

# People's Mujahedin of Iran

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The **People's Mojahedin of Iran** or the **Mojahedin-e-Khalq** (**MEK**, also **PMOI**, **MKO**; Persian: سازمان مجاهدین خلق ایران *sāzmān-e mojāhedīn-e khalq-e irān*) is an Iranian opposition movement in exile that advocates the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>[2]</sup>

It was founded on September 5, 1965 by a group of left-leaning Muslim Iranian university students, as a Muslim, progressive, nationalist and democratic organization,<sup>[3]</sup> who were devoted to armed struggle against the Shah of Iran and his supporters.<sup>[4]</sup> They committed several violent attacks against the Shah's regime and US officials stationed in Iran during the 1970s. In the immediate aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the MEK was suppressed by Khomeini's revolutionary organizations and harassed by the Hezbollahi, who attacked meeting places, bookstores, and kiosks of the Mujahideen.<sup>[5]</sup>

On 30 August 1981, the MEK launched a campaign of attacks against the Iranian government, exploding a bomb in a meeting of the Islamic Republic Party and killing 81 members of the party, including President Mohammad-Ali Rajai, Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar, and many other high-ranking officials, in the government. The remainder of the Iranian government reacted harshly, arresting and executing many members of the MEK. During the Iran–Iraq War the MEK forged an alliance with Saddam Hussein.

The group renounced violence in 2001<sup>[6]</sup> and today it is the main component organization of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an "umbrella coalition" calling itself the "parliament-in-exile dedicated to a democratic, secular and coalition government in Iran." Despite the public renouncement of violence, the MEK have been accused by the Iranian government and US officials speaking anonymously to NBC News of being financed, trained, and armed by Israel to assassinate Iranian nuclear scientists and educators.<sup>[7]</sup> The MEK has denied any involvement in the assassinations and the existence of any alliance with Israel. While the MEK's leadership has resided in Paris, the group's core members were for many years confined to Camp Ashraf in Iraq, and later in 2003 the MEK and U.S. forces signed a cease-fire agreement of "mutual understanding and coordination."<sup>[8]</sup> The group's remaining 3,200 members were recently compelled to move to ex-U.S. military base Camp Liberty.<sup>[9]</sup> The MEK/NCRI revealed in 2002 that Iran pursued a covert program to enable production of nuclear weapon material that was not declared to the IAEA as required by the NPT.<sup>[10]</sup> Massoud Rajavi is the leader of People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran.

The European Union, Canada and the United States formerly listed the MEK as a terrorist organization, but this

People's Mojahedin Organization	
سازمان مجاهدین خلق ایران	
<b>General Secretary</b>	Masoud Rajavi
<b>President</b>	Maryam Rajavi <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Founder</b>	Mohammad Hanifnejad
<b>Founded</b>	September 5, 1965
<b>Headquarters</b>	 Camp Liberty, Iraq  Paris, France
<b>Ideology</b>	Iranian nationalism Islamic socialism Left-wing nationalism
<b>Political position</b>	Left-wing
<b>Colours</b>	<See Tfm> <input type="checkbox"/> Red
<b>Party flag</b>	
	
<b>Website</b>	
<a href="http://www.Mojahedin.org">www.Mojahedin.org</a> ( <a href="http://www.mojahedin.org/pages/">http://www.mojahedin.org/pages/</a> )	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Politics of Iran</li> <li>Political parties</li> <li>Elections</li> </ul>	

designation has since been lifted, first by the Council of the European Union in January 26, 2009 (following what the group called a "seven-year-long legal and political battle"),<sup>[11][12][13]</sup> then by a decision by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton<sup>[9]</sup> on September 21, 2012 and lastly by a decision by the Canadian government on December 20, 2012.<sup>[14]</sup>

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## Other names

The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran is known by a variety of names including:

- **Mojahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MEK)**
- The **National Liberation Army of Iran** (the group's armed wing)
- **National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)** – the MEK is the founding member of a coalition of organizations called the NCRI.<sup>[15][16]</sup>
- **Monafiqeen** – the Iranian government consistently refers to the People's Mujahedin with this derogatory name, meaning "the hypocrites".<sup>[17]</sup>

*Note: The acronym MEK is used throughout this article, as it is commonly used by the media and national governments around the world to refer to the People's Mujahedin.*

## Membership

The MEK was believed to have a 5,000–7,000-strong armed guerrilla group based in Iraq before the 2003 war, but a membership of between 3,000–5,000 is considered more likely.<sup>[18]</sup> In 2005 the U.S. think-tank the Council on Foreign Relations believed that the MEK had 10,000 members, one-third to one-half of whom were fighters.<sup>[19]</sup> According to a 2003 article by the *New York Times*, the MEK was composed of 5,000 fighters based in Iraq, many of them female.<sup>[20]</sup> A 2013 article in *Foreign Policy* claimed that there were some 2,900 members in Iraq.<sup>[21]</sup>

## History

### Before the Islamic Revolution

#### Foundation

The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran was founded in September 5, 1965 by six former members of the Liberation or Freedom Movement of Iran, students at Tehran University, including Mohammad Hanifnejad, Saied Mohsen and Ali-Asghar Badizadegan. The MEK opposed the rule of Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, considering him corrupt and oppressive, and considered the Liberation Movement too moderate and ineffective.<sup>[22]</sup> They were committed to the Ali Shariati's approach to Shiism.<sup>[23]</sup> However although the MEK are often regarded as devotees of Ali Shariati, in fact their pronouncements preceded Shariati's, and they continued to echo each other throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>[24]</sup>

In its first five years, the group primarily engaged in ideological work.<sup>[25]</sup> Their thinking aligned with what was a common tendency in Iran at the time – a kind of radical, political Islam based on a Marxist reading of history and politics. The group's main source of inspiration was the Islamic text *Nahj al-Balagha* (a collection of analyses and aphorisms attributed to Imam Ali). Despite some describing a Marxist influence, the group never used the terms "socialist" or "communist" to describe themselves,<sup>[26]</sup> and always called themselves Muslims – arguing along with Ali Shariati, that a true Muslim – especially a true Shia Muslim, that is to say a devoted follower of the Imams Ali and Hossein – must also by definition, be a revolutionary.<sup>[24]</sup> However, they generously adopted elements of Marxism in order to update and modernize their interpretation of radical Islam.<sup>[27]</sup>

The group kept a friendly relationship with the only other major Iranian urban guerrilla group, the Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerrillas (OIPFG).<sup>[28]</sup>

## Schism

In October 1975, the MEK underwent an ideological split. While the remaining primary members of MEK were imprisoned, some of the early members of MEK formed a new organization that followed Marxist, not Islamic, ideals; these members appropriated the MEK name to establish and enhance their own legitimacy.<sup>[29]</sup> This was expressed in a book entitled *Manifesto on Ideological Issues*, in which the central leadership declared "that after ten years of secret existence, four years of armed struggle, and two years of intense ideological rethinking, they had reached the conclusion that Marxism, not Islam, was the true revolutionary philosophy." Mujtaba Taleqani, son of Ayatallah Taleqani, was one of these converts to Marxism. Thus after May 1975 there were two rival Mujahedin, each with its own publication, its own organization, and its own activities.<sup>[30]</sup> A few months before the Iranian Revolution the majority of the Marxist Mujahedin renamed themselves "Peykar", on December 7, 1978 (16 Azar, 1357); the full name is: Organization of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class. This name was after the "League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class", which was a left wing group in Saint Petersburg, Russian Empire, founded by Vladimir Lenin in the autumn of 1895.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Anti-American campaign

Members of the MEK carried out several attacks against American citizens. On November 30, 1970 a failed attempt was made to kidnap U.S. Ambassador to Iran, Douglas MacArthur II.<sup>[32]</sup> This was followed by an assassination attack in May 1972 against USAF Brig. Gen. Harold Price. Price survived the attack but was wounded.<sup>[33][34]</sup> The CIA's former Chief of Station in Tehran, George Cave, described the attack as the first instance of a remotely detonated improvised explosive device.<sup>[35]</sup>

In the years between 1973 and 1975, armed operations within the MEK intensified, while primary members of the MEK remained imprisoned.<sup>[36]</sup> In 1973 ten major American-owned buildings were bombed including those of the Pan American Organization, Pan-American Airlines, Shell Oil Company, Hotel International, and Radio City Cinema. In addition, MEK members carried out multiple assassination attempts, successfully assassinating six Americans:<sup>[37]</sup>

Lt. Col. Louis Lee Hawkins, a U.S. Army comptroller. He was shot to death in front of his home in Tehran by two men on a motorcycle on June 2, 1973.<sup>[32][33][38][39][40]</sup> A car carrying U.S. Air Force officers Col. Paul Shaffer and Lt. Col. Jack Turner was trapped between two cars carrying armed men. They told the Iranian driver to lie down and then shot and killed the Americans. Six hours later a woman called reporters to claim the MEK carried out the attack as retaliation for the recent death of prisoners at the hands of Iranian authorities.<sup>[32][33][39][41]</sup> A car carrying three American employees of Rockwell International was attacked in August 1976. William Cottrell, Donald Smith, and Robert Krongard were killed. They had been working on the Ixion system for gathering intelligence on the neighboring USSR.<sup>[32][42]</sup> Leading up to the Islamic Revolution, members of the MEK, conducted attacks and assassinations against both Iranian and Western targets.<sup>[43]</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State and the presentation of the MEK by the Foreign Affairs group of the Australian Parliament, the group conducted several assassinations of U.S. military personnel and civilians working in Iran during the 1970s. After the revolution the group actively supported the U.S. embassy takeover in Tehran in 1979, and opposed the release of the diplomats in 1981 by the Iranian government, and called for their execution instead. As a result they staged a large demonstration.

MEK supporters have claimed that the assassinations and bombings were carried out by the Marxist leaning splinter group Peykar, who "hijacked" the name of the MEK, and were not under the control of imprisoned leaders such as Massoud Rajavi.<sup>[36]</sup>

## After the Revolution

The group supported the revolution in its initial phases.<sup>[44]</sup> It participated in the referendum held in March 1979.<sup>[44]</sup> Its candidate for the head of the newly founded council of experts was Masoud Rajavi in the election of August 1979.<sup>[44]</sup> However, he lost the election.<sup>[44]</sup> The group also supported for the occupation the US embassy in Tehran in November 1979.<sup>[44]</sup> In January 1980, Rajavi announced his candidacy for the presidency, but he was banned, since he was regarded by Ayatollah Khomeini as ineligible.<sup>[44]</sup> In February 1980, concentrated attacks by Hezbollahi toughs began on the meeting places, bookstores, and newsstands of Mujahideen and other leftists, driving the left underground in Iran. Hundreds of PMOI supporters and members were killed from 1979 to 1981, and some 3,000 were arrested. Ultimately, the organization called for a massive half-a-million-strong demonstration under the banner of Islam on June 20, 1981, to protest Iran's new leadership, which was also attacked. Following the June 20 protests, Mr. Massoud Rajavi formed the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) in Tehran.<sup>[45]</sup>



Protests against the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini (20 June 1981)

## Ideology

### Before 1979 Iranian Revolution

The MEK's ideology of revolutionary Shiaism is based on an interpretation of Islam so similar to that of Ali Shariati that "many concluded" they were inspired by him. According to historian Ervand Abrahamian, it is clear that "in later years" that Shariati and "his prolific works" had "indirectly helped the Mujahedin."<sup>[46]</sup>

In the group's "first major ideological work," *Nahzat-i Husseini* or Hussein's Movement, authored by one of the group's founders, Ahmad Reza'i, it was argued that *Nezam-i Towhid* (monotheistic order) sought by the prophet Muhammad, was a commonwealth fully united not only in its worship of one God but in a classless society that strives for the common good. "Shiism, particularly Hussein's historic act of martyrdom and resistance, has both a revolutionary message and a special place in our popular culture."<sup>[28]</sup>

As described by Abrahamian, one Mojahedin ideologist argued

"Reza'i further argued that the banner of revolt raised by the Shi'i Imams, especially Ali, Hassan, and Hussein, was aimed against feudal landlords and exploiting merchant capitalists as well as against usurping Caliphs who betrayed the *Nezam-i-Towhid*. For Reza'i and the Mujahidin it was the duty of all muslims to continue this struggle to create a 'classless society' and destroy all forms of capitalism, despotism, and imperialism. The Mujahidin summed up their attitude towards religion in these words: 'After years of extensive study into Islamic history and Shi'i ideology, our organization has reached the firm conclusion that Islam, especially Shi'ism, will play a major role in inspiring the masses to join the revolution. It will do so because Shi'ism, particularly Hussein's historic act of resistance, has both a revolutionary message and a special place in our popular culture.'<sup>[47]</sup>

## After the revolution

In 1981, the MEK formed the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) with the stated goal of uniting the opposition to the Iranian government under one umbrella organization. The MEK says that in the past 25 years, the NCRI has evolved into a 540-member parliament-in-exile, with a specific platform that emphasizes free elections, gender equality and equal rights for ethnic and religious minorities. The MEK claims that it also advocates a free-market economy and supports peace in the Middle East. However, the FBI claims that the NCRI "is not a separate organization, but is instead, and has been, an integral part of the [MEK] at all relevant times" and that the NCRI is "the political branch" of the MEK, rather than vice versa. Although the MEK is today the main organization of the NCRI, the latter previously hosted other organizations, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran.<sup>[15]</sup>

According to the publicly stated ideology of the MEK, elections and public suffrage are the sole indicators of political legitimacy. Their publications reported that the Word of God and Islam are meaningless without freedom and respect for individual volition and choice. Their interpretation of Islam and the Quran says that the most important characteristic distinguishing man from animals is his free will. It is on this basis that human beings are held accountable. Without freedom, no society can develop or progress. Although its leaders present themselves as Muslims, the MEK describes itself as a secular organization: "The National Council of Resistance believes in the separation of Church and State."<sup>[48]</sup>

In more recent years under the guidance of Maryam Rajavi the organization has adopted strong principles in favor of women. Women assumed some senior positions of responsibility within the ranks of the MEK and although women make up only a third of fighters, two-thirds of its commanders are women. Rajavi ultimately believes that women should enjoy equal rights with men.<sup>[49]</sup>

## Bombings and armed conflict with the Islamic government

Following the 1979 revolution, the newly established theocratic government of Ayatollah Khomeini moved to squash dissent. Khomeini attacked the MEK as *elteqati* (eclectic), contaminated with Gharbzadegi ("the Western plague"), and as *monafeqin* (hypocrites) and *kafer* (unbelievers).<sup>[50]</sup> In February 1980 concentrated attacks by *hezbollahi* pro-Khomeini militia began on the meeting places, bookstores and newsstands of Mujahideen and other leftists<sup>[51]</sup> driving the Left underground in Iran. Hundreds of MEK supporters and members were killed from 1979 to 1981, and some 3,000 were arrested.<sup>[52]</sup>

On August 30, a bomb was detonated killing the popularly elected President Rajai and Premier Mohammad Javad Bahonar. An active member of the Mujahedin, Massoud Keshmiri, was identified as the perpetrator, and according to reports came close to killing the entire government including Khomeini. The reaction to both bombings was intense with many arrests and executions of Mujahedin and other leftist groups, but "assassinations of leading officials and active supporters of the government by the Mujahedin were to continue for the next year or two."<sup>[53]</sup>

Eventually, the majority of the MEK leadership and members fled to France, where it operated until 1986, when tension arose between Paris and Tehran over the Eurodif nuclear stake and the French citizens kidnapped in the Lebanon hostage crisis. After Rajavi flew to Baghdad, French hostages were released.

## National Liberation Army of Iran

The MEK transferred its headquarters to Iraq after France agreed to expel them in order to release French hostages in Lebanon in 1986, during the Iran–Iraq War. Near the end of the 1980–88 war between Iraq and Iran,

a military force of 7,000 members of the MEK, armed and equipped by Saddam's Iraq and calling itself the National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA), went into action. On July 26, 1988, six days after the Ayatollah Khomeini had announced his acceptance of the UN brokered ceasefire resolution, the NLA advanced under heavy Iraqi air cover, crossing the Iranian border from Iraq. It seized and razed to the ground the Iranian town of Islamabad-e Gharb. As it advanced further into Iran, Iraq ceased its air support and Iranian forces cut off NLA supply lines and counterattacked under cover of fighter planes and helicopter gunships. On July 29 the NLA announced a voluntary withdrawal back to Iraq. The MEK claims it lost 1,400 dead or missing and the Islamic Republic sustained 55,000 casualties (either IRGC, Basij forces, or the army). The Islamic Republic claims to have killed 4,500 NLA during the operation.<sup>[54]</sup> The operation was called *Forouge Javidan* (Eternal Light) by the MEK and the counterattack Operation Mersad by the Iranian forces.



Flag used by the NLA.

### 1988 executions of Iranian political prisoners

A large number of prisoners from the MEK, and a lesser number from other leftist opposition groups (somewhere between 1,400 and 30,000),<sup>[55]</sup> were executed in 1988, following Operation Eternal Light.<sup>[56][a]</sup><sup>[58][59][60]</sup> Dissident Ayatollah Montazeri has written in his memoirs that this massacre, deemed a crime against humanity, was ordered by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and carried out by several high-ranking members of Iran's current government. Recently The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appointed a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights violations for Iran, to take action on such actions since 1988.<sup>[61]</sup>

### Relations with France in the mid-1980s

In 1986, after French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac struck a deal with Tehran for the release of French hostages held prisoners by the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the MEK was forced to leave France and relocated to Iraq. Investigative journalist Dominique Lorentz has related the 1986 capture of French hostages to an alleged blackmail of France by Tehran concerning the nuclear program.<sup>[62]</sup>

### Post-war

In the following years the MEK conducted several high-profile assassinations of political and military figures inside Iran, including Asadollah Lajevardi, the former warden of the Evin prison, in 1998, and deputy chief of the Iranian Armed Forces General Staff Brigadier General Ali Sayyad Shirazi, who was assassinated on the doorsteps of his house on April 10, 1999.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, MEK camps were bombed by the U.S., resulting in at least 50 deaths. It was later revealed that the U.S. bombings were part of an agreement between the Iranian regime and Washington. In the agreement Tehran offered to oust some al-Qaeda suspects if the U.S. came down on the MEK.<sup>[63]</sup> Following the invasion, the group voluntarily disarmed and its members confined themselves to Camp Ashraf.<sup>[64]</sup> At the time of the agreement, some controversy was raised, both in the public sphere and privately among the Bush administration due to the MEK's former designation as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

In the operation, the U.S. reportedly captured 6,000 MEK soldiers and over 2,000 pieces of military equipment, including 19 British-made Chieftain tanks.<sup>[65][66]</sup> The MEK compound outside Fallujah became known as Camp Fallujah and sits adjacent to the other major base in Fallujah, Forward Operating Base Dreamland. Captured MEK members were kept at Camp Ashraf, about 100 kilometers west of the Iranian border and 60

kilometers north of Baghdad.<sup>[67]</sup>

After a four-month investigation by several U.S. agencies, including the State Department, only a handful of charges under U.S. criminal law were brought against MEK members, all American citizens. The MEK remained listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the Department of State until September 28, 2012.<sup>[68][69]</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared MEK personnel in Ashraf protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention. They are currently under the guard of the U.S. Military. Defectors from this group are housed separately in a refugee camp within Camp Ashraf, and protected by U.S. Army military police (2003–current), U.S. Marines (2005–07), and the Bulgarian Army (2006–current).<sup>[70]</sup>

In May 2005, Human Rights Watch issued a report describing prison camps within Iraq run by the MEK and severe human rights violations committed by the group against former members.<sup>[71]</sup> The report prompted a response by the MEK and a few friendly European MPs, who published a counter-report in September 2005.<sup>[72]</sup> They stated that HRW had "relied only on 12 hours interviews with 12 suspicious individuals", and stated that "a delegation of MEPs visited Camp Ashraf in Iraq" and "conducted impromptu inspections of the sites of alleged abuses." Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca (PP), one of the Vice-Presidents of the European Parliament, alleged that Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) was the source of the evidence against the MEK.<sup>[72]</sup> The HRW report covered only the period from 1991 to 2003. In a letter of May 2005 to HRW, the senior US military police commander responsible for the Camp Ashraf area, Brigadier General David Phillips, who had been in charge during the year 2004 for the protective custody of the MEK members in the camp, disputed the alleged human rights violations:

I directed my subordinate units to investigate each allegation. In many cases I personally led inspection teams on unannounced visits to the MEK facilities where the alleged abuses were reported to occur. At no time over the 12 month period did we ever discover any credible evidence supporting the allegations raised in your recent report. (...) Each report of torture, kidnapping and psychological depravation turned out to be unsubstantiated.<sup>[73]</sup>

On January 1, 2009 the U.S. military transferred control of Camp Ashraf to the Iraqi government. On the same day, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki announced that the militant group would not be allowed to base its operations from Iraqi soil.<sup>[74]</sup>

In 2012 MEK moved from Camp Ashraf to Camp Hurriya in Baghdad (a onetime U.S. base formerly known as Camp Liberty). A rocket and mortar attack killed 5 and injured 50 others at Camp Hurriya on February 9, 2013. Iranian residents of the facility and their representatives and lawyers appealed to the UN Secretary-General and U.S. officials to let them return to Ashraf, which they say has concrete buildings and shelters that offer more protection. The United States has been working with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees on the resettlement project.<sup>[75]</sup>

### **Iraqi government's crackdown**

On January 23, 2009, and while on a visit to Tehran, Iraqi National Security Advisor Mowaffak al-Rubaie reiterated the Iraqi Prime Minister's earlier announcement that the MEK organisation would no longer be able to base itself on Iraqi soil and stated that the members of the organisation would have to make a choice, either to go back to Iran or to go to a third country, adding that these measures would be implemented over the next two months.<sup>[76]</sup>



On July 29, 2009, eleven Iranians were killed and over 500 were injured in a raid by Iraqi security on the MEK Camp Ashraf in Diyala province of Iraq.<sup>[77]</sup> U.S. officials had long opposed a violent takeover of the camp northeast of Baghdad, and the raid is thought to symbolize the declining American influence in Iraq.<sup>[78]</sup> After the raid, the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, stated the issue was "completely within [the Iraqi government's] purview."<sup>[79]</sup> In the course of attack, 36 Iranian dissidents were arrested and removed from the camp to a prison in a town named Khalis, where the arrestees went on hunger strike for 72 days, 7 of which was dry hunger strike. Finally the dissidents were released when they were in an extremely critical condition and on the verge of death.<sup>[80][81]</sup>

## 2003 French raid

In June 2003 French police raided the MEK's properties, including its base in Auvers-sur-Oise, under the orders of anti-terrorist magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière, after suspicions that it was trying to shift its base of operations there.

U.S. Senator Sam Brownback, a Republican from Kansas and chairman of the Foreign Relations subcommittee on South Asia, then accused the French of doing "the Iranian government's dirty work". Along with other members of Congress, he wrote a letter of protest to President Jacques Chirac, while longtime MEK supporters such as Sheila Jackson-Lee, a Democrat from Texas, criticized Maryam Radjavi's arrest.<sup>[20]</sup> Subsequently, the MEK members were quickly released.

## Negotiations between Tehran and Washington

During the Iraq war, U.S. troops disarmed the MEK and posted guards at its bases.<sup>[82]</sup> The U.S. military also protected and gave logistical support to the MEK as U.S. officials viewed the group as a high value source of intelligence on Iran.<sup>[83]</sup> The MEK is credited with revealing Iran's nuclear program in 2003 and alerting Americans to Iranian advancements in nuclear technology.<sup>[84]</sup>

The same year that the French police raided the MEK's properties in France (2003), Tehran attempted to negotiate with Washington. Iranian officials offered to withdraw military backing for Hamas and Hezbollah, and to give open access to their nuclear facilities in return for Western action in disbanding the MEK, which was revealed by *Newsnight*, a BBC current affairs program, in 2007. The BBC uncovered a letter written after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 where Tehran made this offer.<sup>[85]</sup> The proposition was done in a secret letter to Washington via Switzerland. According to the BBC, the U.S. State Department received the letter from the highest levels of the Iranian government. According to Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff of Secretary of State Colin Powell, interviewed by the BBC, the State Department initially considered the offer, but it was ultimately rejected by the office of Vice President Dick Cheney.<sup>[86]</sup>

## Nuclear issue

The MEK and the NCRI claim to be the first entities that revealed Iran's nuclear activities in 2002, which has turned to be a major concern for the U.S. and some of its allies today.<sup>[87]</sup> On February 20, 2008, the NCRI claimed to have revealed another nuclear site of the Islamic Republic.<sup>[88]</sup>

US officials confirm that MEK was financed, trained, and armed by Israel in killing Iranian nuclear scientists.<sup>[7]</sup>

## MEK and the US government

Before their exile, 'Anti-Imperialism' was preached by MEK both before and after revolution. The Mojahedin Organization praised writers such as Al-e Ahmad, Saedi and Shariati for being 'anti-imperialist'.<sup>[89]</sup> Rajavi in his presidential campaign after revolution used to warn against what he called the 'imperialist danger'.<sup>[90]</sup> The matter was so fundamental to MEK that it criticized the Iranian government on that basis, accusing the Islamic Republic of 'capitulation to imperialism' and being disloyal to democracy that according to Rajavi was the only means to 'safeguard from American imperialism'.<sup>[91]</sup> However, after exile, Rajavi toned down the issues of imperialism, social revolution, and classless society. Instead he stressed on human rights and respect for 'personal property'.<sup>[92]</sup>

## MEK and the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

In the beginning, MEK used to criticize the Pahlavi regime for allying with Israel and South Africa;<sup>[93]</sup> even calling them racist states and demanding cancellation of all political and economic agreements with them.<sup>[94]</sup> The Central Cadre established contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), by sending emissaries to Paris, Dubai, and Qatar to meet PLO officials. In one occasion, seven leading members of MEK spent several months in the PLO camps in Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>[95]</sup> On August 3, 1972, they bombed the Jordanian embassy as a means to revenge King Hussein's unleashing his troops on the PLO in 1970.<sup>[96]</sup>

After the revolution and while in exile, however, they teamed up with Israel to conduct covert operations against the Iranian nuclear scientists as a means to combat the Iranian government.<sup>[97][98]</sup>

## The 'ideological revolution' and the issue of women's rights

On 27 January 1985, Rajavi appointed Maryam Azodanlu as his co-equal leader. The announcement, stated that this would give women equal say within the organization and thereby 'would launch a great ideological revolution within Mojahedin, the Iranian public and the whole Muslim World'. At the time Maryam Azodanlu was known as only the younger sister of a veteran member, and the wife of Mehdi Abrishamchi. According to the announcement, Maryam Azodanlu and Mehdi Abrishamchi had recently divorced in order to facilitate this 'great revolution'. As a result, the marriage further isolated the Mojahedin and also upset some members of the organization. This was mainly because, the middle class would look at this marriage as an indecent act which to them resembled wife-swapping. (especially when Abrishamchi declared his own marriage to Musa Khiabani's younger sister). The fact that it involved women with young children and the wives of close friends was considered a taboo in traditional Iranian culture. The effect of this incident on secularists and modern intelligentsia was equally outrageous as it dragged a private matter into the public arena. Many criticized Maryam Azodanlu's giving up her own maiden name (something most Iranian women did not do and she herself had not done in her previous marriage). They would question whether this was in line with her claims of being a staunch feminist.<sup>[99]</sup>

According to Ervand Abrahamian: "the Mojahedin, despite contrary claims did not give women equal representation within their own hierarchy. The book of martyrs indicates that women formed 15 percent of the organization's rank-and-file, but only 9 percent of its leadership. To rectify this, the Mojahedin posthumously revealed some of the rank and file women martyrs especially those related to prominent figures, into leadership positions."<sup>[100]</sup>

## Designation as a terrorist organization

The United States put MEK on the U.S. State Department list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in 1997.

However, since 2004 the United States also has considered the group as "noncombatants" and "protected persons" under the Geneva Conventions because most members have been located in a refugee camp in Iraq for more than 25 years.<sup>[101]</sup> In 2002 the European Union, pressured by Washington, added MEK to its terrorist list.<sup>[102]</sup> In 2008, the United Kingdom also removed PMOI from the list of proscribed terrorist groups.<sup>[103]</sup>

MEK leaders then began a lobbying campaign to be removed from the list by promoting itself as a viable opposition to the mullahs in Tehran. In 2008 US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice denied MEK its request to be delisted, despite its lobbying the State Department.<sup>[12]</sup>

In 2011, several former senior U.S. officials, including Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, three former chairmen of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, two former directors of the CIA, former commander of NATO Wesley Clark, two former U.S. Ambassadors to the United Nations, the former U.S. Attorney General Michael Mukasey, a former White House Chief of Staff, a former commander of the United States Marine Corps, former U.S. National Security Advisor Frances Townsend, and U.S. President Barack Obama's retired National Security Adviser General James L. Jones called for the MEK to be removed from its official State Department foreign terrorist listing on the grounds that they constituted a viable opposition to the Iranian government.<sup>[104]</sup>

In April 2012, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh reported that the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command had trained MEK operatives at a secret site in Nevada from 2005 to 2009. According to Hersh, MEK members were trained in intercepting communications, cryptography, weaponry and small unit tactics at the Nevada site up until President Barack Obama took office in 2009.<sup>[105]</sup> Hersh also reported additional names of former U.S. officials paid to speak in support of MEK, including former CIA directors James Woolsey and Porter Goss; New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani; former Vermont Governor Howard Dean; former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Louis Freeh and former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton.<sup>[105]</sup>

## Removal of the designation

In January 2009 the Council of the European Union removed the terrorist designation. This followed the 2008 Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg censure of France for failing to disclose alleged new evidence of MEK's terrorist threat.<sup>[11]</sup> Delisting allowed MEK to pursue tens of millions of dollars of frozen assets<sup>[13]</sup> and lobby in Europe for more funds. It also removed the terrorist label from MEK members at their Iraqi Camp Ashraf.<sup>[12]</sup>

On September 28, 2012 The U.S. State Department formally removed MEK from its official list of terrorist organizations, beating an October 1 deadline in a MEK lawsuit.<sup>[9][69]</sup> Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a statement the decision was made because MEK had renounced violence and had cooperated in closing their Iraqi paramilitary base. An official denied that lobbying by well-known figures influenced the decision to remove the designation.<sup>[106]</sup>

The National Iranian American Council denounced the decision, stating it "opens the door to Congressional funding of the M.E.K. to conduct terrorist attacks in Iran" and "makes war with Iran far more likely."<sup>[9]</sup> Iran state television condemned the delisting of the group, saying that the U.S. considers MEK to be "good terrorists because the U.S. is using them against Iran."<sup>[107]</sup>

## See also

- Guerrilla groups of Iran

## Notes

- a. In this operation MEK penetrated as deep as 170 km into Iranian soil and very close to Kermanshah, the most important city in western Iran.<sup>[57]</sup>

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## External links

### Official

- "The MEK" (<http://www.english.mojahedin.org/pagesEn/>) (official Website; 2014: no longer in use).
- Website of the National Council for Resistance (NCR) (<http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/ncr.html>)
- National Council of Resistance of Iran – Foreign Affairs Committee (<http://www.ncr-iran.org/>)
- U.S. Department of State: MEK Profile; 2014: no longer in use (<http://library.nps.navy.mil/home/tgp/mek.htm>)



Wikimedia Commons has media related to *People's Mujahedin of Iran*.

### Other

- Global Security on MEK (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/mek.htm>)
- **(Persian)** News and Information on Mujahedin-e Khalgh (MEK/MEK/NCR) (<http://www.nejatngo.com>)
- "MKO Watch" (<http://www.MKOwatch.com/>).
- Brian Binley (British MP) argues for removing the MEK from terror lists (<http://hjs.byteart.com/stories.asp?id=401>)
- Washington Times Article (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071204/EDITORIAL/112040004>)
- Economist article ([http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=13447429](http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13447429))
- Book: The United States and Iran ([http://books.google.ca/books?id=ZB9F74tiE-kC&pg=PA79&lpg=PA79&dq=saddam+hussein+mek&source=bl&ots=MlNaN1111W&sig=QqWqpW5mCXzfO3ceXe0FGxVecfE&hl=en&ei=FNhzSpeNDqL8tgeH\\_NGWCQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=6#v=onepage&q=saddam%20hussein%20mek&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=ZB9F74tiE-kC&pg=PA79&lpg=PA79&dq=saddam+hussein+mek&source=bl&ots=MlNaN1111W&sig=QqWqpW5mCXzfO3ceXe0FGxVecfE&hl=en&ei=FNhzSpeNDqL8tgeH_NGWCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6#v=onepage&q=saddam%20hussein%20mek&f=false))

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