My father said he was in a dilemma and even thought of taking me to Paris with him, but instead he abandoned me alone in the unknown streets in the middle of Brussels because he had to obey orders.

My father even before his arrest kept asking why I still cared about him after treating me like this and after years of abandonment. And really it isn't easy to explain, but I believe that the bond between family is stronger than anything and my own faith in Islam has always been my guide in this, and this is what has allowed me to forgive my father for much of the pain he caused me and my mother.

What became really clear to me during this trip was that my father hadn't really been doing these things by choice. He had been subject to the manipulation of a cult which affected him very badly and so he has been a victim himself. He had been ordered by the Mojahedin to not have any contact with his family. This is why it is both so

painful and so laughable that the Mojahedin still insist that my father was arrested while travelling to Syria to visit his family, even when he has himself told the truth about the Mojahedin's smuggling activities. My father is quite clear himself where to place blame. Although he feels contrition and is apologetic to me personally, he said on many occasions during our visit that the Mojahedin told him lies and deceived him and his colleagues.

He asked me to pass on this message to those colleagues who can hear him. Above all he said that Elaheh Azimfar, his former wife who is still with the Mojahedin, should not listen to them but should come to Iran to visit him. He said 'I can vouch for her safety. She doesn't need to stay here, but just come and see her family who she has not seen for over two decades and come and see me and Jamil to see that we are both fine'. He said to his friends in the Mojahedin that they shouldn't listen to the lies that the leaders are telling them. He said that as he believes in a secular non ideological government, now that he has seen the various factions of Iranian politics at first hand, he believes that for years Rajavi has been out of the political equation of Iran. He has not seen any support or sympathy for the terrorist acts committed by the Mojahedin in Iran nor has he come across any forgiveness for their participation in the Iran-Iraq war working as mercenaries for Saddam Hussein. He said that quite early on in his imprisonment, the guards took him and Jamil into the streets of Tehran and told them to ask at random any member of the public what they thought of the Mojahedin. My father said this was a salutary experience, since those who actually did know of the Mojahedin only hated them for this cooperation with the Iraqis during the war. This is why we are both pleased that all those who have visited my father, including an independent journalist, could see for themselves what was going on inside

Iran. I think we all gained a fresh and more realistic view of life there. For one thing, I saw that Iranian women enjoy much greater personal freedom than any other Middle Eastern country I have visited. On one occasion when we had gone shopping in a middle class area, it amused my father greatly that one shopkeeper showed his surprise at my not being Iranian. He said, 'but she's the only one in this whole street wearing proper hijab!'

In the end, the overall message that my father wanted me to convey to others is his sincere gratitude to all those who have helped and campaign-

ed on his behalf, in particular Iran-Interlink, Baroness Emma Nicholson, Mr Win Griffiths and Sir Teddy Taylor, and to speak of his great optimism for his own future and the future of others who have been victims of the MKO cult and who may in some way be able to achieve their freedom like him, even if that means going to jail to find it! My message in this letter is also one of gratitude to you but I must also extend that to the Iranians who, I believe, have treated us all with an unexpected kindness and respect.

Thank you all.

Homa Khodabandeh ■

VIEWS ON THE FATE OF THE MKO IN JULY

Hoshyar Zebari, Iraqi foreign minister, in an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, said Iraq has adopted some decisions on how to treat with neighboring countries according to which Iraq will not allow oppositions of neighboring countries to use Iraq soil against them.

Then he emphasized that Iraq is no longer a haven for armed opposition groups. In response to the question that "whether Iraq is going to deport Mojahedin-e Khalq to Iran," Zebari said: "we won't let them have bases in Iraq and we will never be on their side. We will let them leave Iraq, since they are unacceptable and unbearable in this country." July 24

According to Mehr News, Iraqi tribe leaders and some political officials have asked for the expulsion of MKO from Iraq since this group supported the former Iraqi regime and took part in the suppression of Kurdish and Shiite uprisings in 1991. July 23

Amazingly enough, there are political forces in Washington, including the Neocon-dominated, pro-Israeli "Washington Institute for Near East Policy," that support the MEK terrorist organization and want the Bush administration to, as well. Juan Cole, ProgressiveTrail.Org. July 21

Richard Boucher, State Department Spokesman, press briefing. July 20
QUESTION: "Very quickly on a point. They also called for the U.S. to put an influence or to pressure to disband Mujahedin-e Khalq, and since it's on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations, why not? I mean, why --" BOUCHER: I think you know that we have stopped their activities in Iraq. They are in cantonment. They have been vetted or are being interviewed to determine which one of these people -- which of these people may be wanted for crimes or for terrorism and which of them may not be. That process is underway, but there's certainly no question that at this point, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, which we do see as a terrorist organization, has been rounded up and stopped in Iraq.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, in an interview with National Public Radio, July 20, supported the Council on Foreign Relations' report on Iran and described

US support of Mojahedin as embarrassing.

A Council of Foreign Relations taskforce said Washington should work with the new Iraqi government to disband the Mujahidin-e Khalq organisation, a militia in Iraq that is intent on regime change in Iran. About 4,000 MEK fighters have been detained by US-led forces in Iraq. Financial Times. July 19
Canadian government officials visited a former Iranian guerrilla base north of Baghdad last month and met with dozens of detained members of a militant group who say they come from Canada. Some of the landed immigrants may no longer be eligible to return to Canada since they have been out of the country for so long. Those with status in Canada are free to return, an official said. "They have been told that they are totally at liberty to come back to Canada if it is their wish," said Reynald Doiron, a Foreign Affairs spokesman. The National Post. July 19

As for the outlawed terrorist Mujahideen Khalq Organization (MKO) members, Allawi said Iraq's interim

government would not allow Iraq to be turned into a base of insecurity for Iran. July 18 The discovery of new documents of the former Iraqi regime's activities has led to the disclosure of wide cooperation of Mojahedin with Saddam's dictator regime, a source, close to SAIRI, said to Fars News Agency. July 17

Abdulaziz Hakim, leader of one of Iraq's leading Shia Muslim parties, said he expected the new Iraqi government to expel the members of the group, known as the Mujahidin-e Khalq (MEK). The Financial Times. July 14
Al-Hayat newspaper exclusively interviewed Salim Al-Chalabi, director of Saddam's court.

Chalabi has said that he is going to travel to Iran in the next few days in order to be informed of accusations against Saddam concerning war on Iran. He has added: "this court is qualified to follow the case of Iraqis and those who live in Iraq. I believe that this will reduce the punishment of the indicted but his responsibility remains the same. If there is enough evidence, there is the possibility of trying the

Mojahedin-e Khalq because they are present in Iraq." July 12

Determining the status of terrorist MKO, an action which was postponed until the posthandover era, is the first severe exam for the Iraq interim government. Baztab website.

July 5

United States Court of Appeals FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CIRCUIT
Argued April 2, 2004 Decided July 9, 2004 Opinion for the Court filed by Circuit Judge ROBERTS.

ROBERTS, Circuit Judge: This is the fourth in a series of related cases concerning the biennial designations by the Secretary of State of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK) and its aliases as a foreign terrorist organization ...After reviewing NCRI's arguments, the entirety of the administrative record, and certain classified materials appended to that record, we conclude that the Secretary's latest designation complied with the governing statute and all constitutional requirements. We therefore deny the petition for review. ■

UK PLEDGES TO RESOLVE THE MKO ISSUE

On July 13 Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has pledged to continue to raise Iran's interests in the 3,800 members of the outlawed Mujahideen-e Khalq (MKO) terrorist group detained by the US at their Camp Ashraf training site in Iraq.



"We have made proper representations in the past to the United States government and to the Iraqi provisional government and we will make those too to the Iraqi interim government," Straw told parliament on Tuesday. "I fully understand Iran's concern about the MKO, which I, when I was Home Secretary, declared to be a terrorist organization following the passage of the Terrorism Act 2000," he said. The foreign secretary was questioned by veteran Conservative MP Teddy Taylor whether he agreed that "Iran, which has suffered so much from brutal attacks

from members of the MKO, should have a meaningful role in discussions on the future of its 3,800 members."

"Would not such a step improve relations between Britain and Iran and confirm the US's declared opposition to international terrorism?" the former junior minister asked. His question came after Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell revealed earlier this month that arrangements for Camp Ashraf are being considered by the Iraqi interim government in conjunction with US authorities, who have sole responsibility for the detained MKO members. ■

WHO SUPPORTS THE MKO?

Massoud Khodabandeh



It had been many years that the MKO had lost hope of any support from Iranians either inside or outside Iran. Now in losing Saddam the MKO has been confronted head on with the inevitable loss of support from the anti-Iranian forces both in the region and the west. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the devastating effect of Saddam's downfall on the MKO was considered acceptable collateral damage for those who pursued the war. After all, Rajavi had received warnings over and over again both during and after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and was given the chance to distance himself from the fate of Saddam. Rajavi not only defied these warnings, but engaged his military forces in crushing the Kurdish and Shiite uprisings to save Saddam.

To make the MKO's current situation worse, Rajavi's wife, who is second in command of the military cult, was arrested in Paris only a few days after running away from Iraq, when French police raided the MKO's western headquarters there. She is awaiting trial on charges related to terrorism and to add to the already bloody background of the cult, she, in an effort to put pressure on the French judicial system, ordered the series of selfimmolations which took the lives of two younger members and left others badly injured and dis-

The sudden, irrevocable loss of MKO leader Massoud Rajavi's only serious benefactor, Saddam Hussein, has been the biggest blow in its history to the strategic and ideological existence of the MKO in Iraq and the other branches of the cult in the Middle East and the west.

bled. Rajavi did not expect these events. In his choices, he had never entertained the possibility of losing Saddam altogether and that perhaps came from the illusion that since he had once been supported in transferring his forces to Iraq to help Saddam in his war against the Iranians, the backers would never leave him or his benefactor to cook in their own oil.

Well, this has not been the first such abandonment in history; nor will it be the last. Facing this new disastrous situation, compounded by the plethora of damning documents and video tapes surfacing from the former Iraqi intelligence which reveal the depth of the conspiracies and ties between Saddam's secret services and Rajavi, the MKO closed all its English propaganda outlets and created new Farsi websites in an attempt at damage control and crisis management. The sole purpose of these new outlets is to bank as many credulous members of the cult as possible. And although it has to be said this has met with very little success, the outlets are in overdrive pretending that:

- 1-The MKO has not been arrested and disarmed by the Americans, its bases were not bombed by the coalition forces and that the members are not facing expulsion from Iraq by the Iraqis.
- 2-It still has some backers and has not been abandoned by the anti-Iranian forces in the west.
- 3-Its entry in the lists of terrorist entities practically all over the world, the arrest of Maryam Rajavi, the fall of the MKO empire in Baghdad, the scandalous testimony of ex MKO prisoners held in Abu Ghraib prison,

and etc are all the work of the intelligence ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The propaganda machine has been in overdrive for the last year, during which time the MKO has claimed that four hundred thousand Iraqis have demonstrated their willingness to keep them in Iraq, that thousands of Iraqi officials support them, and that the presence of the MKO (a small armed pro-Saddam group of Iranian origin) in Iraq is a potent means of fighting Islamic fundamentalism in Iraq. These claims have been dismissed in the media and political circles as naive and desperate hype disseminated as the rope tightens around Rajavi's neck. The MKO's absurd insistence on its own lies continued with claims that 305 imaginary British parliamentarians had signed up to support them and that over 700 members of the EU had ignored their own policy on terrorism to sign the MKO's petition, and that hundreds of Australian politicians support them. More recently the MKO have claimed that a majority of the members of the Belgian parliament have demanded the MKO be removed from the EU list of terrorist entities. It did not take long for the media and others to see through the MKO's ploy and discover its falsification of signatures. After all, this was not the first time. Baroness Nicholson, MEP, Vice Chair of the EP Foreign Affairs Committee had on one occasion passed the MKO's case to the UK police's fraud department after an MKO representative had handed her a list of obviously forged signatures in order to persuade her to add her name to the petition. From that time the MKO has not even bothered to

falsify documents and signatures, it simply issues its claims. For the past year at least, their claims have never been supported by any list of signatures whatsoever. Having been placed on the list of terrorist organisation in the US, UK, European Union and other countries across the globe, it is hardly surprising that any normal independent politician would hesitate to be seen as associated with them in any way.

But having said that, it cannot be said that the MKO is not active in the west. The cult managed to transfer a few hundred of its forces from Iraq to the west before the start of the war in 2003. Some of these of course we have seen setting fire to themselves in the capitals of Europe last year. And it is not true to say that they cannot find anybody to put themselves out to try to protect them from the law of the land whether in Iraq or Paris or the US. But who are these people?

There are a handful of people around the world who on various occasions and over a long period of time have supported the MKO under its different guises. They have either been paid or were otherwise not concerned about their own position or reputations any more. Lord Corbett of Castle Vale, an unelected member of the House of Lords in Britain is one of these people. In Sweden we see Herman Schmid, member of the European parliament who was seriously criticised and dismissed by his own party for supporting the MKO. In the US, Richard Perle attended a meeting organized by the MKO under a pseudonym. He accepted payment for his speech, but denied any knowledge of the MKO's involvement in organising the event however shortly afterwards he resigned his post as Pentagon advisor. Putting aside these propaganda channels whose activities usually appear only in the Farsi language papers and Farsi websites affiliated to the MKO, there are still others who believe that the MKO could be a useful bargaining chip for confronting the ruling regime in Iran. Israel and the Israeli support groups in the US, if not the only 'believers', then certainly are at the top of

the list. The theory that the 'ends justify the means' allows them to close their eyes to the bloody terrorist nature of the MKO. These of course are the same forces who did not see anything wrong with using the Falangists in the massacre of Lebanese children, and did not see anything wrong in providing weapons of mass destruction to Saddam Hussein to use against Iranian soldiers and Kurdish villages, and do not see anything wrong in bombing civilians to bring about a dictated regime change in the Middle East and elsewhere. For these forces the MKO can never be more than a tool. They announce publicly that they do not see the MKO as an alternative and nor do they trust Rajavi to be on their side. Apparently the utmost use that can be made of the MKO is as a mouthpiece for relaying second hand information using Israeli satellite pictures, or employing them in a place like Fox News network to transmit their own version of events out of the mouth of someone Iranian. The question is, does this kind of action against Iran weaken the Islamic Republic of Iran or does it makes it stronger and more legitimate (at least inside Iran)?

As someone who has many good friends in Israel, the US, Iraq and Iran, and as someone who strongly believes that a free market economy and independent, freely elected, secular government would best serve the interests of the people of any country, including Iran, I have failed to understand this policy. And by that I mean the benefits which they think can be derived from it. Although this is not a widespread idea and is certainly not a policy that any US administration would approve, it would be informative to briefly assess the price of such line of action. To follow this policy, the first step is that you have to find a way for MKO leader Massoud Rajavi not to be brought to justice. It is no secret that Rajavi has been and remains in the custody of US forces in Iraq, and even the MKO's own representatives accept this in their interviews. It is also no secret that the MKO, like any other cult, would not

have any short term future and use if Rajavi is taken out of the equation. Up to this day, the fate of 3800 MKO members has been placed in jeopardy only to protect Massoud Rajavi and his hand-picked associates from justice (refer to my article 'Rajavi's hostages' in Survivors Report June 2004). Is it going to be the case that the US will give in to the demands of Rajavi and his few known backers? And to what end? By doing this the US will have failed to acknowledge the atrocities committed by Saddam's private army against the Iraqi Kurds, Iraqi Shiites. It will have failed to acknowledge the suffering of Iranians who have been affected by the MKO's terrorist acts in Iran, many Iranian opposition groups and personalities who have been affected by the actions of the cult in Europe and America, and the hundreds of disaffected members who have been imprisoned tortured and executed by the agents of Massoud Rajavi in Ashraf camp and/or Abu Ghraib prison. Above all by doing so have you not in fact supported and harboured terrorists who are on your own list of terrorist entities? And if so, could you really blame those people who would consequently see your war on terror as something irrelevant to their lives and problems and see it as just another tool to crush opponents rather than making the world a safer place for all of us? War on terrorism can never be effective as long as we hesitate to deal with it effectively in its every manifestation, and as long as we place other political and economical priorities above it. In this particular case in Iraq and with Saddam facing trial in near future, I must insist that it would be foolish to ignore Saddam's links to terrorism and pay the full price just for having another mouthpiece in Fox News. No wonder that among all the warnings to the Bush administration Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National security adviser, in his interview a few days ago referred to any backing of the MKO as a shameful act. ■



THE MOST BIZARRE TERRORIST GROUP

Mahan Abedin

The Mojahedin-e-Khalq is probably the most bizarre terrorist group around. Verging on a cult the Iranian revolutionary group boasts a matriarchal philosophy and admires former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Mahan Abedin explores a tale of incompetence and misplaced loyalties.

“Immediately before the declaration of war on the Islamic Republic, the MKO leader, Massoud Rajavi, had fled Iran aboard an aircraft dressed as a female. Rajavi settled in France and in the months after the failure of their terrorist campaign the surviving MKO cadres and supporters fled Iran and joined their leader in Paris.”

Somewhere in the Diyala wastelands of Iraq, 65 miles northwest of Baghdad, lies a military town that seems to exist on a parallel universe. Ashraf camp is the home of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organisation (MKO) a bizarre Iranian revolutionary group dedicated to the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its replacement by a Pol Pot style “people’s dictatorship”.

The military town is 14 square miles of Diyala desert that has been turned into a mini-state by the Mojahedin. The town boasts two hospitals, parks, a university, artillery ranges, a shopping centre and last but not least a large prison. When US forces entered the town in May 2003 they found a bizarre world of middle aged female tank commanders and a disciplinarian and regimented society that makes North Korea seem like a paragon of liberal democracy. The Mojahedin-e-Khalq had been an intrinsic feature of Saddam Hussein’s security military apparatus since 1986. Saddam gave them a sizeable chunk of Iraqi land and in return expected them to do his bidding, not only against Iran but also in Iraq against the Baathist regime’s opponents. The Mojahedin gained notoriety in 1991 when they helped Saddam’s shock troops suppress

the Shia and Kurdish uprisings in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War. The downfall of Saddam Hussein has been the greatest strategic blow ever suffered by the Mojahedin. Many observers thought that they would be summarily expelled from Iraq upon the Baathist regime’s collapse and it is indeed surprising that nearly 15 months since the fall of Saddam Hussein the MKO remain ensconced inside Ashraf. The Iraqi Governing Council called for their expulsion in December 2003, but the American occupation authorities have been unwilling to enforce this decision. This is perplexing for many reasons, not least because the US State Department designated the MKO a terrorist organisation back in the 1990’s. The fate of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq remains on a tight rope, as Iraq regains its symbolic sovereignty on 30 June. Again many observers believe that the new Iraqi government will move quickly to expel this foreign terrorist organisation from Iraqi soil, but the Mojahedin’s fate will, ultimately, be decided by the Americans. A true test of whether the 30 June transfer of power constitutes a genuine re-investment of sovereignty on the Iraqis will revolve around whether the new Iraqi government can influence the Americans to dismantle and expel an organisation that has Iraqi blood aplenty on its hands.

Beginnings

The Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organisation was formed in the 1960’s by a group of

idealistic students who fused revolutionary Islam with Marxism-Leninism. Although the group constituted little more than a tiny cell of activist students, nevertheless the Shah’s regime was determined to crack down hard on any form of dissent. The endgame for this small activist network seemed to have arrived in 1971 when the Shah’s secret police, the notorious SAVAK, rounded up the group’s leaders. All of the leaders were subsequently executed, with the exception of Massoud Rajavi. Former Mojahedin activists contend that the only reason the SAVAK spared Rajavi’s life is because he had “cooperated” and had agreed to become their informant. Moreover the jailed leaders of other organisations have given credible testimonials that Massoud Rajavi had been the SAVAK’s “antenna” in Tehran’s notorious Evin prison. Shortly after the victory of the Iranian revolution, Massoud Rajavi and a few close confidants revived the Mojahedin-e-Khalq. They capitalised on their organisation’s anti-Shah activities to establish a presence in the immediate post-revolutionary environment. They had some successes in mobilising sections of the young revolutionary youth, as the Mojahedin’s exotic mixture of Islam and Marxism-Leninism-Maoism held some appeal. But soon afterwards the Mojahedin fell out of favour with the revolutionary regime led by the charismatic Ayatollah Khomeini. The principal problem was the Mojahedin’s insistence on operating an armed militia in a desperate effort to steal the

for although the Mojahedin enjoyed a measure of popularity, whatever support they had was dwarfed by the epic appeal of Ayatollah Khomeini. The Mojahedin's inability to influence the character of the Islamic republican regime coalescing around the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini was the major factor behind their decision to wage an armed campaign against the Iranian government. This terrorist campaign started in earnest in June 1981, as the Mojahedin mobilised all their resources in a desperate effort to destabilise the Islamic Republic. The Mojahedin strategy was simple; they hoped that the nascent postrevolutionary government would collapse in the face of both an external war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq and an internal terrorist campaign waged by the Mojahedin. In fact they had badly miscalculated not only their own capabilities but also the determination of the Islamic Republic to put down armed challenges. The veteran Iranian-Armenian academic and writer, Ervand Ebrahmanian in his *The Iranian Mojahedin*, which continues to be the only authoritatively researched book on the subject, explains that support for the MKO was confined to a sub-section of the religious and left wing modern middle classes. The Mojahedin did not have a constituency beyond this parochial social class and therefore the failure of their "armed struggle" was sociologically predetermined. The MKO's badly planned terrorist campaign resulted in the destruction of their organisation inside Iran. Some 3,000 MKO members were executed and a further 5,000 were killed in armed clashes with Iranian security forces. Another 7,000 were detained by the Iranian authorities, many of whom subsequently turned against the organisation and returned to civilian life. At the same time the Mojahedin's terrorist campaign badly tarnished its image inside Iran and beyond. Whilst the Mojahedin succeeded in assassinating some of the key officials of the Islamic Republic, the vast majority of their victims were ordi-

nary and innocent people.

The Rajavi Cult

Immediately before the declaration of war on the Islamic Republic, the MKO leader, Massoud Rajavi, had fled Iran aboard an aircraft dressed as a female. Rajavi settled in France and in the months after the failure of their terrorist campaign the surviving MKO cadres and supporters fled Iran and joined their leader in Paris.

Rajavi soon developed a personality cult and gradually turned his organisation into a totalitarian and Stalinist machine. But these developments paled into insignificance to the bizarre set of events that rocked the Mojahedin in January 1985. The drama basically centred on Rajavi stealing the wife of his right-hand man Mehdi Abrishamchi and presenting the theft as an "ideological revolution". Abrishamchi's eventual acquiescence to the theft of his wife, Maryam Azdanlou, turned the whole affair into a particularly ugly and bizarre form of cuckoldry. Rajavi's marriage to Maryam Azdanlou and the latter's subsequent promotion to joint-leader of the organisation, was marketed as a "feminist" revolution. This unusual set of events provoked widespread unrest within the organisation. The first 4 ramifications of it were mass desertions of the organisation by veteran cadres who saw the affair for exactly what it was; the sexual lust of one man being trumpeted as a socio-cultural and political breakthrough. According to the critics of the organisation, these mass desertions were exactly what Massoud Rajavi wanted, for he had been determined to purge the organisation of non-conformists from the beginning. According to the critics this internal purge was the key mechanism used by Rajavi to establish his irreversible centrality within the organisation. It is at this point, say the critics, that the Mojahedin assumed the trappings of a cult. The Mojahedin's ideological revolution changed the organisation beyond recognition. It not only feminised the organisation

— largely achieved by placing females, irrespective of competence, in all the top positions — but also enabled the Mojahedin to develop a matriarchal ideology. In Mojahedin-speak, their organisation, by virtue of its feminist credentials, had become the very antithesis of the misogynist Khomeini regime. In reality the "ideological revolution" turned the Mojahedin into a baffling, bizarre and ultimately irrelevant cult. Like all cults the Mojahedin used the denial of sex and sexuality as a form of repression. The organisation went so far as to organise mass divorces and banning sexual relations between its cadres—for this was seen as a powerful means with which to destroy the individuality of members. Mass meetings were held during which members confessed to their sexual "crimes" and promised to purge themselves of all vestiges of individuality. Thus the 5,000 remaining MKO members were all transformed into the embodiments of Massoud Rajavi. These developments destroyed the political prospects of the Mojahedin. In the first instance it engineered the collapse of the "National Council of Resistance", a coalition of political forces set up by the Mojahedin in 1981, as other organisations immediately severed their links with the increasingly bizarre MKO. In the longer term it destroyed the reputation of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq in Iran and amongst exiled Iranian communities across the world. This process of alienation was completed by the MKO's alliance with the Saddam Hussein regime.

MKO & Saddam Hussein

Alarmed by the increasingly bizarre posturing of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, the French government ordered the expulsion of Massoud Rajavi and demanded the organisation scale down its activities in France. The Mojahedin subsequently concentrated their resources in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The organisation's links with the Baathists in Baghdad go back to January 1983, when Massoud Rajavi held a meeting with Tariq Aziz in Paris. Thus even if the

Once in Iraq the Mojahedin set up a "National Liberation Army" (NLA) and went to battle alongside Saddam's forces against their own countrymen. This brazen act of treachery destroyed whatever was left of their reputation in Iran. The end of the Iran-Iraq war might have heralded the demise of the Mojahedin's "NLA", had it not been for Saddam's wish to keep the MKO as an internal tool of repression.

This bore fruit in March 1991, in the immediate aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, when the Mojahedin played a significant role in the suppression of the Shia and Kurdish uprisings. In a letter to the London Independent in September 1996 Hooshang Pirnia, a former MKO member, claims that Maryam Rajavi ordered MKO forces to run over Kurdish fighters and civilians with their tanks. This claim is backed up in Elizabeth Rubin's article in the New York Times in July 2003, entitled "The Cult of Rajavi", which asserts that Maryam Rajavi commanded her forces to: "Take the Kurds under your tanks and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards". The Mojahedin's alliance with the Baathist regime was not only tactical, but was in fact premised on certain ideological affinities. The MKO genuinely regarded Saddam Hussein as a great "Socialist" leader and a friend of the "new" Iranian revolution. Moreover the organisation admired Baathist discipline

and its totalitarian grip on Iraqi society. This was vividly manifested by the behaviour of the diminutive Massoud Rajavi whose mannerisms, moustache and military uniform likened him to a miniature version of Saddam Hussein.

Endgame

The downfall of Saddam Hussein has proved to be the greatest misfortune ever to beset the Mojahedin. The coalition armies that invaded Iraq in March 2003 bombed the organisation's bases throughout the country and after the war disarmed their mini-army and consolidated all their forces in the Ashraf town. Currently the Mojahedin are quarantined in Ashraf and anxiously await their fate. The only reason the Mojahedin have remained in Iraq for the past 15 months is that it enjoys the support of the neo-conservatives and the pro-Israel factions in the Pentagon and other branches of the U.S. administration who hope to use the organisation as a bargaining chip against Iran. It remains to be seen whether the Iraqi will to be rid of this murderous cult is stronger than the will of the "Likudniks" in the Pentagon who dream of destabilising the Islamic Republic. The problem for the MKO is that it can no longer re-group in Europe as the EU branded it a terrorist organisation back in the late 1990's. This was underscored by a massive raid by French anti-terrorist

police on the Paris HQ of the organisation in June 2003, which netted Maryam Rajavi and more than 160 senior members of the organisation. Maryam Rajavi is currently awaiting trial in Paris on terrorism-related charges. There have also been raids by anti-terrorist Police on MKO offices and safe houses in Germany, Italy and Britain. As for the veteran cult leader Massoud Rajavi, not a word has been heard from him since the downfall of Saddam Hussein. But reliable reports suggest that he is hiding in Ashraf town with the acquiescence of the Pentagon. Many Iraqi leaders have indicated that they wish to put Rajavi and other senior MKO leaders on trial for crimes against the Iraqi people. But any move against Rajavi, or any forced expulsion of the Mojahedin from Ashraf is likely to provoke mass-suicides. When French anti-terrorist Police detained Maryam Rajavi in June 2003, dozens of MKO members and sympathisers set themselves on fire in Paris and other European cities in protest. Should a similar move be made against Massoud Rajavi these self-immolations are likely to take place on a far greater scale. It seems that a human catastrophe in the Diyala wastelands of Iraq is almost inevitable as the Mojahedin's bizarre world collapses all around them. ■

INTERVIEW WITH JAMAL KHASHOGGI

Mahan Abedin, Middle East analyst, Financial Advisor and Jamestown's correspondent, interviewed Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and media advisor to the Saudi Ambassador to the UK, Prince Turki al-Faisal. He was previously editor-in-chief of the Saudi daily al-Watan. The interview was conducted July 7, 2004 at the Saudi embassy in London.

In a part of this interview, Khashoggi admits that the Saudi government used to support the MKO financially. Meanwhile, he expresses surprise that the US has not dismantled this group. Following is an excerpt from the interview concerning the Mojahedin-e

Khalq.

JK: I think the Iranians need to clarify their position. The Iranians are trying to bargain.

MA: What do you mean?

JK: They are trying to play politics. They want something in return as they have

so many problems with the west. I am not even sure that the Iranian government is in charge of the al-Qaeda file. After all we all know that there are competing circles of power in Iran. **MA:** But what is wrong with bargaining?

JK: Nothing is wrong with that. I am just surprised why the bargaining is taking so long. We know that the Iranians want the Americans to take action against the Mojahedin-e-Khalq in Iraq.

MA: Are you referring to a deal whereby Iran would hand over senior detained al-Qaeda people to the U.S. in return for the dismantling of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq's organization in Iraq?

JK: I am really surprised that the Americans have not dismantled the Mojahedin-e-Khalq infrastructure in Iraq. This is really strange and the Americans need to explain their position. It is not right for any country to host its neighbour's enemies. And we all know that the Mojahedin-e-Khalq is a particularly extreme terrorist organization and it is not right for Iraq to be hosting them. I don't blame the Iranians for feeling frustrated on this issue.

MA: On the question of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, I have come across credible reports indicating that the Saudi government used to give this organisation financial support back in the 1980's.

JK: We have to put things into context here. We were at virtual war with Iran back in the 1980's. They were working against us and therefore we were working against them. However our relations with Iran have been excellent for many years now. ■



It was while working as a member of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq in Iraq that the real nature of this organisation became alarmingly clear to me.

At that point I started to oppose the repression and suppression of the ordinary members as well as the imprisonment and torture and murder of disaffected members.

As a result, for three years I was forced to perform hard-labour as well as being subjected to mental and physical torture in their camps. This did not have the effect of silencing me so I eventually came face to face with the wrath and fury of the leadership of the organisation and was imprisoned permanently.

In 1998 I was handed over to Iraqi intelligence agents and after being

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES: Abu Ghraib Prison by Ali Ghashghavi

imprisoned in Feyzaliah prison for some time, I was transferred to Abu Ghraib prison. I spent about three years and eight months in Saddam's prisons and torture chambers. It was in Abu Ghraib prison that I discovered the true extent of the co-operation between Rajavi and Saddam in political, military, security and intelligence matters.

Today, there are not many people who haven't heard the name of Abu Ghraib prison, one of the most notorious prisons in the history of the Middle East. Kept secret from the eyes of reporters and inspectors for years, the international community was not as aware as it is today of the prison. That changed after the downfall of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

But prior to that the prisoners of Abu Ghraib had for decades been subjected to every kind of torture and execution. The prison guards of this prison enjoyed an open hand to the extent that sometimes a newcomer would be killed in cold blood before even entering a prison cell at all.

I remember the first day that the agents and prison guards of the MKO handed us over to the Iraqi guards at Abu Ghraib prison. There were three Iraqi guards, and each one held some sort of large instrument like a sledgehammer in their hands. They hauled us in violently and told us: "open your

ears and listen carefully for the first and the last time.

As much as we hate the Jews (Israelis), we hate the Persians (Iranians) even more. In fact thousands of times more. And now, as to you who have been coming here from the MKO, we hate you even more than the ordinary Persians."

Every day the Iraqi prison guards would choose one of us and take him to the yard and break some hands or legs using these sledgehammers that they had. They would call this a celebration ceremony. I remember that the hatred felt toward the ex-members of the MKO was so strong that we were the first to be chosen for torture so that the other prisoners could watch us while they would break some bones, legs or hands in front of the others. They would really enjoy the pain that they inflicted on us especially in front of other prisoners. On many occasions these scenes reminded me of the way the MKO would force its members to gather in so-called 'anti-individualism' sessions in which one person would be chosen and all the others would have to attack him on every aspect of their personal and communal activities so that the person would be purified. This of course would easily and quickly slide into insults and even beatings if the person would not cooperate and would resist the charges against him.

Many ended up in prison just because of resisting in these sessions, usually charged with working for the Intelligence ministry of Iran. Saddam and Rajavi have both followed the same ideology. The only difference was that Saddam would call the tortures 'punishment' (oghoba), but Rajavi would call it 'collective actions against individualism' (zed-e fardiat). And of course Rajavi did not have a country and ruling regime so he had to use his own methods and sometimes borrow the prisons and torture chambers from Saddam.

I clearly remember the day that Seyed Hassan Sharifi, one of the MKO ex-members in the prison was beaten up with a sledgehammer to the point that he could not move from his place for over two months and later would have periodic attacks in which he would lose control of his body. I also remember clearly that twice they broke Akbar Sharbaf's leg and also one hand and one leg of Jasem and left them with no medical attention. And I remember too clearly many, many more incidents like this.

The torture in Abu Ghraib did not only affect those actually suffering the torture. All other prisoners had to attend the session and watch the brutal, barbaric tortures. They had no right to show any sympathy towards the tortured person nor had they the right to close their eyes or turn their back. They were expected to openly approve the actions and praise the torturers. The punishment for disobeying these rules was much harsher than the original torture.

Finding yourself in these situations is probably worse than being tortured yourself.

Watching another human being tortured in front of your eyes in very close proximity and hearing is not something easily imaginable. It is not easy to describe the mixture of fear and hopelessness and disgust that would rush into your blood. Looking at other inmates screaming, grabbing and biting the floor and every other thing until blood pours out and until they had no more

energy to even do that. Many never got up. For many this was the end of their misery.

No one was ever sure about being alive even for the next few hours. If a glass would fall from some one's hands, the whole prison would fall silent. Someone had to pay the ultimate price. There was so much fear that for a simple task of filling a glass of water, the prisoners had to check outside for several hours to make sure that when they left the cell there would not be any guards along their route to the water tap.

The prison system was such that the more savage the guard, the higher their position would be. Our so called leader had gone along so far with Saddam that the guards hated us more than any of their enemies. They looked at us as the MKO's deposit with the Iraqi government and we were their personal possession to do with whatever they wanted. The Iraqi officials of the prison would remind us that 'we have invested in every one of you and therefore we cannot easily forget about any of you'. But still, it was never clear for us whether we were the prisoners of Saddam's regime or the prisoners of the MKO. This was the point at which we could clearly see that we were more deeply involved as Saddam's Private Army than we could imagine ourselves. One officer of the prison used to say that 'as you have left the MKO, your future is not clear. That is why you are labelled as "deposits" by the Mojahedin in here'. We did not have any charges made against us in Abu Ghraib and were kept there on behalf of the MKO by the Iraqis as "deposits" as though we were some goods or objects belonging to the MKO leaders. The leadership of the MKO did not have any mercy on us who had given everything we had for the past two decades. We did not have the right to visitors or visits by the Red Cross and the officials of the Red Cross are aware of this.

In 2000, a new prisoner arrived. He was from Sudan. Being new, he did not know some of the rules and he

paid the price for that. He was beaten up with a sledgehammer, then dragged along the road for a long distance behind a vehicle and then his body disposed of.

It was a known trend that any agent who wanted to show his loyalty to the Iraqi regime had to kill a prisoner under torture in cold blood. This again brings back memories from Rajavi's ideological and organisational tactics. This was another common tactic between Saddam Hussein and Massoud Rajavi. But of course the common ground did not end there.

Today, the atmosphere of Abu Ghraib prison is changed. The shadow of Saddam and Rajavi is no more. News about what is happening in the prison can travel the globe in no time. Those old secret days are gone. Once the exposure of their crimes against humanity was an impossibly distant dream. Now with the downfall of Saddam and his puppets those dark days are gone and they are gone for ever.

But one thing more. Now that the true nature of the terrorist Mojahedin organisation is being revealed to the world, I urge all human rights organisations and political organisations to condemn the MKO leadership and to seek legal redress for people like me. Be sure that this terrorist organisation remains one of the most dangerous organisations in the world at this time. ■

SURVIVORS' REPORT

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

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