

Victor Charbonnier



The People's Mojahedin of Iran: A struggle for what?

Translated by
Dr Thomas R. Forstener, RSA

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Hassen Zadeh Zine el-Abidine: "They fired twelve bullets in my back".

Ali Asghar Omidi: "My son is held hostage by the Mojahedin".

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Ghoulam Reza Qirai Manach: "The attackers escaped through the window".

Zahra Nourbakhch: "My daughter was burned alive before my eyes".

Foreword

This book looks at the background and development of the Iranian Mojahedin of Massoud Rajavi, which should not be confused with the Afghan Mujahidin of the late Commandant Massood. Unlike the latter, who led a just cause in their fight against the Soviet presence in their country, and then against the obscurantist Taliban of Mullah Omar, the Iranian Mojahedin have taken terrorist action against their own people from a hostile, foreign base in Iraq. Moreover, they consistently state their hostility to the West. Accounts by former members and by their victims show us the true nature of this political military group which operates, simultaneously, as a Party, a mercenary force, an intelligence cell, a religious sect and an armed gang.

The Sazeman-e Mojahedin-el Khalq (often shortened to the Mojahedin Organization Khalq (MOK), or Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) or the National Resistance Council (NRC) or the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, the most accurate title in English (PMOI)) is an Islamic-communist group, which started its activities in the mid-1960s. (I) It opposed the regime

of Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlavi, whose reign lasted from 1941 to 1979. After the fall of the monarchy, the People's Mojahedin lost its initial sense of political orientation, and compromised its principles by engaging in a blind and bloody guerilla struggle. Today, their activities seem increasingly pointless. Considered as one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world, the PMOI still survives thanks to the self-interested support of Iraq, which shelters its few thousand militants and provides them with arms and provisions. But it also survives because of the equivocal and embarrassed complacency of some in the West.

The United States Department of State, in a report prepared in 1994 at the request of Congress, maintained that "bombs were the Mojahedin's weapons of choice and ... they frequently used them against American targets". This report, published later in the same year with the title, "A Tactic That Failed", goes on to conclude that this Iranian opposition group "is not a viable alternative to the current Iranian regime". "Our disapproval for Tehran ... should not influence our analysis of the Mojahedin", wrote the then Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Affairs, Wendy R. Sherman, in presenting the report to House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman, Lee Hamilton. Since then, the PMOI figures prominently on Washington's annual list of terrorist organizations.

The Iranian organization also appears on a similar list published by the United Nations on 7 November 2001 along with such notorious groups as Japan's Aum Shinrikyo, Spain's ETA, Egypt's Islamic fundamentalist group, Gam'al Islamiya, the Irish Republican Army, Colombia's FARC (Armed Revolutionary Forces), as well as Peru's Shining Path.

On 2 May 2002, the European Union's "Fifteen" members agreed to include the PMOI on their list of terrorist organizations. Inclusion on the E.u. list, created on 27 December

2001, or almost four months after the attack on the World Trade Center towers in New York, means that the People's Mojahedin's assets in Europe are /Tozen. The President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, and Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, as the Commission Chair, informed U.S. President George W. Bush of this step when they met with him that same day in Washington.

But if Massoud Rajavi's organization is now listed in the United States and the European Union as a terrorist group, its political wing, the National Resistance Council, run by his wife, Maryam Rajavi, has not been placed under any controls nor have its considerable assets been frozen anywhere. This stance may seem contradictory, given that the PMOI and NRC are two sides. of the same coin. Yet it shows the ambivalence of the Western position concerning an organization that uses lies and double talk as a strategy. Thus, if Western decision makers have often closed their eyes to the PMOI's crimes, it is because the group projected the image of an opponent of the Mullahs' regime in Tehran. And it is hardly an exaggeration to state that the West is anything but friendly to Iran's government.

The PMOI, however, has clearly established its terrorist credentials, claiming responsibility for a significant number of deadly acts, largely in Iran. Over the past thirty years, these terrorist attacks have left hundreds dead, including many citizens of Western countries. Yet, the organization continues to enjoy the calculated leniency of some of these countries, including the United States, despite its extremely violent methods. In opposing the Iranian regime, the PMOI is useful, even indirectly so, to those who seek its fail.

While trying to benefit from this permissiveness, which could be withdrawn at any moment, the leaders of the PMOI attempt to cover up their terrorist past and to be seen, in Western eyes, as freedom fighters and democrats who defend human rights. Yet decision makers and journalists are becoming harder and harder to convince. The latter know quite well that the Mojahedin's violent activism puts it in a class with the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and the Taliban of Afghanistan. The strategic alliance forged by the PMOI with the internationally outlawed Iraqi regime contrasts sharply with the idyllic image they hope to project. There are increasing doubts about their real aims.

While some success was once achieved in the PMOI's public relations campaign in the West to portray the movement as an alternative to Iran's theocracy and to obtain political and financial support, it is now largely rejected. Statements by their leaders on the abandonment of revolutionary ideology and the embrace of liberal-democratic principles no longer fool many in Western countries. The possibility that the PMOI could possibly return to the Iranian political scene is remote since its level of popularity in the country is close to zero these days. For good reason: the acts of terrorism and sabotage committed by its members inside Iran for the past twenty years have discredited the PMOI in the eyes of most Iranians.

Why then, while recognizing the true face of the Iranian Mojahedin, do Western countries continue to provide asylum for a number of militants? A European diplomat answers: "We cannot prevent members

of the PMOI from undertaking political action in our countries since they are often citizens of those countries in which they live, or have refugee status or reside in a perfectly legal and registered way. They, therefore, have the same right to free expression as any other citizen. As long as they remain within the bounds of the law and avoid trouble, they are above reproach."

The United States, the prime target, is currently leading a major campaign against terrorist movements, worldwide. The Mojahedin are among the most dangerous and, remarkably, least known among them. They are also based in Iraq, looming as a possible theatre of military operations where the PMOI will certainly play a role. That is why we have chosen to describe them to Western readers at this critical time.

[See Chapter 20 of this edition, completed in August 2003.]

The People's Moujahedin of Iran: A struggle for what?

The People's Moujahedin of Iran (PMOI) began almost forty years ago as an anti-Shah study group in the University of Teheran. Slowly, its leadership moved toward a combination of Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism, from study to violence. Yet, when the Shah fell in 1979, the PMOI began a bloody and indiscriminate guerrilla war that lasted until May 2003. It is considered to be one of the most lethal and unpredictable terrorist organizations in the world. By the mid 1980s under the leadership of Massoud Rajavi, the PMOI had become the "guest" and anti-Iranian guerrilla force of Saddam Hussein. At the same time, the Moujahedin, presenting themselves as a legitimate, democratic opposition to the Iranian Government, won at least some support and encouragement, however cautious, from the West.

Only days before the publication of this book, the United States Department of State abandoned the pretense that the National Resistance Council, headed by Rajavi's wife Maryam, was a legitimate, recognized lobbying organization with no terrorist activities. Only some weeks ago did French security police raid the National Resistance Council's headquarters near Paris and arrest Maryam Rajavi and others for planning terrorist acts in their country and nearby.

Indeed, until the coalition's armed intervention in Iraq, Massoud and Maryam Rajavi had succeeded in creating and violently enforcing a cult of personality on their dwindling band of ageing followers sheltered by Saddam Hussein on his territory. Until then, there were those in the West willing to turn a blind eye to these practices or gullible enough to accept the lie that PMOI was a democratic movement.

First hand accounts by former members and victims presented here allow us to probe the reality behind the Moujahedin's well financed propaganda machine. They uncover a military-political movement which has acted simultaneously as a political party, a mercenary force, an intelligence bureau, a cult and a heavily armed gang of common criminals.

*Although dying, the PMOI may show some spasms of rage here and there. For this reason, the two authors of this investigation have decided to write under the joint pseudonym of **Victor Charbonnier**. One is a journalist for a major weekly magazine. The other is a former international television correspondent.*