

## 1 Preface

The stories here are stories of courage and endurance they are stories of hope and astonishing resilience. The women who speak in this book were ordinary people who became extraordinary as they encountered and responded to extreme situations

The stories presented here are true, collected from real persons and presented with a minimum of editing. They have not been artificially enhanced to make anyone look better or worse, more or less ethical, or any different from how our Participants chose to present themselves. These oral narratives of women from the People's Mojahedin of Iran, or their female supporters, were solicited via in-person interviews over the course of 2009 to 2013, during events held in Paris or Auvers-sur-Oise, France. The interviews involved a collective process: a list of questions was presented by me, the Narrator, to each participant; an editor, Jennifer Shaw, took notes during the interviews for all except one (M. Saremi, whose testimony was recorded from memory of the first, less formal interview), and she later polished the English, but left the turns of phrase, unique usages of non-native speakers, and outbursts (where occurring) as they occurred, to preserve the flavor of the stories told. Ms. Nasrin Saifi, an Iranian ex-patriot now living in the United States, served as the translator for most of the interviews. She was aided by Ms. Sarnaz Chitsaz, of the Women's Committee of the National Council of Resistance in Iran, and Militia Farjan, a supporter of the feminist movement for regime change in Iran.

The experience of hearing these stories of imprisonment, abuse, genocide, and resistance was a disturbing one for all involved. Often, all of us paused to weep, and tiny gasps of caught breath served as an accompaniment to the episodes related. A spirit of collective kinship emerged from these narratives, giving comfort to all around. One translator expressed her deep gratitude for the work undertaken here, which, while the sisters of the MeK held in a prison camp (Camp "Liberty") in Iraq, and their underground supporters in Iran were still in danger, there was no time for them to leave their struggles in order to do the work of sharing what these women as a group had been through. In such circumstances, they felt that having a known supporter and trusted academic author take up that task was a great blessing for their cause.

In fact, it was a privilege to sit with these women and become faithful keepers of their words; we always left feeling that we were the ones who had been blessed.

In order to make these women's experiences in a feminist Muslim resistance movement more accessible and understandable to audiences in the West, we include here also a chapter or two on the history of the movement of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (the Iranian designation for the PMOI - Peoples' Mojahedin of Iran), and the theological insights of its

leader, Maryam Rajavi. The history lesson on the group's political and armed struggles and how it earned them the unwarranted label of 'terrorist' was composed by Col. Wesley Martin (ret.) of the U.S. Army (with some editing by the present writer). Wes served for some years as the Head Coordinator of the Counter-Terrorism Theatre in Iraq and Afghanistan during and just after those ill-fated wars, and came to know "the Ladies" well during his posting in Iraq, when he was in constant contact with the leaders and members of the MeK in their self-built Ashraf City, in the Diyala Province of Iraq, about 60 miles north of Baghdad. General Dave Phillips, (ret.) U.S. Army, served as the head of Security at Ashraf, and was there when members were interviewed by the "Alphabet Agencies" who found not a terrorist among them. Other generals who served at Ashraf came to know these women and men well. After the transfer of sovereignty from the Coalition Forces to the government in Baghdad in 2009, together military eye-witnesses have served as whistleblowers. An unrelenting campaign of slander and disinformation about the MeK oozes out of Tehran and its fanatical, fundamentalist Islamic regime. Honorable men have lost stars and standing by their willingness to unveil the truth of this long-standing Resistance Movement. They have been vilified by State Department officials, and ultimately, required defense in court for the unfair charges leveled against them.

U.S., European and Muslim political leaders ranging from conservative to liberals have added their voices to the choir of military men calling for the protection of these dissidents from Iran and its puppets in Baghdad. Despite the machinations of the Iranian and Iraqi governments, it is worth noting that, despite the US State Department's collusion with its Tehran-backed allies in the Iraqi government, the women and men of the Resistance continued to be viewed as faithful and fruitful allies and sources of intelligence in the struggle for a pro-democratic Iran, one which is free of nuclear arms and which no longer sponsors terrorism throughout the region. In fact, the provision of intelligence to the United Nations Atomic Weapons watchdog groups and the West about Iran's secret nuclear installations is one of the very reasons why Tehran is determined to exterminate this group, with the willing aid of the Shi'ite fundamentalists who populate the new 'free' post-war Iraq.

The simple truth is that, in the absence of any evidence of terrorist activity on the part of the MeK after extensive investigation by the CIA, NSA, and US Armed Forces, the women and men of Ashraf City were declared to be Protected Persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention by both the United States and the United Nations. They voluntarily disarmed, and were granted civilian refugee status within Iraq, and given the promise of protection by the US Army and the United Nations once all governmental functions were transferred to Iraq in 2009. This promise carried with it the provision of medical care, humanitarian services, resettlement to third-party nations, and forbade any extradition (refoulement) to Iran where the members of the Resistance would certainly be tortured

and executed. As the so-called "moderate" president of Iran, Rohani, came to power and publically declared his intention of playing a game of delay by pretending to negotiate with the West (thereby giving Iran the time to complete its ambition to become a nuclear power), the intelligence provided by the MeK network inside Iran has become a key target of the Mullahs' elimination of all dissent. Rohani had been a henchman of earlier "moderate" President Khatami, both noted for their ruthless executions of political prisoners of conscience within Iran's jails. before conceding to Western demands on the Human Rights fronts, as a prerequisite to mutually-beneficial negotiations and trade. This act took place before a display of Tehran's cynical calculation. Rohani, like Khatami before him, presses on with the policy of doing away with all political opposition so that when the West mentions Human Rights violations, there are no survivors left to testify to those facts. In fact, this "moderate" president has hung over 1,000 of his citizens in his first year, surpassing his mentor. The Mourning Mothers network inside Iran, women with nothing left to lose after the imprisonment and execution of their sons and daughters by the Mullahs, keeps careful watch over unscheduled and unannounced executions within Iran's notorious prisons. Working with the MeK inside Iran, they have been able to send information to the United Nations, documenting that it is mostly the prisoners who are MeK who are currently being executed in droves. Why, we may ask, are those particular prisoners considered so dangerous to the existing government? MeK prisoners are the survivors of Khatami and Rohani's earlier Human Rights violations inside the prisons of the regime, and they are keeping watch and counting up numbers during their long imprisonments. Their information finds its way to the mothers of the dead, and from there it makes its way to the outside world.

One must sympathize with the Mullahs' difficulties: It's hard to masquerade as a reformer when the world has hard evidence to the contrary. It's hard to pretend you are not working to weaponize plutonium when your countryfolk send the location of your secret installations to the outside world. In both cases, it is the MeK that routinely unmasks the internal crimes against humanity that are the everyday norm within Iran.

It is no wonder that the real terrorists want these women and men dead. Add to this the sophisticated and astute female leadership of the movement, and the Mullahs' ideology of constitutionally justified female inferiority melts like a wet witch. In the face of a fierce, intelligent and courageous female Opposition that inspires men born into sexism to reject it wholesale, MeK men have transformed themselves into new beings who are quite capable of embracing female leadership. Tehran has no answer to this other than its usual one: denial, death, and more death.

The voices here amply illustrate why Tehran is afraid; hear them, and tremble. The women who tell their stories of midnight courage, and daytime torture, of longing and loving, of imprisoned baby girls who are fed by an entire cell block sharing their rations,

mothers emboldened by the depth of their loss, are all here, testifying to what makes the Mullahs pace their mansions, wringing their hands:

Women are strong.

Women are powerful.

Women endure.

## A Survivor People: The Power of Personal Narrative

Why are we telling the stories of such human disregard for basic decency of human life? Why do we ask you to read the narratives of survivors in a distant land with a history that is not much known by regular citizens in the West? Why should you read on?

The stories here participate in the Human Rights tradition of personal testimony gathered from survivors as evidence for crimes against humanity. Hopefully, the events narrated here will one day be brought to judgment in international courts that make such matters their focus. Such stories are spawned by what trauma psychologists refer to as 'extreme situations'.

Extreme situations are classified as circumstances and events where normal rules do not apply. Hence, people are not always able to respond in traditional ways that they have learned because, in a very real way, they have been taken by surprise by a radically-altered circumstance whose rules they do not understand. People who survive extreme situations often find themselves with not only physical wounds from their ordeal, but also emotional and intellectual wounds that are not as visible to others. These latter states roughly correspond to the form of combat injury we now know as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The situation for dissidents as well as ordinary people in Iran is such that, tragically, daily events offer considerable opportunities to become acquainted with traumatic stress.

### **MeK: Beyond PTSD**

Posttraumatic stress disorder is something with which those who provide support services for veterans are very familiar. Usually thought of as a 'disease' afflicting mainly males in and after combat experiences, the collective PTSD of women prisoners has in recent years begun to merit the same attention and study. Studies of women in the Holocaust may provide some parallels. We find that people who have been broken by war, political or domestic abuse that is ongoing, as well as victims of normal violence have difficulty moving on to productive life even though they may have survived the primary event of extreme abuse. The women and men of the MeK are remarkable, as you will see in their stories, for the way they sought a different explanation of their suffering – one that empowered them to move beyond their personal brokenness into torchbearers for human rights and a civil society defined by decency and compassion. We ask you to persevere in reading their stories so that their courage, commitment, and example may be added to the resources of human resilience that all persons everywhere need to incorporate into their own ways of being.

Trauma psychologists tell us that three things are necessary to make the move from surviving to thriving. First, the circumstances in which the abuse is taking place and the

abuse itself must end. No person, no matter how resilient, committed or thoughtful, can be expected to progress through the stages of healing as long as they are still at hourly and daily risk of more torture in human treatment or despair. It is a sad truth that the entire country of Iran and not just the MeK and expatriates around the world, are daily continuing to experience the terror and threat that is Iran's only way of retaining power for the theocratic elites who run the country. Whether it is a person inside Iran struggling to make ends meet under an inept regime, a member of a dissident group currently at risk in Iraq, or an expatriate living in the West, everyone has daily evidence before them – hangings, public harassment for the slightest infractions of medieval law codes, and outright acts of violence against people and families, are arriving every day.

In such circumstances, those who have thrown in their lot with the feminist resistance are actually existing in a healthier mode of being: they know that their enemies are real and determined to wipe them out; they know that they are trapped between political forces at the international level; and they understand that their struggle is ongoing. They are playing “long game”, one that is both personal *and* national. The odds against them are enormous. Yet, they are not helpless; they act, even when those actions do not seem to bear fruit or represent only a minute fraction of what needs to be done to reestablish a humane and wholesome government in their country. They have moved from helplessness to dedication, from nursing their wounds to planning for a future whose end they may never see. There is a lesson here about the role of a collective vision in sustaining individual resistance and hope.

Second, in order to move into healthy survivorship, the survivor must find a way to reconnect with a community of support, and that community is essential in validating the reality of their suffering. In particular, *public* acknowledgement of the situation of abuse must take place as part of the goal of ending such profoundly damaging experiences. The solidarity of the community, often public, often private, is sometimes taken in the form of empathetic listening to what the survivor has experienced. It is important that the survivor's view of the world is accepted as a real and genuine coping response in the middle of events which are extreme, and require strengths in a person which they were never taught to develop. Hence, the community becomes a living resource, a kind of encyclopedia of human capacities for resilience, and the survivor, validated by a public, can move on, assured that at least a few people understand why they may think or act as they do.

Third, survivors move into the realm of thriving when they have been validated to the point where they can again trust their responses to evil and act in a commensurate way. It is a curious fact that most survivors of torture, war, and other forms of physical/emotional trauma only truly reclaim their lives when they dedicate some portion of their selves to the prevention of the same kinds of dreadful treatment they themselves have experienced.

The MeK has provided a crucible in which survivors of political terror, sexual and other forms of torture, and long imprisonment under appalling conditions have been able to get on with not just their own lives, but envisioning and building a new and healed life for their whole country. The work of the MeK in attempting to empower Iranian society to make better choices and necessary changes has brought together all of the necessary ingredients that survivors need to change their world and the world of their descendants. First, the MeK have made the breakthrough from helpless imprisonment to empowered resistance – even while some of them remain imprisoned in Iran or Iraq – by setting up bases and working groups in Iraq and around the world. They have taken a step that moves them closer to a new world, which they dream and yearn for and for which they are already engaged in daily work to achieve. While the abuse has not yet fully stopped, nevertheless the MeK have become the candle whose faint but steady light illuminates the dark and dangerous path ahead.

The MeK has also met the second requirement for promoting survivorship: they have unmasked the dirty secrets of Iranian prisons, illegal nuclear installations, and a worldwide campaign of disinformation. They have provided ongoing support for refugees from Iran, networked with other groups under attack from Iranian proxies like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Assad's Syrian army, and smuggled information and important military intelligence out of Iran to the West. Their many speeches and events repeatedly highlight and lift up the courageous example of those who have been the Mullahs' victims. They celebrate worldwide the incredible bravery of ordinary people who have responded to non-ordinary events in astonishing ways. Many who have started out as suspicious of the MeK have become ardent friends and supporters. This is precisely because of their decades-long persistence in bringing the state of the Iranian people to the attention of the world, even as the Mullahs brand them as terrorists and attempt to keep the veil of a religious Revolution as a cloak for what is going on inside their borders. Said one State Department insider recently, "if the MeK are not whom they have shown us they are, it is the best, longest running, most compelling charade in political history." Currently flush with legal successes from around the world in defeating the Mullahs' allegations of terrorism, the MeK is currently moving along the continuum of "terrorists" to "dissidents" to "best-vetted opposition movement in the Mid-East". (FN: MeK shackled by...????)

Finally, the people of the MeK have taken up as their task the goal of preventing the continuation of a fanatical and brutal regime. They maintain a thorough and vibrant network within Iran as the people inside that country struggle to use what means are available to them to bring about political change. If the MeK succeed in their quest to turn Iran into a vibrant, diverse, economically-stable, and member-in-good-standing of the world community, they will have eliminated the conditions which perpetuate torture. They will have removed a state sponsor of religious terrorism as a key actor in the travails of the

region of the Mideast. If they succeed, they will have embodied a progressive (& fiscal support??) Islam that adheres to the teachings of the Prophet, but interprets them in ways that enhance human dignity, global peace, and the planet's deliverance. Simply by enduring, the MeK has been able to show their countryfolk that they are not helpless, that the Mullahs' terror can be opposed, and that individual lives and choices matter.

We invite you to read these stories as part of a journey of Social Recovery. The West, and in particular Britain and the United States, has a long history of interference in the politics of the Mideast. These colonial violations have not always been good histories, and have, in fact, set the stage for Khomeini's murderous theft of the Revolution of 1979. The West is now faced with another turning point in its relations to Iran: will we continue with war and economic bargaining, or will we insist on basic human dignity as a baseline for all members of the human community? As we in the United States ponder our own loss of power to order the world as we please, it is interesting that Iran in the form of the MeK offers us back knowledge we will find useful in our own revitalization of national self-image. We must stop the abuses that torture our own people or the globe; we must stand in solidarity with survivors of the tragic wars that have taken place in this new century, and we must stop engaging in fruitless behaviors that have already failed numerous times. Finally, the MeK has shown us how to prevent becoming a torturing state by their faithfulness to a vision of a compassionate, secular, Muslim-majority state where women, religious minorities, and even political dissidents may all count on equal treatment under just laws.

### Tellers of Tales/

It is no small thing to declare oneself a teller of tales, and take up a cycle of stories as one's own. In some cases, telling stories of the past seems like a prophetic form of active resurrection of those long dead: by mouth to mouth retelling of What Happened, the dead live once more, often, and repeatedly. In other cases, the telling of invented stories—"fiction" or "mythology" as some moderns might characterize the genres—becomes a tour de force of unique imagination that can shape a culture: "...these are the stories of the Starship Enterprise...." or "Long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away...". Would we have 'smart phones' or 3D printers, MRIs and "Cat" scans without those futuristic stories that helped 20<sup>th</sup> century culture imagine its own future as something very different from its past? Would the young have learned to speak of what was once known as 'spirit' as 'The Force', or would the old have dreamed of medicine that could reverse so much of the burden of age? Probably not; for without the legacy of stories, reimagined and passed on in media which, while different from the oral tales of the past, nevertheless retained the shape

and power of the stories and poems of earlier ages, we would remain 'stuck' in the actual, and ignorant of the possible.

And so the heritage and the necessity of storytelling, narrating, composing, performing, and in our age, researching, writing and publishing, goes on without pause. Yes, it may currently be the fashion to shape one's abrupt punctuations of life's stories into 128 characters, or a fleeting image in time snapped on a phone camera, able to fly around the atmosphere like Puck girdling the Earth at Oberon's command. But it is not until such snippets are joined together, "threaded" in juxtaposition of replies or like contributions, that an actual narrative – a story – emerges. And such forms of telling are not to everyone's taste, nor is their ability to outlast the moment yet apparent. Still, elder generations must remain open to the possibilities of Twittered Tales and Snapchatted Sagas, for just as some communities took laments from the biblical Psalms and made of them the expressive Blues, stories and poems, like Murder, will out. The Telltale hearts of humanity are always composing, and tastes, tempos, and methods can, may and will change. As we will see below, some stories of oppressed peoples are now found in their most shocking truth on Facebook, or flitting, like a wraith, from proxy server to proxy server, as Power seeks to suppress a people's need to tell the truth of their lives to the world.

With trepidation, then, this teller of tales speaks to you now of stories which have not yet had their endings written, punctuated by poems in celebration or agonizing reflection on the grieving that happens along the way. A scholar of the ancient past of the what we now call the "MidEast" and monotheistic "Scriptures", I am used to stories and poems whose endings have broken off the edge of the clay tablet, or torn away from the outside of the papyrus roll. PostModern critics say such moments in a scholar's life invite the insertion of oneself into the 'gap', that the loss of endings only embodies the way that the propaganda of any text, any story, eventually betrays itself as partial, an inevitable betrayal of the very claims of truth that often impelled the story to be told. Perhaps that is true, and not so bad a way to view the lost ending of Middle Kingdom Egypt's Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, but when the stories one tells are of martyrs who *did* live, who *did* give their lives for a belief, or who might *yet* live, if only the world knew their story and cared—in such cases, PostModern theory must address itself to the Ether of MetaTheory, for it has no place on the ground where stories are written in cruelty, sacrifice and blood.

So, I invite you, Gentle and Determined Reader, to read on, even though I cannot promise you endings as of yet. The story told here is of the determined resistance movement led by women, for the sake of women and girls, and currently being enacted in the refugee and prison camps of Iraq, in the prisons of Iran, in the dogged work of Human Rights activists in the great capitals and courts of the "civilized" world. This is the story of a

particular group of the feminists of Iran, the Mojahed of the Mujahedin-e-Kalq.<sup>1</sup> The story begins in the Universities and the coffee-shops of Tehran, Shiraz, and Tabriz under the wretched colonial rule of Shah Pahlevi, and written in blood during and after the "Islamic Revolution" of the brutal Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. This story is taking place now in the notorious Evin Prison, Iran's own Bastille, and in the crimes against humanity being committed in the name of the United States and the sovereign nation of post-war Iraq. The characters are living, breathing women and the men who follow their leadership, and they weave through a maze of obstacles placed before them by an oil-hungry and blind postcolonial West, and the devious and bankrupt fundamentalist state still dominating the long suffering people of Iran. The Dead, martyrs of the Resistance movement, live among these stories also, for the story began with them, and they have entrusted its ending to the next generation of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for their people. And, yes, the Teller of these Tales has also taken on a life in these stories also. This recorder of heartbreaking oral histories of these women and their Beloved Dead began as an activist observer volunteering for a Non-Governmental Organization which considers the problems of women and religion from the standpoint of United Nations promulgations. But just as stories rarely end where they began, neither has the activist: the Observer has become Narrator, a committed family member, hoping with stories to atone in some small part for the shame of her own government and the unknowing people to whom it lies.

For these are stories that matter: life and death are in the power of the Tongue, the biblical Book of Proverbs tells us, and here that power is shamelessly and shape-fully deployed. I make no secret of it: I believe that if you hear (read) the unvarnished stories of these women, you will come, as I have, to care what happens to them and the people for whom they sacrifice themselves. As a religious scholar, I think of them as the "Daughters of Allah"—though that moniker is totally unIslamic, and not one they themselves would care to own—because of their similarities to the female Christian martyrs of the early Church, girls and women who believed, and in that belief in the possibility of salvation for all, became courageous members of One Family whose Father was God. Thecla, Felicity, Perpetua, and the rest: they went to the arena and died in droves for their belief in salvation, and the Church hailed them—and their brothers martyrs—as the Daughters and Sons of God. Today, we are living in a new era of Martyrdom, as Islam worldwide struggles to reclaim its soul from violence, terror and bigotry. In this conflict, the Feminist Resistance in Iran and Iraq represents a ray of hope, a radical alternative, a worthy cause about which one should care passionately.

---

<sup>1</sup> Also known in the West as the PMOI: The People's Mojahedin of Iran; the NCR-I (National Council of Resistance in Iran) is the political arm of this group; and some of the PMOI are members of the NLA, the National Liberation Army.

And perhaps together, that caring can write a new end to the familiar story of horror, sacrifice, and hope.

## THE AMERICANS

Gen David Phillips (ret.)

In defense of the residents of Camp Ashraf, I need to make a preamble about zealotry. In my answers below, I sound somewhat critical of the MeK's dedication and absolute focus on their mission, but I need to explain up front. Their actions and personality, when described sound a lot like zealotry. Yes, they are zealots, but for a very good reason. I have yet to meet a member of the MeK who does not have a personal story of tragedy caused by the current Mullah Regime. They include the murder of a brother, the hanging of a sibling, the stoning of a mother, unwarranted incarceration and torture to name but a few. If those personal experiences don't create a psyche for zealotry, I don't know what does. They are good people thrust by events into a unique situation. They may be zealots, but they are not terrorists. Dave Phillips, 22 August 2012

### *When did you first learn of the MeK?*

During the buildup to the invasion of Iraq, my S2 Officer (Intelligence) provided reports on each of the significant groups in Iraq; Republican Guards, Iraqi Army, Police and a little known brigade sized organization of Iranians called the MeK. He gave me a synopsis on the group and a determination that they may fight on the side of the Iraqis. My S2 added, don't worry about this group. We'll have little to do with them. (Ha, I should have had chills run up my spine)

### *Given your expectations from what you had heard/learned, did you find the label terrorist to be warranted?*

When I first rolled through the gates of Camp Ashraf in 2003, I had already been to the MeK Camp at Hillah, Fallujah and downtown Baghdad. Camp Ashraf closely resembles the Camp just east of Fallujah, but is much more remote. My impression of the MeK was irrelevant, because I was told they were terrorists by the State Department and that was good enough for me. I was happy to poke the terrorists in the eye in retribution for 911. It didn't matter that they had nothing to do with 911, but the label of being a terrorist group was good enough for me. I mentally equated the MeK with the Iranian Hostage Crisis back in 1979-80. I was a young lieutenant though and we were going to war with Iran. I kept looking at the female MeK members and saw the images of the Iranian women, hajeb covered, inside of the US Embassy trying to piece back together the shredded documents. I was not a friend of the Mek and if they would have given me an excuse, we would have gone kinetic.

Overtime, after having my staff do additional research, I was beginning to question the terrorist designation. The FBI, CIA, DIA and other three letter agencies were not finding anyone they determined to be of interest. I was incredulous. I had over 3000 terrorists detained without any due process other than a directive from DoS, yet there were none who warranted a second look by our federal agencies. All of the three letter agencies packed up and departed by June of 2004 and left my unit holding the bag. My staff lawyer was concerned that we were in violation of international law by keeping the MeK detained indefinitely without any due process.

The more I researched, the greater my belief that these people should be our allies, not our terrorists. I continued to hear the same rhetoric about their terrorist acts, but none could stand up to scrutiny.

By summer 2004, I was ready to just open the gates of Camp Ashraf and let them leave. Unfortunately, the DoS blocked every initiative to ease the detention.

Bottom line; they may be terrorists in the eyes of the current Iranian government, but I would better label them as Iranian freedom fighters.

I am not discounting that this group, not these specific individuals, may have harmed Americans during the Shah years in Iran, but most at Ashraf were either too young or weren't even born in pre-1979.

### ***What are your strongest impressions on the MeK as a group? Individuals?***

They are dedicated to a fault, which makes them susceptible to outside attack. They are their own enemy because of their inflexibility. Take the MeK emblem for example. I went around and around with them that the red hammer/sickle/anvil emblem wouldn't play well in the post-Soviet world. They just smiled and repeated that they liked their emblem. They didn't look at the bigger picture of marketing and public relations.

They are a group think organization that act like the science fiction race in the Star Trek Next Generation series; "The Borg." Sorry to use such a pop culture comparison, but it really fits them best. They are a collective and operate as such. They rarely talk one on one and almost always have either a minder or partner listening to every word. I tried repeatedly to get my point of contact to discuss items of interest other than overthrowing the Mullah's of Iran. He was the only individual ever to spend time alone with me. Occasionally I could break through the thick layer of rhetoric and get him to reflect on his past. I learned that he liked tootsie roll candy and liked to go boating. Of course I slipped him a bag of tootsie rolls, but he never mentioned them. I also learned that his wife was also in the camp, but he hadn't seen her in three years. This also leads to the cult-like perception by outsiders. Maybe so, but they are not your Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas. The uninformed, inexperienced or closed minded people would easily paint the organization as a cult, but I see them as much different. They are something much deeper than a simple cult. They are an organization where the individual is secondary to the cause. They have given up everything in order to further the goals of the organization. Unfortunately, this type of mentality, coupled with so many years without little outside contact (for the majority of the 3000+) has in many ways impaired their free thought. Even if they do succeed in overthrowing the regime in Iran, they are probably not suited for governing. They wouldn't like me saying this, but it is my belief. They can definitely rally support and even a major uprising, but their total focused approach will hardly endear them to the masses in Iran. I see them as viable in bringing about regime change, but their inflexibility and lack of free and creative thought will prevent them from governing in post-Mullah Iran.

As individuals??? There are no individuals in Camp Ashraf. They gave up being individuals years ago. Cult like? NO, but disturbingly different from western social norms.

*\*\*\*There is one other issue which I don't want to put in writing. Anti-MeK individuals could and would use it against them. The uniformed would definitely believe they are a crazed cult; even though it is that identification label that couldn't be further from the truth. No, this is not the marriage issue. It is something much more dark (at least in my mind). If you would like to discuss this issue, let's do so over the phone. Just let me know.*

***Could you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?***

Two quick stories that stand out;

When I first arrived at Camp Ashraf, my intelligence officers informed me that they believed that they identified Commander Zohreh, the leader of the National Liberal Army. When we arrived at the Martyrs Museum, my intel officer whispered and pointed out several older women. They were MeK members standing off to the side. He stated that the one was believed to be Commander Zohrah. I walked past the greeting group and right up to the group of women and faced the one believed to be Commander Zohreh. I introduced myself by stating to the effect, "Commander Zohreh, I'm Colonel Phillips, Commander of the 89<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade." Her response was very quietly spoken, yet without talking her eyes off of mine. "You know me?" I said, "Yes, You're Commander Zohreh, I recognize you." She retorted, "How did you know me, there are few photos of me and we've never met." I replied, "I agree, there are few photos of you." I added as a mild compliment, "You're like a ghost, but we found you." She got a tight lipped knowing smile and replied, "Am I a good ghost or bad ghost." Something in her eyes said, don't mess with me. I'll gut you and watch you bleed if it serves my purpose. I knew right at that point this mission was going to be a lot more than I anticipated. Wow, was that premonition correct.

The second story involves my scariest incident in Iraq and it wasn't fighting the insurgents. It was the second and third order of effect when we raided the female barracks in search of people being held against their will and torture. Our intelligence kept picking up what I now believe was rumor and rhetoric by the Anti-MeK groups. They stated that a certain remote female billets was holding people against their will and torturing them. We were conducting an operation and sealed off the area and then swept in unannounced. The young women went fanatical, screaming and surrounded me and my personal security NCO. There must have been 100-150 women 'terrorists' surrounding me. My Soldiers were trained to shoot in this type of situation, but thank goodness they held fire. My close in personal security NCO is also trained to place himself between danger and me, but we were surrounded. Fahima Arvany, a senior MeK leader came pushing up to me and spit in my face. My NCO said he never came so close to shooting someone at point blank range. I raised my hand to stop him and slowly took off my glasses and wiped the spittle from my face. I don't recall what I said, but whatever she was yelling wasn't very nice. Over the next few minutes the situation was a standoff. Finally, Commander Zohreh showed up and basically quieted the situation.

This was the most scared I ever was during years of combat in Iraq. The scenario is now taught at the US Army Military Police School as a training vignette in the protective services course.

Regardless to say, we didn't find anyone held against their will or any indication of torture.

There is a silver lining to this situation. I can now state without doubt and under oath that I searched all areas day and night, without notice and never found signs of torture or people held against their will. I've used this example several times when briefing Congress.

***How have you changed because of your encounters with members/the group of the MeK?***

This is interesting. It isn't only the MeK that changed me, but the entire post 9/11 experience. I believed we always held the high ground as a nation, yet the patriotism of post 9/11 blinded us to many of the situations where we came off of the high ground. We squandered so much world support as the lone world super power by the Iraq debacle, Afghanistan...yes! Iraq no. It could have waited. Saddam may have been hell on wheels with his own population and rattled a lot of sabers, but for the most part remained confined to his own country. Also, he kept Iran in check. Now where are we? Better or worse off with the regime change in Iraq?

As for the MeK, I felt lied to by my own State Department and used as a repression force against all of my person values and beliefs. I was in charge of keeping people detained in a desert outpost under the threat of death at the hands of my Soldiers. No due process, no care or concern...just blind obedience to orders. To this day it causes me to lose sleep when we turned off the MeK radio station which broadcast into Iran. My Farsi speakers listened to the station continuously and determined that it was much like a "Voice of America" format. Yet, the State Department insisted that we shut it down, because the MeK were sending secret messages. I now believe they lied to me.

I used to believe what I heard from my government with everything being in black and white. I now know that things are various shades of gray. If the State Department labeled some group as terrorist...that was good enough for me. Now I know better.

Do I feel threatened and at risk for supporting the delisting of the MeK. YES, by the Iranian government, Islamic extremists and segments of my own government. Even some of my own family and so called friends have alienated me for "SUPPORTING TERRORISTS." Regardless, if they even know anything about the issue.

***What would you like to say to readers of these stories of the MeK? What message do you have for your own people (however defined) in particular?***

If you want to understand the MeK, look to revolutionary France and the overthrow of the Bourbons. To the rest of the world, France looked like a pariah, yet espoused freedom and

democracy. Once the revolution began, it took turns that couldn't be controlled, yet the end result affects our western world today in positive terms.

My message to 'my own people' (defined as those of western philosophies) is simple; consider what we currently have in Iran...what could be worse? A government which espouses destruction of western values and society, the total annihilation of Israel and the absolute suppression of women...or a group made of men and women who espouse democracy, freedom and a nuclear free Iran. Even if this group did do some harsh things in the past (which is debatable), didn't our own revolution have its hard core members who did some harsh things to the British and the loyalists? Yes, I can and do make the comparison.

The Mullahs of Iran vs. the MeK... I vote for the MeK!

**Freshdi Dashti** The only four individuals whose name comes close are those listed below;

|     |          |                                                                                                    |
|-----|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 713 | EBDF2001 | Dashti, Arshad                                                                                     |
| 714 | 9BED618D | Dashti, Shahram                                                                                    |
| 729 | 079BE364 | Dehdashti, Esmat                                                                                   |
| Xxx | EBDF2001 | Dashti, Arshad (Claimed Pakistani Citizenship. Repatriated to Pakistan in late 2004 or early 2005) |

Only Arshad Dashti had anything derogatory and it was minor.

**Zohreh Shfaei** The spelling is slightly different, but I believe this is who you are referring too

|      |          |                        |
|------|----------|------------------------|
| 1681 | 0BCC4D16 | Kamiab Sharify, Zohreh |
|------|----------|------------------------|

This young woman is very dedicated and determined. I checked my notes and 'believe' she is the young woman who told me in no uncertain terms that she was denied the right to be born in her own country. Regardless, if it was her, this comment struck me hard. It demonstrated that most of these people will never be able to integrate back into normal society. I guess after 10 years in captivity, most of us would be somewhat socially impaired. Interestingly, the comment was made to me back in early 2004. I can only imagine what the past 8 years have done to her psyche.

**Homya Wassehan** I cannot find anyone with a name that is close enough to cross reference. There are only three members with a last name that begins with "W"

## Trapped by Politics

by Colonel (Retired) Wes Martin, U.S. Army

Formerly

If there is any expectation that the current U.S. administration is going to do the harder right instead of the easier wrong, it is very doubtful to happen in the case of the People's Mujahedin of Iran. The PMOI or Mujahedin, as they are more frequently referred to, has become more of a cultural, political, and ideological threat to the Islamic fundamentalist Iranian government than the military opposition force of years past. Located in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, 50 miles northeast of Baghdad, the PMOI surrendered their enormous inventory of weapons to the American military following the fall of Saddam Hussein. The largest component of the European-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), the PMOI no longer possesses offensive military capability.

Formed in September 1965 as a Muslim group opposed to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the PMOI grew quickly in numbers and influence. Had not the Central Intelligence Agency twelve years earlier caused the collapse the popular Iranian government of Dr Mohammad Mosaddeq, the PMOI would have likely never come to exist. Had President Teddy Roosevelt's grandson, Kermit, not publicly boasted about orchestrating the overthrow and placing the US-friendly Shah Pahlavi in power, the hostility toward the U.S. would not have occurred. Installing a government that would in time execute thousands is bad enough; boasting about it is not the way to win hearts and influence the minds of the victims. The June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1963 brutal suppression that ended the demonstrations resulting from the rift between the Shah and the clerics set in motion many actions that still have major impact on Iran, the Middle-East, and the world.

In 1966 the PMOI adopted a set of philosophies that would put them at odds with both the ruling government and rising Islamic fundamentalists. They came to embrace equality between those in power and those not, between men and women, and among various religions and races. Going even further, they believed the clergy should not have total control over interpretation of the Quran, nor should the clerics have total control over their congregations. These philosophies, which still have major influence on the PMOI, would cast them into fighting successive enemies.

Even further problems were growing. As in the case of many organizations, an internal element often develops that does not share organizational beliefs, but are within the ranks because it best suits their purpose at the time. When the opportunity presents itself, this element will either split off or attempt to take control of the original organization. This became the situation as a Marxist element emerged within the PMOI. Often at serious odds with established senior leadership, the Marxists soon found themselves in a very advantageous position.

Failed attempts at attacking the Shah and disrupting the government ended up with arrests of sixty-nine members of the PMOI in August of 1971. The core of the PMOI leadership was off the streets, and most ended up on the gallows, including the three founding members. As very few remaining members of PMOI leadership survived in the Shah's prisons, awaiting the end of torture that only death would bring, the rift between the rival elements intensified. By May of 1972, two PMOIs existed, with the preponderance of power favoring the Marxists. The two elements spent as much time fighting each other as they did engaging the Shah's regime. Meanwhile, one imprisoned member who was not executed by the government enforcers, but rather remained captive until the final days of the Shah's rule, was a young Massoud Rajavi. Inside prison he built an organizational structure and a large membership anchored on original PMOI concepts and independent of Marxist influence.

Today, any action conducted by either the PMOI or the Marxist PMOI is viewed as a PMOI action with no discrepancy to which organization did it. For the United States, this is especially true concerning the deaths of three American officers: the June 1975 dual killing of COL Paul Shaffer and Lieutenant Colonel John Turner, and the following month's killing of Lieutenant Colonel Lewis Hawkins. The fact that in August of 1975 the Shah's police arrested two people for the killings of Shaffer and Turner and stated they were part of the "Islamic Marxist group," and a member of the Marxist PMOI would later claim to have killed Hawkins, the blame remains on the PMOI.

In November of 1976, the strength of the Marxist PMOI was shaken when they lost a major gun battle with Iranian police. Weakened, but not broken, both elements continued to be actively involved in 1978 and 1979 uprising against the Shah. In January of 1979, ten days before Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from exile in Paris, Rajavi was released from prison. As he worked to rebuild the PMOI, most of the subordinate leadership he selected also came from Qasr Prison. Soon the Marxist element abandoned any claim to the PMOI name and renamed themselves "Paykar" (Struggle).

Following the fall of the Shah, the PMOI had hopes of being part of the moderate Premier Bazargan/President Bani Sadr government. However, Ayatollah Khomeini was determined to establish a religious regime, with himself at the center. With this latest development, almost immediately Bazargan and the PMOI were at odds with the fundamentalist clerics under the leadership of Khomeini. Years earlier, as a cleric, Khomeini had been condemned to death by the Shah. The execution had been prevented by a sudden meeting in Najaf, Iraq where Khomeini was elevated to Ayatollah. In turn, Shah Pahlavi was left with the options of violating Islamic law by executing an Ayatollah or exiling Khomeini out of country. Out of country did not mean Khomeini was no longer undermining the Shah nor working to destroy his, or any Iranian government, that did not practice Khomeini's own brand of fundamentalism.

On November 3, 1979 Khomeini addressed the university students, resulting in 400 of them storming and taking over the American embassy in Tehran. This act caught the rest of Iran and the world by surprise. Yet it became one more thing attributed to the PMOI. Any military leader can verify that from Khomeini's exciting the students to their taking over the embassy, time did not exist for any formal organization to develop and perform a mission. Hope for a moderate Iran was immediately disappearing, as evidenced by the same-day resignation of Premier Bazargan. Bani Sadr stayed on for the time being as President, but it was obvious his attempts to bring order out of this chaos were not going to succeed.

As in the words of Shakespeare, "Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war," Khomeini was able to seize upon this event to take the world stage and raise the fever all across Iran. His followers had successfully attacked the center of United States presence in Iran and now held American hostages. Khomeini used that excitement to bring his wrath on adversaries, real and perceived, within Iran. Anyone who did not share his fundamentalist beliefs was an adversary. Top on the list were the PMOI and the Communists. Attempts by Rajavi to work within the new government were not allowed. In December of 1979, Khomeini refused to allow him to run for President; and the following March, Rajavi was denied attendance to Parliament. In June 1981, the PMOI organized a peaceful demonstration in Tehran which attracted nearly half-a-million people. Khomeini responded by unleashing a brutal crackdown where dozens were killed, hundreds wounded, and thousands arrested. By 1982, Khomeini's attacks produced further bloodshed, to include the death of Rajavi's wife Ashraf and his second-in-command, Moussa Khiabani.

This time it was the PMOI who had to seek refuge. By 1981, Rajavi and now-ex-president Bani Sadr had moved the organizational structure behind their combined efforts to Paris. In 1986 another major relocation took place that takes us directly to the situation currently trying to be resolved. In the Middle-East, the belief is very real that, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Iran's mortal enemy was the Iraqi government under the rule of Saddam Hussein. While possessing the ability to be very charismatic, Saddam was also one of the most corrupt, manipulating, brutal, and self-serving leaders in the world. He was a person who enjoyed delighting others with his charm, yet would take equal delight watching those same people being tortured to death. The legend of his wood chipper was very much real.

Saddam saw a purpose for the Mujahedin. Having a major military force in his country dedicated to the overthrow of his principle enemy and replacing that enemy with a friendly government was very much in his interest. For the PMOI, Saddam offered a series of bases where they could monitor the Iranian government, work their operatives inside Iran, have a military staging area, operate a radio communications network, and be a beacon of hope to the people in Iran hoping to survive until a better government could take control. In 1986, a large majority of Iranian people had lived

under the Mosaddeq government or heard stories from their parents. They knew that replacing the Shah with Khomeini was not a solution in the right direction, only more of the same. Even Khomeini's grandson had long since remarked that replacing the Shah's government with his grandfather's regime had taken the country from bad to worse. Now, just across the border into Iraq was organized Iranian opposition.

For the next seventeen years, the Mujahedin operated several bases in Iraq and did conduct military operations against the Iranian government. Up to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Mujahedin grew in size and capability. It was during this period that the majority of the people now living at Ashraf joined the PMOI. An interesting and still haunting development occurred in October of 1997. While attempting to create positive relations with the newly elected President Mohammad Khatami, who was then making overtures of becoming more moderate, the Clinton administration placed the Mujahedin on the State Department list of terrorist organizations. As time would prove, there never was an intent by the fundamentalist Islamic leaders of Iran to become more moderate. This perception was nothing more than a successful psychological operation that achieved many desired goals, which once achieved revealed Iran's true intent - complete with an active nuclear weapons research program.

In 2003, as the United States developed its plans to invade Iraq, the Iranian government set to work on how to quietly take over as much of Iraq as possible. The Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution of Iraq and its own military arm, the Badr Corps, were already firmly inside Iraq. The political operations of the southern Shia provinces were continually taken over by Iranian loyalists. Since the invasion, the Ministry of Interior and especially the national police have become more and more under the control of rebel cleric Moqtada Sadr. Today, the Iranian influence has expanded itself through the southern provinces, over most of Baghdad, and into Diyala province where Camp Ashraf is located.

Also in 2003, as the Coalition prepared to invade, Mujahedin leadership made the decision that their fight was not with the Coalition and elected not to rise up in support of Saddam. Their fight was with the Iranian government. Even when their camps were bombed, resulting in deaths within the organization, the Mujahedin did not return fire. When the Coalition forces arrived on the ground, rather than resistance, it became a relationship of cooperation. The Mujahedin accepted consolidation of their ranks into the one camp of Ashraf. Of the 10,000 members, approximately 3,700 accepted the move, with the remainder leaving the organization. Eventually, another 190 of these members elected to leave the PMOI and move to a small camp under Coalition control. In time, these 190 former members were accepted into Kurdistan where they now reside.

From the very beginning, the United States had a difficult time figuring out what to do with the PMOI. This was a first in the history of the world: an invading force inherits control of a military organization within the defeated country, yet that organization is an adversary of another country. That country, being Iran, is the same one that President Bush declared to be a nation sponsor of terrorism. In 2004, following the PMOI's formal renouncement of terrorism, members of the Mujahedin were awarded Protected Person status under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

My first awareness of this organization came in October 2003. After having conducted a force protection assessment of Abu Ghraib, I had a meeting with 800<sup>th</sup> Military Police Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Janis Karpinski. A classmate from officer basic course, I addressed with her the serious lack of adult supervision at Abu Ghraib. In the same meeting, she addressed the PMOI and how Coalition leadership had yet to figure out how to deal with them and use them as a potential resource - especially in the area of intelligence. Their name came up again when an officer reported to Coalition Forces J-3 (Operations), Major General Tom Miller, that the Mujahedin were constructing combat trenches between their camp and the Americans. Turned out the trenches were for the installation of water pipes to handle the surge of new residents caused by the consolidation. I had no way of realizing this was just the beginning of all the unfounded rumors I would hear about the PMOI. Two years later, the Mujahedin dilemma would play a bigger role in my life when I became the Operations Officer for Task Force 134, Detention Operations. Seven months after that, it became my main focus when in June of 2006, I became the first colonel to serve as base commander of Camp Ashraf.

One thing that always impressed me in 2006 about Camp Ashraf (named after Rajavi's first wife) was how out of the desert an oasis was built. Outside of the perimeter fences was barren land. Supported by water pumped from two rivers and purified within the compound was a well irrigated community. Each time I witnessed this irrigation I was drawn back to Anwar Sadat's amazement when he first saw the work Ariel Sharon had done during Israeli occupation of the Sinai Peninsula. The Mujahedin had also set up outlets along the pipeline to allow local farmers to draw water for their use. Electricity was provided to all camp facilities; a hospital and clinics served not only the Mujahedin but anyone who showed up at the gates requesting treatment. Each compound had its own bakery and dining facility. Each of these had a special food or item that championed over the other facilities. They produced their own ice and made their own soft drinks. The uniforms they wore were always well-serviced and clean at the beginning of the work day.

I found Camp Ashraf's mosque a testimonial to the organization's founding principles of tolerance of other religions and races as well as the clergy not possessing total control over interpretation of the Quran or the congregations. Constructed with the two towers of a Shia religious center, it was open to all. Sunni residents of the local area were welcome to come and worship. Americans and all other nationalities of any faith were welcome to come inside the mosque. Unknown to the outside



day, their chances of getting caught by the Shia death squads were that much greater. The workers preferred to come and go once a week and deliver the earnings to their families. Having seen enough to realize that once again I was chasing State Department swamp gas, I started to leave the compound. My PMOI escort interrupted my departure and stated that there was another building to examine. I assured him between what I already witnessed, and his willingness to show more, I was convinced there was no reason to look further.

Another rumor concerned the Mujahedin keeping people against their will. They did have concertina wire fences between their compound and ours. To the outside, it appeared they were trying to keep people in. Upon much closer examination and experience, I came to realize that they didn't want anyone to defect from the organization without being debriefed and carrying in their possession sensitive documents or information. In one case, the Mujahedin took me to a compound they had for people wishing to leave. One person was living the good life there and didn't want to leave. He was being cared for with meals and lodging, but didn't have to work for his keep. The Mujahedin leadership asked me to talk to him and convince him to come over to our defector camp. Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful. This person had the best of both worlds and didn't want to give it up. Using the logic of Imam Ali Hussein, the Prophet's grandson, the night before the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD, Mujahedin leadership told their membership, "We will turn out the lights." Anyone wishing to leave had that choice. Mujahedin leadership just wanted to know about the departure before it happened.

One unexpected departure afforded me the opportunity to negate another rumor: that the Mujahedin were sneaking out of Camp Ashraf without our knowledge to conduct business and undermine the Iraqi government. Having shown up unexpectedly in the middle of the night, this man caught both the Americans and PMOI by surprise. The Mujahedin accepted my doing the debriefing of this person who was now under our control. They accepted my word that he didn't bring any sensitive documents, only himself. This person's former role was to do the shopping and bank business trips to Baghdad while under American oversight. When I interviewed him, he made it clear he wanted nothing more to do with the Mujahedin. I then specifically asked him if the PMOI were leaving camp without our knowledge. Even though he was dissatisfied with his former organization, he assured me they were not violating any of our rules and were complying with everything we mandated. That conversation, and many other events, further proved to me that the PMOI was fulfilling the spirit and intent of every requirement placed on them by the Americans.

The Mujahedin was an intelligence source that we didn't learn to fully use for a long time, even though they were willing to share information. This is the organization that made the world aware that the Iranian government was conducting nuclear research operations. Their relationships in the local area were bringing in continual reports of Al Qaeda, Badr Corps, and Mahdi Army activities throughout the region. Not until the arrival of the Marine Corps Human Exploitation Team were we

able to get that information into the intelligence network. I was always amazed at the amount of information they were able to extract out of Iran. One instance was the result of a conversation in Baghdad between that same State Department representative and a senior Iraqi official. When the conversation was over, the Iraqi official filed his report to Tehran. Within two weeks, all the details of the conversation were handed to me by the PMOI.

Concerning my tour of duty at Ashraf, I came to know the Mujahedin better than any other outsider before, and very likely after. I heard the rumors, then pursued the facts. I challenged them in debate and listened to them in discussion. Having already been the Antiterrorism/Force Protection Officer for all of Iraq, I had a solid understanding of the ever-changing threat. To understand what I was working to protect, and from whom, I had done an incredible amount of studying. When I was outside the perimeter in missions with the Mujahedin, I found them to be a solid ally. Inside the perimeter, I found them to be a major learning opportunity. We didn't always agree, but we always respected and trusted each other.

Upon my return to the Pentagon, I began working with State Department representatives in Washington, D.C. to properly address the PMOI issue. What I found were the two primary people at Foggy Bottom responsible for the Mujahedin had almost no working knowledge of the organization. The first two meetings I had with them, and several other people in attendance, concerned presenting a time-line history of the organization from its earliest days and going over about sixty photographs I had taken concerning all aspects of Camp Ashraf and its residents. The State Department representatives had no idea what the membership looked like, the uniforms they wore, the layout of the compound, the existence of an industrial compound where trailer homes were being manufactured, the fact they ran their water through a treatment plant before consumption, had medical facilities, and ate their meals in dining facilities. They did know a lot of the rumors, but almost none of the facts.

Finally we got to the issues concerning the Mujahedin. The biggest one was the accepted-as-fact rumor that in years past the Mujahedin had attacked the Kurds. I produced a letter from Hoshyer Zebari, head of Kurdistan Democratic Party International Relations, clearly stating this did not occur. This was checked out by having their counterparts in Baghdad talk to Mr. Zebari. I was later assured by my Foggy Bottom counterparts that Mr. Zebari confirmed my information to be true. Yet, several months later when the annual report on terrorism was released by the State Department, the accusation for attacking the Kurds was not removed. I questioned the same people I had been dealing with and was informed that they don't communicate with the people who put out the annual report.

Another issue that has plagued the PMOI is the Marxist label. While the PMOI worked for more openness in Islam, the Marxist element discarded Islam in favor of Marxism. The best analysis to this situation was provided by former Undersecretary of State George Ball in his August 19, 1981 *Washington Post* article. Mr. Ball stated, "...The sloppy press habit of dismissing the Mujahedeen as leftists badly confuses the problem....Its intention is to replace the current backward Islamic regime with a modernized Shiite Islam drawing its egalitarian principalities from Koranic Sources rather than Marx..."

The leadership of the Mujahedin have expressed their willingness to leave Iraq and go elsewhere. The problem is they have no place to go. Even if the United States follows the actions of the European Union and removes this organization's terrorist designation, none of the members can come to the United States because they were once in a designated terrorist organization. As far as Homeland Security is concerned, it is irrelevant as to whether that designation was right or wrong in the first place. As long as the United States leaves them on this list, no other country is willing to accept them. The only actions that have come out of the State Department were to pull the "protected person" status and turn oversight of Camp Ashraf over to the Iraqi government.

Against this backdrop, we now have a U.S. administration who believes the war is basically over for America and we can start pulling out. As Americans, we haven't learned from our mistakes. In the early days of Iraq occupation, we saw little activity in the southern Shia provinces. We were so focused on the Sunni activity that we never realized Iran and the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution of Iraq were taking control of all the community and provincial governments. The same has now been going on for several years throughout the country. Yet our politicians continue to express confidence and support of this government.

We continually experienced corruption within the Iraqi government, to include civilians being arrested without reason and held for ransom; illegal detention facilities to include on Ministry of Interior grounds; and an entire Sunni village ordered to leave their homes within an hour so Shia families could move in and take over their possessions. I personally had senior members of the Ministry of Culture offer to give me a painting that was part of usurped art. One of the most painful events was when one of our convoys was driving through an Iraqi police checkpoint. Just as our last vehicle entered the open area, the rear gunner saw the uniformed Iraqi police officers running for cover. As he radioed the warning to the convoy commander, a suicide driver came at the front of the convoy. Engaged by the lead gunner, the vehicle was destroyed and the driver killed before he made it to the convoy. Suddenly, the entire right flank of the convoy was under attack. When it was over, one American was killed in action. Meanwhile, this is the government that has been making continued promises to the Americans that the Mujahedin will be protected. Yet on a continuing basis, Camp Ashraf has been placed under siege. Attacks have left members of the Mujahedin dead or maimed. Critical medical supplies, petroleum products, and food have been denied delivery to

Ashraf. Loudspeakers have been continually used to conduct psychological operations against the PMOI.

It is not hard to recall the fiasco that was supposed to be the legitimate execution of Saddam Hussein. If not for the unexpected release of the digital footage, the world would never have learned of the executioners chanting "Moqtada, Moqtada" while Saddam's body was dangling from the rope. These actions supported the promise Moqtada Sadr made to his followers, that Saddam would "not live to see the light of the new year." There is no reason to expect the Iraqi government to do any better with the PMOI. If Prime Minister Maliki really cared about Iraq, he would turn to the PMOI just as Egypt's Anwar Sadat turned to Israel's Ariel Sharon and ask for guidance in developing more fertile lands.

Ruled by fear enforced by brutality, the Iranian fundamentalist government remains in place. Each year we watch the spectacle of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad giving his annual speech to the United Nations. Representatives of the free world get up and leave as Ahmadinejad speaks. He doesn't care. For his rants are not to positively influence the outside world, but to be shown inside Iran how their President is standing up to the West. Even though in his last ramblings he called for an investigation into the American government's orchestrating the 9-11 attacks, Ahmadinejad's attention is never far away from the annihilation of Israel. Khomeini often stated, "The road to Jerusalem is through Karbala."

The real benefactor to the fall of the Mujahedin will be Ahmadinejad and the ruling religious fundamentalists. The determination to maintain themselves in power by deceit and brutality was well proven following the 2009 Iranian presidential election. There was no way the mullahs were going to allow a real moderate and progressive leader like Mir Hussein Mousavi to become the President. The brutality in putting down the protests following the election brings back the deep memories of 1963 and 1981. Perhaps more than anything else, the Iranian government wishes for the membership of the PMOI to be turned over to them. The Mujahedin has represented resistance to the fundamentalist government for more than a generation. Mass public executions will be conducted to show the Iranian people what happens to people who oppose the government. The public executions will also be used to further break the spirit of anyone considering resistance and to show the world what happens to those trust their lives to the United States.

To appease the Iranian government, the State Department recently placed Jundallah, a Sunni-Balochi Islamic group, on the terrorist list. To this, it needs to be accepted that this group in fact is conducting terrorist activities inside Iran. That stated, the timing speaks for itself as the State Department is trying to figure a way to work with the Iranian government and is making an appeasement gesture. There is little chance the same State Department is going to make a negative

gesture by removing the PMOI despite calls from the American Legislative and Judicial Branches of government, as well as the European Union, to professionally revisit this issue. That would be the harder right. History is repeating itself back to when the current Secretary of State's husband was the President and the Mujahedin was placed on the list.

Meanwhile, the State Department claims to have access to classified information about the activities of the PMOI. It is doubtful to be more accurate than the intelligence reports about Saddam possessing weapons of mass destruction and those State Department intelligence reports that frequently sent me out looking for activities that were not happening. To date the State Department has yet to share this classified information with either the United States military or members of Congress who do have the clearances, need to know, and ability to validate or debunk the information. This steadfast refusal leaves us to conclude State Department officials have realized this "classified information" cannot withstand the test of scrutiny.

That takes us back to the already discussed real and present danger of the PMOI. Will the United States allow the easier wrong and permit the Iraqi government to turn the PMOI over to Iran? No matter how the United States government will attempt to cleanse itself of this matter, one fact will always stand out above all others: the Peoples' Mujahedin Organization of Iran surrendered to the United States military. They trusted their safety to the United States. They renounced terrorism at the request of the United States and through the effort lead by the United States, they accepted the status of protected persons. As a nation, we made a serious mistake in the First Gulf War when Kurds and Shia were encouraged to rise up against Saddam. After one hundred hours of fighting, we shut down and left them to their fate. Thirteen years later we invaded Iraq, setting off a whole new series of mistakes. Trusting the Iraqi government to handle the Mujahedin any better than they handled the execution of Saddam will be a mistake that will cost 3,500 lives. There is still time to correct this problem, but not at the pace and in the direction the State Department is moving.

## **Iranian Women at Risk in Iraq: 1325 and the Long Road to Non-Violence**

**Carole R. Fontaine, Jila Kazerounian, and Esmat Kargar Zadeh**

### **PREFACE**

Carole R. Fontaine, *VP, Women United Against Fundamentalism (L'Intégrisme) and for Equality (WAFE)*

This report explores the role of UNSCR 1325 in establishing a constructive, threat-free atmosphere among Iranian political exiles, the women of the PMOI, living in Ashraf, Iraq

since 1986. Due to a campaign of relentless disinformation by Tehran, this legitimate opposition group opposing theocratic dictatorship was declared to be terrorists and became military targets during the invasion of Iraq by the United States and coalition forces in 2003. Their bases were bombed based on false intelligence from Tehran, and subsequently, the citizens of Camp were disarmed by Multi-National Forces in Iraq who established a military base there (Camp Grizzly) in 2003. After thorough investigation of all of the members of the group, the US Military concluded that no member had ever been involved in any act of terrorism, and the US government and United Nations granted all members of the PMOI full legal guarantees of safety as Protected Persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The right to full protections for the dignity and rights of women—a key value in UNSCR 1325—was spelled out to the members of the Camp by US Military leadership. Since the PMOI had made gender a critical component of their platform for democratic elections in Iran by blending critical feminist theory with a progressive version of Islam, women had been deliberately groomed and promoted, taking high positions of leadership in every aspect of the group's life and mission. Before transfer to Iraqi sovereignty in 2009, these women—formerly combatants in a national movement—turned to their legacy of non-violent, political origins to formulate a new way of reaching out world-wide: to their sisters inside Iran, to women in Iraq newly threatened with a lessening of their rights for religious reasons, and to women throughout the world. This was only possible in the presence of the guarantees and monitoring provided by UNSCR 1325. This is a story of their new role as peacemakers and political change agents, and is told through the voices of the women members, and their supporters from women's NGO's.

## **THE ORIGIN OF THE MOVEMENT**

*Jila Kazerounian, President, Women's Forum against Fundamentalism in Iran*

The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) was established in 1965 by three university students. Their ideology is based on a progressive interpretation of Islam. The Mojahedin believe in the establishment of a secular republic and have never propagated an ideological government. Formed in opposition to the Shah's tyranny and despotic government, the organization originally attracted young educated men and women who were searching for a venue to replace the dictatorial government ruling their country.

In the early 1970's, the Shah's secret police performed a major crack down on the Mojahedin and other opposition groups. As a result, almost all of the leadership of the organization, including its founders, was executed. The majority of its members were imprisoned and they were left with little organizational structure.

In the 1960's to the early 1970's women mainly played a support role in the PMOI. With all of the restrictions and taboos imposed on them by society, women had been prevented from joining in full time and active participation in the opposition organizations. One of the first women who joined the Mojahedin was Fatemeh Amini. She was a graduate of Mashhad University and joined the movement in 1970, Fatemeh became a main contact of the Mojahedin network and the imprisoned leaders of the organization. She was eventually arrested and imprisoned in the notorious Evin prison, where she was extensively tortured for a confession by the Shah's SAVAK and became paralyzed as a result. She later died under torture.<sup>1</sup>

In 1971 and 1972, following the arrest and execution of PMOI members, some of the mothers, sisters and women sympathizers organized demonstrations in different cities in Iran. The early restrictive cultural situation yielded to full scale participation of women in all aspects of political life within the PMOI. The organization, in an effort to implement 'positive discrimination' after the implementation of misogynist policies of the mullahs against women, trained women to increase their capabilities to take leadership roles. This was a deliberate statement against the propaganda about women's inferiority that was being issued by the regime in Tehran.

One of the most prominent women in the movement was Ashraf Rabi'i (Rajavi). She was a Physics student at Sharif University when she joined the organization in 1970. Ashraf traveled to different cities and set up Mojahedin networks. Her first husband was arrested and executed by the Shah's regime but she cleverly escaped arrest many times. Ashraf was finally arrested in Qasvin and taken to Evin prison where she underwent severe torture.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran. 1995. *Women, Islam and Equality*. Available at: [http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/book\\_on\\_women.html](http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/book_on_women.html) (accessed 27 July 2010).

Her nose was broken and her eardrum permanently damaged. She remained in prison until February of 1979, when she was freed just before the revolution when the prisons were taken over by the people.<sup>2</sup> She eventually was killed by the fundamentalist regime's forces in an attack in February of 1981. The revolutionary guards took her two year old son hostage. He was shown on National TV that night held by "the butcher of Evin Prison", Lajevardi. Eventually, Ashraf's sacrifice for democracy gave her name to the PMOI's main refugee base just over the border in the Diyala province of Iraq.

In 1979, Monarchy was eventually brought down in Iran after 2500 years. Millions of Iranian people demonstrated in the streets, filled with the intention of bringing democracy and freedom to their homeland. Soon after the fall of the Shah, these hopes were shattered and this time a fundamentalist religious dictatorship was established based on absolute rule of religious jurisprudence (*Velayat-e Faqih*).

Misogyny is a pillar of Islamic fundamentalist ideology in Iran, and the first and foremost victims of Khomeini's dictatorship were women. Women are considered to be second-class citizens who must be submissive to their male counterparts, and violence against women is institutionalized within the laws of the ruling regime in Iran. Less than a month after the revolution, Khomeini ordered the observance of dress code for Iranian women. The Mojahedin was one of the first organizations to oppose the mandatory dress code. On March 11, 1979, the PMOI issued a statement that said: "Any use of force to impose any sort of veil or dress code on the women of this country...is irrational and unacceptable. Our revolution cannot accept any second thoughts on or denial of Iranian women's complete judicial, legal, political and social rights."

In his final report on January 2, 1992, to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, the Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Iran wrote: "...the Prosecutor General, Abolfazl Musavi Tabrizi, said that 'anyone who rejects the

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

principle of the *hijab* (dress code) is an apostate and the punishment for an apostate under Islamic law is death."<sup>3</sup>

As stated in Beijing, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, this is in direct contradiction of international Human Rights law: "violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their universal human rights and fundamental freedoms."<sup>4</sup>

As the attack by the regime's forces on the limitation of peoples' freedoms expanded, the Mojahedin started on their journey to a non-violent struggle in defense of human rights and women's rights. Their ideology and progressive positions attracted millions of people, young and old. Tens of thousands usually gathered to listen to the PMOI leader Massoud Rajavi's teachings and speeches. At the same time, Khomeini's regime started a severe crack down on anyone advocating freedom and democracy. They especially feared the Mojahedin and their attractive goals for genuine democracy. The price paid by Iranian women was obviously much higher: They were attacked by reactionary thugs, beaten, insulted and arrested, whether they were Mojahedin or not.

Though they were constantly attacked, their basic rights violated and suppressed, the Mojahedin refrained from any violent resistance against the regime and its suppressive forces. During these early years, they published their newspaper, distributed their literature and arranged peaceful gatherings and speeches. They also tried to take part in the political system and run for office. All of their efforts were violently undermined by the government.

---

<sup>3</sup> Pohl, R. United Nations Document Reference E/CN.4/1992/34. 1992. *Report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl*. 48th Session of the UNCHR Commission on Human Rights: Report on the Forty-Eighth Session (27 January-6 March 1992).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Document A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1. 1996. *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (4-15 September 1995)*. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf> (accessed 27 July 2010).

On 27 April 1981, Mojahedin women organized a big demonstration, 150,000 people strong, in Tehran to oppose the increasing brutalities and crack down on freedoms. This demonstration was their first full scale protest against the regime.

On 20 June of that same year, the Mojahedin organized another big protest against the clerical regime in Tehran. More than 500,000 people attended the peaceful demonstration. Khomeini issued an edict to stop the protestors who were emerging on the streets, headed toward the Parliament. The revolutionary guards and Basij militia attacked the demonstration with weapons. Anyone arrested in that demonstration was imprisoned and later executed.

*Time Magazine* published an article on 6 July 1981, titled: 'Iran: Terror in the Name of God'. The article offered a glimpse into the horror of what happened in the days following the protest.

"Their crime was that they had demonstrated against the dismissal of Banisadr from his post as President of the nation. The Islamic judge who sentenced them—Ayatullah Mohammadi Gilani—did not even know who they were. The twelve girls, the oldest 18, the others under 16, refused to identify themselves in court. When Gilani asked their names, each in turn replied, 'Mujahed' (Crusader). To the question 'Child of?' each replied, 'The people of Iran.' Gilani solved the problem of identifying the girls by having them photographed. Then he consigned them to the firing squad. Islamic guards led the dozen girls to the courtyard of Evin Prison in Tehran. The oldest was clad in a flowing black chador, the traditional Muslim veil. The others wore dark head scarves. As the guards began to blindfold them, the girls started chanting, 'Death to fascism! Death to Khomeini!'

In answer, the guards and prison attendants watching the spectacle began their own chant of 'Allahu Akbar!' (God is great). Then the rifles roared.

Three days later, the clergy-controlled newspaper *Ettela'at* printed the girls' pictures with a terse message asking the parents to call for the bodies.

The parents should bring, the paper said, 'birth certificates bearing their [the girls'] pictures.' At a press conference Gilani defended the trials and executions of the girls.

'By the Islamic canon,' he said, 'a nine-year-old girl is mature. So there is no difference for us between a nine-year-old girl and a 40-year-old man.'<sup>5</sup>

Women political prisoners have been special victims of the misogynist regime of the mullahs. The most inhumane and savage tortures have been applied to the women who have stood up to their tyranny. One method of torture was the shooting of a single bullet into a woman's womb and letting her bleed to death. Hundreds of pregnant women were executed in this way, such as: Azar Reza'i, Masoumeh Qajar-azodanloo, Zahra Nozari, Parvin Mostofi, Nayyereh Khosravi, etc. According to a religious decree, virgin women are raped in the prisons the night before their execution. The reasoning is that if they die virgin, they will end up in heaven! Stoning to death is also another savage punishment for the so called allegation of adultery. Women are buried up to their necks so that they cannot escape and exposed to this extremely hideous action, which also brutalizes onlookers and participants, hence creating further social repression.

In a 3 February 1984 TV sermon, Khomeini stated: "Killing is a form of mercy because it rectifies the person. Sometimes a person cannot be reformed unless he is cut up and burnt...you must kill, burn and lock up those in opposition."<sup>6</sup>

After the attacks on the peaceful demonstration of the unarmed civilians and the outrageous escalation of arrests and execution, the regime basically had closed all the peaceful avenues of expression and protest. Anyone who dared to even express the slightest hint of dissent was arrested, tortured and executed. Khomeini started a relentless reign of terror which continues to this day.

At that point, the Mojahedin had exhausted all of the peaceful and legal options and had completely refrained from violent retaliation. The 20 June 1981 demonstration marked an historic turning point. Following that, the PMOI was left with two options: Either surrender to the Islamic Fundamentalist forces and forget about democracy and freedom in their

---

<sup>5</sup> Blake, P. 1981. 'Iran: Terror in the Name of God'. *TIME Magazine*, Monday, 6 July. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,922597,00.html> (accessed 27 July 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Khomeini. Feb. 3, 1984, TV sermon later published in the government newspaper, *Ettela'at*.

homeland, or resist the tyrannical rule and terror of the regime. They chose the second option.

Women, as the primary victims of this unjust violence stood up and defended themselves, and took responsibility within their organized resistance movement.

This move is not without precedent in the history of the struggle for Human Rights. As stated in the preamble to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law."<sup>7</sup>

The International Committee of the Red Cross's commentary on Article 3 of the First Geneva Convention refers to discussions at the Diplomatic Conference of Geneva to ratify the Conventions in 1949: "It sometimes happens in a civil war that those who are regarded as rebels are in actual fact patriots struggling for the independence and dignity of their country... *It was not possible to talk of 'terrorism', 'anarchy', or 'disorders' in the case of rebels who complied with humanitarian principles.*"<sup>8</sup>

The Catholic Church, which in general opposes the use of violence, has also recognized this right to resist. A document, 'Instruction *Libertatis conscientia* on Christian Freedom and Liberation,' made public by the Vatican in 1986, states: "Armed struggle is the last resort to end blatant and prolonged oppression which has seriously violated the fundamental rights of individuals and has dangerously damaged the general interests of a country."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III). Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b3712c.html> [accessed 15 August 2010] Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the General Assembly, December 10, 1948.

<sup>8</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949, 75 UNTS 135. [p.32] 2. Available at: <http://www.icrc.org/IHL.NSF/1a13044f3bbb5b8ec12563fb0066f226/466097d7a301fb4c12563cd00424e2b?OpenDocument> [accessed 27 July 2010].

<sup>9</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986. Instruction *Libertatis conscientia* on Christian Freedom and Liberation, 22 March, 1986: AAS 79 (1987).

## THE EXODUS TO IRAQ: WHEN PEACEFUL PROTEST FAILS

In 1984, the Mojahedin relocated to Iraq and set up bases near the border with Iran. This happened following the expulsion of their leader Massoud Rajavi from France – a token of good will by the French to appease the Iranian regime. Desire for Iranian oil deals was the critical impulse for this act. Iraq was the only country that accepted Mojahedin refugees.

The PMOI's armed struggle was never aimed at civilians of any nations; they always targeted the suppressive organs of the regime and those who were directly involved in torture and execution of the innocent people.<sup>10</sup> However, in 1997, after the so-called 'moderate', Mohammad Khatami became the President in Iran, the PMOI was placed on the United States' Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) list by the Clinton Administration. A senior Clinton administration official told the *Los Angeles Times* at the time that "The inclusion of the People's Mujahedin was intended as a goodwill gesture to Tehran and its newly elected president, Mohammed Khatami." In the wake of the United States' pronouncement, Great Britain and the European Union followed suit and placed the PMOI on their designated terrorist lists to appease the Mullah's regime in Iran. Instead of encouraging any moderation within the regime, the policy of appeasement of the Western governments brought the most reactionary and fundamentalist forces to power.<sup>11</sup>

Though their armed resistance was entirely justified (and only adopted when all other means of resistance became impossible), in 2001 the PMOI put down their arms and began another round of political campaigns.

In March 2003, the United States attacked Iraq in search of terrorists connected to the planning of September 11, 2001 attacks. PMOI bases were also bombed at the behest of the Iranian regime, and in 2003, the MNF-I signed a formal treaty of disarmament and agreed officially to protect members of the PMOI under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

## VOICES FROM THE DESERT

---

<sup>10</sup> Mohaddessli, M. 2004. *Enemies of the Ayatollahs: The Iranian Opposition's War on Islamic Fundamentalism*. New York: Zed Books.

<sup>11</sup> Kempster, N. 1997. 'U.S. Designates 30 Groups as Terrorists'. *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1997.

*Esmat Kargar Zadeh, President, Secretariat of PMOI, In Charge of Women's Outreach*

### **Ashraf: City of Solidarity, supported by millions of Iraqis**

The transformation from barren desert in 1986 to a self-contained, full-functioning town known to Iraqis as "*Medina Ashraf*" ("City of Refuge") during war and occupation since 2003 is a testimony to its residents' passionate commitment to Human Rights and democratic change.

Change in Iraq's sovereignty in 2003 brought new and widespread changes in the political and social relations between the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) and Iraq's society. The Iranian regime, frustrated due to the failure of bombings against PMOI bases, began hostile measures against the Mojahedin residence in Iraq. In reaction, the people of Diyala Province immediately protested, announcing their support for the PMOI, with Baghdad and other provinces following.

The people of Iraq have named Ashraf the "City of Solidarity", and its visitors consisted of men and women, Shites and Sunnis, Christians and other religious minorities, Arabs, Kurds, Turks, and Turkemans, tribal sheikhs and doctors and specialists, university professors and students, writers, artists, athletes and other social sectors of Iraq. Among all of these, what catches one's eye the most is the vast presence of Iraqi women in Ashraf as a one-of-a-kind exception.

### **Blockade and pressures imposed on Ashraf**

The religious-terrorist fascism ruling Iran has converted Iraq to its frontline of battle against the international community and its first launchpad to establishing a religious empire in the region. Due to the fact that Iraqis describe Ashraf as the strongest barrier against the Iranian regime in Iraq, the mullahs have concentrated their pressures and conspiracies against Ashraf. The clerical regime is using every means possible to annihilate the camp, undertaking all measures to pressurize and execute any form of conspiracy.

These initiatives include an all-out ban on logistics, terrorist attacks, vast political propaganda, and even the misuse of family relations against their own loved ones in Ashraf. These measures go as far as pressuring, torturing and issuing death sentences to Ashraf residents' family members living inside Iran under the clerical regime's rule.

From the first day of its existence, due to its fear of the effects of freedom and democracy within Iran, the mullahs' regime has resorted to suppressing the Iranian people, especially women. By waging war and supporting international terrorism, the clerical regime has announced the establishment of an authoritarian empire under the name of Islam as its main objective. However, due to the existence of a popular and organized opposition, the mullahs are being rapidly isolated in Iran's society. Today, over 90% of the Iranian population is calling for a regime change. Women—especially those supporting the Iranian Resistance—have played an active role face-to-face against the Iranian regime from its very beginning, facing extreme tortures and assaults on female dignity. In such an atmosphere, Iranian women who stand in opposition to these acts of violence play the most engaged role in the resistance against this anti-humane and misogynous regime. This reality has lead to the membership of many Iranian women in the nationwide resistance movement, joining the Iranian Resistance at its main base in Iraq. Currently, one thousand women members of the PMOI are present in Camp Ashraf, many of them former prisoners in Iran. Many have been educated in the United States and Europe. Today, the lives and dignity of these women are threatened by the Iranian regime's proxies in Iraq. The Iranian regime, seeing the Iranian Resistance as its main threat, has always been in the pursuit of striking the PMOI at any opportunity, and since 2003 has resorted to every possible means to force Ashraf to succumb. During that same time Iraqis have turned out to support the residents of Ashraf. Also, the support of 5 million and 200 thousand Iraqis in 2006, and 300 thousand Shiites in southern Iraq in 2007 shaped a strong social movement in solidarity with the Iranian Resistance, and 700 thousand Iraqi women signed a declaration announcing their support for the PMOI, establishing an organized resistance of Iraqi women against the Iranian regime's meddling in their country.

Before the 2003 US-led war against Iraq, the Iranian Resistance had announced its neutrality. Yet the Iranian regime, through arranged conspiracies and propaganda against the Iranian Resistance, prepared the grounds for Coalition Forces' attacks on the PMOI. To fully accomplish this ominous goal, the Iranian regime simultaneously prepared measures for military strikes and psychological warfare against the Iranian Resistance.

As a result, with the beginning of the US-led invasion of Iraq, although the PMOI had not even fired one bullet, all of the PMOI bases were bombarded by Coalition Forces. In these attacks dozens of PMOI members, including 4 women, were martyred and many others were injured. On 15 April 2003, a local ceasefire agreement was signed between US and National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA) forces, agreeing that the PMOI and the NLA would be stationed in self controlled locations with their weapons. On 10 May 2003, the PMOI and NLA were disarmed by US forces and the PMOI handed over all their weapons to them, leading to the restriction of all PMOI members to Camp Ashraf. In exchange, the US forces guaranteed the protection of Camp Ashraf. Following these events, during a 16-month period, all Camp Ashraf residents were screened one by one by nine US agencies. Ultimately, the US government recognized the status of Camp Ashraf residents as 'protected persons' under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Subsequently, each Camp Ashraf resident signed an agreement in July 2004 with a US forces delegate, condemning "violence" and "participation in or support of terrorism" and also emphasized that "they have handed over all weapons and military equipment under their control". This agreement also specifies that that person, until the determination stage of "choices of proper status" for each individual, "will stay in Ashraf under the protection of MNF-I forces". Unfortunately, since the end of 2008, the US has not lived up to its share of the bilateral agreement to guarantee the protection of Ashraf resident in accordance with US obligations under international laws.

Throughout the past seven years, the PMOI have always had a close relationship with the people of Iraq. Women and children, especially, from cities throughout Iraq visited Ashraf and its residents. During this period the women of Ashraf have had close cooperation with Iraqi women and their organizations. They have organized and held many joint gatherings and meetings aiming to raise the awareness of the Iraqi women regarding their rights and to seek solutions for their problems. Between 2003-09, the women of Ashraf organized and hosted over 40 meetings with Iraqi women's groups (NGO's) on a variety of peace-making and solidarity topics, with between 100-500 women in attendance at each event. This good work was terminated when Ashraf was transferred to Iraqi control.

## **SECURITY TRANSITION TO IRAQI FORCES: 1325 Missing in Action**

On 28 December 2008, the US embassy in Baghdad issued a statement announcing that "the responsibility for security of Camp Ashraf and its residents will be turned over from coalition forces to the government of Iraq on 1 January 2009".

It was as a result of this agreement that on 20 February 2009 "Camp Ashraf witnessed a full-fledged handover of responsibility to Iraqi forces". From that point on, the responsibility for the treatment of Camp Ashraf residents has been in the hands of the Iraqi government. According to a press release from the US Embassy in Baghdad dated 28 December 2008, the Iraqi government has guaranteed that its treatment of the residents of Camp Ashraf will be pursuant to not only Iraqi law, but also International laws.

### **Cooperation of Camp Ashraf residents**

Over a period of one year (from August 2008 to 28 July 2009), the residents of Camp Ashraf, giving respect to Iraq's sovereignty, and considering international warnings, including one from the International Committee of Jurists, engaged and negotiated with Iraqi officials, showing incredible flexibility. The residents of Camp Ashraf have fully cooperated with the Iraqi forces and even provided facilities for them. It is important to note that, since women hold leadership positions, they were partner to these proceedings.

### **Iraqi forces' attack on Ashraf**

In a meeting with the President of Iraq on 8 February 2008, Khamenei—the Supreme Leader of the mullahs' regime—emphasized a bilateral agreement that had been made between the Iranian regime and the Iraqi government regarding the expulsion of the PMOI from Iraq. Unfortunately, the result of the security transition and the response to all of the PMOI's cooperation was the attack and killing of Camp Ashraf residents by the hands of Iraqi forces on 28 and 29 July 2009 under the pretext of establishing a police station in the camp and enforcing Iraqi sovereignty. As a result, 11 unarmed and innocent residents of Camp Ashraf were killed, 500 injured, 1,000 beaten and 36 Ashraf residents were taken hostage for 72 days. Additionally, over 2.5 million dollars' worth of damage was brought to the Camp.

During these attacks, the women of Ashraf were threatened numerous times with murder and rape by the Iraqi offensive forces, in testimony recorded elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> The vicious behavior of the Iraqi forces on 28 and 29 July is evidence to the perilous status of the women in Ashraf. Their complaints have invalidated all assurances given by US officials that safety would be guaranteed. Without SCR 1325 in operation under the Iraqi takeover, women now fear for all aspects of their safety. The "protection of women" outlined by US General William Brandenburg of MNF-I is no longer in operation, causing local peace-making efforts to be severely curtailed.

US officials announced several times that, before the security turnover, they had received written assurances from the Iraqi government about the treatment of Camp Ashraf residents "humanely and according to Iraq's international commitments ..."

US officials also emphasized that "the US will try its utmost to guarantee that the Iraqi government will live up to the assurances it has given us on the treatment of Camp Ashraf residents ..." These assurances have been blatantly disregarded.

### **"Displacement": A new conspiracy to attack and kill Ashraf residents**

The relocation of Ashraf residents is yet another conspiracy plotted by the Iraqi government following the release of the Ashraf hostages. On 19 October 2009, an Iraqi government delegate officially announced to Camp Ashraf representatives, that all residents of the camp must be transferred to Samava (south of Iraq near the Saudi Arabia border) by 15 December 2009. The Iraqi delegate underlined that if the residents of Ashraf did not give in to this transfer, the events of 28 and 29 July would be repeated. To this day, international organizations have emphasized that with reference to the universally accepted principle of non-refoulement, residents of Camp Ashraf should not be displaced, expelled or repatriated and, in violation of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), should not be relocated inside Iraq.

### **Current restrictions on Ashraf**

---

<sup>12</sup> Fontaine, C., J. Kazerounian and E. Kargar Zadeh. 'Falling Through the Gaps of SCR/1325: The Plight of Iranian Political Refugees in Iraq'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. Under review July 2010.

Events of the last year have proved that not only is the Iraqi government not respecting international commitments and conventions but it also has no respect for its own laws and legal system. In this period we have witnessed pressures and restrictions forced by the Iraqi government upon the residents of the Camp, and Ashraf has actually turned into a prison. Restrictions have taken the form of preventing the entrance of different goods and basic necessities into the camp, preventing the entrance of lawyers and family members of Ashraf residents or even American and European human rights organizations aiming to monitor the situation in the camp. Additionally, the illegal siege on Ashraf has had serious physical and psychological effects on the residents, particularly the women.

On 7 October 2005, Major General William Brandenburg, deputy commander of the MNF-I, in a letter emphasized the rights of the residents of Camp Ashraf under the Fourth Geneva Convention which regards the status of foreign civilians in times of war in an occupied land. He stated: "The residents of Camp Ashraf have the right to protection from danger, violence, coercion, and intimidation, and to special protection for the dignity and rights of women".

Due to the all-out siege being imposed on Ashraf, the treatment of patients there deteriorates by the day. Of the 1,000 women in Ashraf, at least 541 are in need of medical care and specialist examinations. They have not had a medical checkup for months. Approximately 90 women have serious cases and among those, 7 are urgent medical patients. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions imposed by the Iraqi Interior Ministry's so-called 'Closing down Ashraf Committee', the Camp has a serious lack of medical services and also medical specialists, including those to perform the necessary surgeries, causing the patients to not receive the medical treatment they need. For example: For nearly four months a women's medical specialist was not allowed to come to Ashraf while 50 patients were in dire need, 20 of whom required urgent examination and treatment. Over half of the women in Ashraf are in need of medical treatment by doctors in female medical specialties.

As stated in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, to fully implement by International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights laws which protect the rights of women and

girls during and after a conflict situation, we ask the international community and UN bodies:

- to emphasize on the status of residents of Ashraf as 'protected persons' under the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention or International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and/or International Human Rights Law,
- Necessary action must be taken for UN forces to take over the responsibility of the protection of Ashraf residents.
- to call on the US government for its forces to continue their presence in the camp until security is taken over by the UN, and to guarantee the protection of the residents from attacks, violence and forcible displacement inside Iraq.

#### **WHEN WOMEN DISARM: EMPOWERED OUTREACH UNDER SCR 1325**

*Carole R. Fontaine*

The work of the women of Ashraf during the implementation of the values and spirit of 1325 during MNF-I control of the refugee camp focused heavily on resourcing women in their network within Iran, and their attempts to partner with the women of Iraq, now facing the imposition of theocratic Islamic law known as *Shari'a* and its lessening of the rights guaranteed to women by international law. Programs revolved around establishing a basic female solidarity through study together, presentations by various speakers, and commonly held religious and secular celebrations. Women's rights and different ways of interpreting patriarchal religions—especially and particularly Islam—were key issues raised with Iraqi women's NGO's. On a broader scale, the leadership at Camp Ashraf was key in providing a safe, neutral meeting place where Iraqis of different ethnicities and denominations could come together to work on national issues in a context free of violence. Eyewitnesses note that the 'message' of the presence of strong, feminist, observant Islamic women at Ashraf was not lost on male Muslims visiting on various missions, and Iraqi women in such delegations were visibly empowered by the Ashrafi example with respect to their own participation in discussions with men. The so-called 'Sunni Awakening' was mothered into existence by the women of Ashraf when the guidelines of 1325 were

observed under UN observation and with US protections. Since the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi government, such meetings have ceased and violence in Iraq is on the upsurge.

Beyond the boundaries of the current occupation in Iraq and brutal dictatorship in Iran, the women of the PMOI have worked through education and outreach to make their voices heard in the West. The women often quote an Iranian proverb, "A clear conscience needs no defense", when speaking of their 'terrorist' label. "We have nothing to hide", they say; "Let the world come and see and know us, and learn who we are." The era of 1325 at Ashraf has allowed some of this to happen. Partnering with their political 'sister' organization, the National Council of Resistance in Iran whose President-Elect is Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, a former leader in Ashraf, the period from 2003-09 saw a flourishing of a world-wide network of support for these women and their cause. Committees of support were founded in a host of European Union countries and other world regions; websites telling the Ashraf story sprang up on the Internet, and in print medium. In 2004 in Geneva, *WAFE*, *International Federation of Women United Against Fundamentalism (L'Intégrisme) and for Equality* was launched at a meeting of European women parliamentarians, professors, Human Rights activists and religious professionals. Thanks to delegates nominated by women at Ashraf or current PMOI members visiting at NCR-I headquarters in Auvers-sur-Oise, France, women from Europe, Africa and the Americas were able to hear directly at WAFE meetings the reports from delegates from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, India, Palestine, Indonesia and elsewhere about the conditions for women in regions where fundamentalist Islam is at war with other more moderate or progressive movements within the religion. Art exhibits on Human Rights abuses inside Iran by Iranian women artists, as well as raw video footage of abuse provided by the PMOI from inside Iran, brought home to women globally the dire consequences of being born woman when misogyny is a key component of a religious government's self-described 'war on immorality'. As of 2009, a second group, *WWAFE*, *Women World-wide Advancing Freedom and Equality*, was born; its focus is the role of female empowerment in areas outside of Islamic theocracies and their satellites. In 2010, *WAFE*, which focuses primarily on Iran and West Asia, adopted the following Mission Statement (soon to be published on a newly launched website):

### **Mission Statement**

1. We, women and men members of *WAFE (International Federation of Women United against Fundamentalism and for Equality)* work to oppose Fundamentalism (religious extremism or in French, l'Intégrisme) wherever it occurs, together with the persecution of women and denial of women's full and equal human rights, upon which Fundamentalism depends.
2. We are appalled by the current treatment of women in many fundamentalist regimes. We see as unworthy of 21st century civilization the view that fifty percent of humankind is inferior simply by virtue of her or his gender.
3. We believe that gender equality is essential to human development and that all discrimination and violence against women is profoundly destructive of human potential and of family and community life.
4. We consequently seek to oppose all regimes which deny to any person the full benefits, challenges, rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and to eradicate all those laws, customs, traditions and rituals which prevent women from contributing fully to all aspects of life.
5. We strongly support the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights and the many international declarations and conventions which have followed, which all affirm that women's human rights are consistent with and inalienable from all human rights.
6. We seek to promote societies free from all forms of gender discrimination in which women and men alike can enjoy self-fulfillment, whilst accepting the responsibilities and concern for others which must accompany such privileges.
7. We seek to promote societies in which every individual has the opportunity to realise her or his potential, constrained only by the limits imposed by respect for the freedom of others.
8. We seek to develop worldwide links with women and men, communities and organizations who share our mission of empowering women and to work with them to oppose the tide of Fundamentalism which threatens many parts of the world today.
9. We are willing to work with other organizations sharing consistent vision and mission.
10. We conduct WAFE activities with transparency in accordance with the above tenets and in conformity with our Constitution. Amended June 27, 2010.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

It cannot be emphasized enough that without the protections of 1325, no peace-making overtures or programs of solidarity between refugees and people of the host nation and beyond could even be imagined, much less implemented, in a war zone or occupation

setting. Where women are used to and proud of being able to defend themselves and their country, one cannot expect that they will docilely present themselves to become victims of rape, torture and harassment when disarmed. Only in the presence of a clear statement of rights and the special needs of women in such conflict situations, as well as monitoring by those in charge, can women be expected to participate in what can seem like blatant dis-empowerment. The women of Ashraf have weathered this transition successfully, and converted a situation of dire possibilities into one of blooming support and education. They deserve to live free of the threat of rape by Iraqi and Iranian forces, or refoulement to a hostile home country that has imprisoned many of them previously. We see what can happen when 1325 is in place; we fear what may happen now that it is not.

The problems posed for Islam world wide by violent, well-funded extremists who claim to be the arbiters of the 'true' form of their religion are problems that will confront every Muslim in the coming century. Women living under the strictest and most misogynist interpretations of theocratic rule invariably suffer: the rise of honor killings of women under the rule of Hamas, funded by Iranian money, in Gaza, and the conditions for women governed by Hezbollah in Lebanon, also funded by Iran, are object lessons for Muslim women everywhere, and non-Muslim women besides. There is more than one fundamentalist religion in the world, and they all share a goal of inscribing the supremacy of Man in their laws and society., even if they are not explicit about it in their public statements. The activities and growth of the women of Ashraf teach all their sisters that Resistance is NOT Futile. We would see them survive their current situation and return to their work with their Iraqi sisters in confronting the advance of fundamentalist extremism.

Along with the Pentagon and various European courts and lawmaking bodies, the authors of this report find no evidence that the PMOI are anything other than what they claim to be: a legitimate opposition movement with a long-term history and impact. They are certainly *not* terrorists as various legal bodies have concluded in their binding determinations and rulings over the past few years. It is ludicrous to continue to claim that they are: these women in head-scarves are not our enemy! The United States has no other course, should it obey international law and honor the outcomes of its own internal investigations, than to

remove the PMOI from the List of Proscribed Organizations. As a voice in the Middle East which blends democratic values and processes with a progressive brand of Islam, they are invaluable allies to those seeking peace in the region, and a beacon of hope to those within Iran who made their presence so strongly felt during and subsequent to the fraudulent General Elections of 2008. The PMOI's presence on the Proscribed Organizations List in the US is now a minority position among lawmakers world-wide. US House of Representatives Resolution 1431 from the US Congress agrees with majority rulings that the PMOI are not terrorists and makes the recommendation that the PMOI be removed from the List.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from any questions of proscription by one national state, we reaffirm that the women and men of Camp Ashraf are Protected Persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention according to the US and UN officials, and that any repatriation of them to Iran constitutes a direct violation of that convention and exposes them to imprisonment, torture and death.

Likewise, resettlement within Iraq raises special issues of safety and gender issues for the women of Camp Ashraf.

Our recommendation: honor the obligations of 1325 as US troop withdrawal commences by transferring Camp Ashraf to UN control and monitoring.

---

<sup>13</sup> H.RES.1431.IH. 2010. United States 111th Congress 2d Session 10 June. Authors: R. Filner, S. Jackson Lee, D. Rohrabacher.

## Works Cited

H.RES.1431.IH. 2010. United States 111th Congress 2d Session 10 June. Authors: R. Filner, S. Jackson Lee, D. Rohrabacher.

Blake, P. 1981. 'Iran: Terror in the Name of God'. *TIME Magazine*, Monday, 6 July. Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,922597,00.html> (accessed 27 July 2010).

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. 1986. Instruction *Libertatis conscientia* on Christian Freedom and Liberation. 22 March, 1986: AAS 79 (1987).

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran. 1995. *Women, Islam and Equality*. Available at: [http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/book\\_on\\_women.html](http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/book_on_women.html) (accessed 27 July 2010).

Fontaine, C., J. Kazerounian and E. Kargar Zadeh. 'Falling Through the Gaps of SCR/1325: The Plight of Iranian Political Refugees in Iraq'. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. Under review July 2010.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). *Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention)*, 12 August 1949, 75 UNTS 135. [p.32] 2. Available at: <http://www.icrc.org/IHL.NSF/1a13044f3bbb5b8ec12563fb0066f226/466097d7a301f8c4c12563cd00424e2b!OpenDocument> (accessed 27 July 2010).

Kempster, N. 1997. 'U.S. Designates 30 Groups as Terrorists'. *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1997.

Mohaddessin, M. 2004. *Enemies of the Ayatollahs: The Iranian Opposition's War on Islamic Fundamentalism*. New York: Zed Books.

Pohl, R. United Nations Document Reference E/CN.4/1992/34. 1992. *Report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Reynaldo Galindo Pohl*. 48th Session of the UNCHR Commission on Human Rights: Report on the Forty-Eighth Session (27 January-6 March 1992).

United Nations Document A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1. 1996. *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (4-15 September 1995)*. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf> (accessed 27 July 2010).

UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III). Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b3712c.html> [accessed 15

August 2010] Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the General Assembly, December 10, 1948.

## Daughters of Allah: In Their Own Words

Over the course of two separate conferences in Paris, we collected the stories of some of the women of the Mujahedin e-Kalq (MeK). To structure the interviews, we started with a common list of basic questions:

- When did you first learn of the MeK?
- What are your strongest impressions of the MeK as a group? As individuals?
- Given your expectations from what you had heard/learned, did you find the label 'terrorist' to be warranted?
- What made you decide to become part of the MeK?
- Would you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?
- What message would you give to the women in the West?

The responses that came back to us were both heartbreaking and hopeful.

***"We are standing until the end."***

**Fareshteh Dashti, 45 years old**

*Born in Abadan in SW of Iran (near Iraq), Fareshteh lived in Tehran with her parents, 3 sisters, one brother and a paternal aunt.*

*When did you first learn of the MeK?*

I started to know of the MeK when I was just 11 years old, when we moved to Tehran. This was 1976-77, under the Shah. My older brother and sister were involved in the MeK in their university environment, and that is how the whole family came to know of them. My father was an accountant in the cultural ministry, and then in a private firm; my mother was a home maker. Both of them were very open minded – well-educated and open to society. They used to pray and would fast and wear the headscarf during Ramadan, but they did not do so regularly. My sisters, when they went to university and started being with the MeK, chose to wear the headscarf.

My sister Layla (sp?) and my second sister, Nasilah, went to university and usually studied together. When my brother, Houd got into the university, he was just 15 years old. My sister Falibah/Farideh (sp??) got her diploma, but she didn't really finish because of the Revolution. All of them were politically active and had to leave the country. Layla (sp?) is in Ashraf right now.

*What are your strongest impressions of the MeK as a group? As individuals?*

A couple of things caught my attention: 1) they were truthful to their belief, not trying to fool you into joining, 2) Their leadership under Massoud Rajavi. They were all as one body, all on one level. No hierarchy. All of them worked together as a group.

*What made you decide to become part of the MeK?*

I already had the background in the MeK, and I read forbidden books. I read a book about [the testimonies of] the first MeK martyr, Mehdi Reza'i, who was 19. He came from a large family, and almost all of them were executed. He was so strong in defending himself in court, they were afraid of him. Rather than speak out for himself, he spoke out about society and the problems that were happening.

I was active with the MeK in student bodies in 1978, and then the Revolution happened. At that age, I chose to be a mujahed. At that time the students didn't have a specific title in the organization. They had a name for all of the students, "militia", "little fighter".

The MeK had different locations during that period. My sisters Layla and Nasilah were active in the MeK in Ahvaz, and Falibah, Houd and I were active in Tehran.

*Did you find the label 'terrorist' to be warranted?*

Right after 1980, the MeK had a newspaper that they used to sell and that talked about the group, but Khomeini had already labeled them an enemy even though they didn't do anything. He started this before velayat e faqih ("*governance of the jurist*"; *theocratic rule*). The mujahedin believe in true Islam. Khomeini knew this and that was why he wanted them gone. In six months, the MeK supporters' numbers became thousands, and when Khomeini saw that, this was when he began to attack them. Massoud Rajavi had classes during that open time, teaching about the universe, philosophy, and other things. Khomeini's people would see them leave the classes and would beat them. This drew the comparison between the MeK's Islam and Khomeini's brand of Islam.

After Khomeini came to power and made the chador mandatory, the women had a demonstration, and we went with them and stood with them. We were very surprised with Khomeini. Islam doesn't dictate how you cover yourself.

*Would you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?*

In 1981, there was a 500,000 person demonstration. It was the most peaceful demonstration that they had done. Before that, I was selling the MeK newspaper and they beat me and put me in prison. After beating and harassing me for a week, they let me go. I was 15 years old.

One of my cousins, Ramin Dashti, was executed in the 500,000 person demonstration. During the demonstration, I was hit with chains so that I could hardly see. As we waited at the clinic, Ramin was killed and didn't come back. The next day, we went to identify Ramin. I wore the chador. There were so many families there looking for their sons and daughters. There were 3 or 4 volumes there of pictures of those who had been killed – they had taken pictures from night to morning of all of the children. The doctor there told us that they had just taken all of the bodies away and buried them. I wondered "how am I going to go home

and tell my uncle his son is dead?" From that moment on, his mother's depression began. Reza, Ramin's brother, was a supporter also, and in 1981 the regime's agents killed him.

A week before this, during a peaceful demonstration, they stabbed my sister Falibah (2 years older) in the back from behind with a machete. It pierced her in the back through to her heart. She bled so much, and they took her to the hospital. Two other MeK members were doctors and they were able to keep her there in the hospital. She had a suction on her heart to keep her alive.

After that happened, and because of how they began arresting MeK members, we couldn't stay. Khomeini had already started executing prisoners. This was Nov./Dec. 1981. We had to hide in family members' houses in order not to be arrested. There were no cell phones or easy access to telephones. We were "underground", from one house to another, and so the connection between us and the MeK was broken because we were underground.

My other sisters had gotten married to MeK members. My brother had gotten a job in Shiraz. He was 21 and had been married about 40 days when they killed him and also his wife Maryam.

At the same time my brother Houd got killed by the regime, Layla and her husband, with help from the family, left Iran and joined the MeK in Kurdistan Iran. Faribah and I were in Tehran and hiding, and we didn't have any place to go but went from house to house of family and friends. We didn't have anyone.

At our house, they would sometimes have meetings and the MeK newspapers were there. One of the times, we came home and the regime accidentally found out and arrested us. They arrested Falibah in 1982 but didn't execute her until 1988, among the 30,000 that were executed.

My sister Nasilah and her husband (Hani Azalu?) and one-month old baby were arrested in 1982. She was in prison for 8 years. Her husband was a doctor, and had been a political prisoner even at the Shah's time. Their two children, Hamid and Houd, stayed with my mother. Even with the one-month old baby, they would take my mother to the Evin prison and torture my sister because they wanted to find me and Falibah.

My nephew Houd and my sister Nasilah went in 1996 to Iraq to see Layla. As soon as they got back, the regime found out and arrested them. They both got 3 years in prison.

*Many would blame the MeK for all of this that was brought to your family. Can you speak about how your experience has led you to remain an active member of the MeK?*

I could see for myself what was happening in my society, and I could see that the MeK had given everything. When I see that the regime has taken away those rights, the freedom to speak, to think, to be...and then I see these educated, intelligent people who have joined in the same cause to fight for those rights. When you know you have such a leadership and know what they can do for people, that's why you go on.

*We hear a lot from the mullahs that the families of the MeK are ashamed that they are doing this, that they are begging them to stop. What would you say back?*

I know who my family is. Some of our distant family members, they might have been scared of what we do, because Khomeini might go after them, but recently, I had a conversation with those family, and they said that they were defending us. My mom, who was tortured and pressured so much herself, says that they are ashamed that they cannot help us.

*Do you have a message you would like to give to the women of the West?*

I believe that all of the women together have to unite and understand the pain of people, and never give up. Like Saba said, 'we are standing until the end'. We who are fighting here in the West and also with you, we can continue.

***"But we had a chance to stand up."***

**Zohreh Shfaei, 50 years old**

[she has articles that Sarvi will send]

This is my family:

Dad, a doctor – 50 when he was executed

Mom – 42 when she was executed

Older brother, a student of mythology – 27 when he was executed

Sister Maryam, at university for literature – 24 when she was executed

Younger brother – 16 when he was executed

Brother-in-law – 29 when he was executed.

We were 5 sisters and brothers, and from my family there is just me and my younger brother left.

We were a very happy family, well off, and we could have done nothing and been fine. But we had a chance to stand up. I am only talking as a witness, but if you speak to any MeK, their story is the same.

*Would you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?*

We lived in Isfahan. My father was well-known and loved. My father, mother and younger brother were executed by firing squad with 50 others. Their crime was being supporters of the MeK. My father, because he was a doctor, would treat them in his offices.

When they were arrested, they wanted to bring my father on the national TV and have him speak out against the MeK; then they would free them. My mom's answer was, 'my child is like thousands of other children who are in the country without anything. And the MeK is fighting for their freedom. I will not go on TV and say this.'

We also had a gathering in our home in memory of a young boy who was killed by the regime. A few months after that, my sister Maryam and her husband were killed in the street. My older brother was killed in prison, on the torture table.

I was only 20 when all of these things were happening to me. The normal thing is that when this sort of thing happens, it has to be the end of your life and world, but I could understand that they gave their lives for the better lives of their children, and that gives me reason to live. Other countries have gotten their freedom by standing up, and it is now our turn.

*Do you have a message you would like to give to the women of the West?*

Really, we need your help for getting our voice out there. Be the voice of the voiceless Iranian women. It is good to be from one side, to be our voice, but also the women in Iran who are under the worst pressure, unable to say anything.

None of us want anything for us. The whole reason and purpose for our fight is to free all Iranian people from the mullahs. In any way you can, help us to free our country to be like others. We admire and value your support and that's why we have the strength to go on.

***"There is nothing left of you to fight"***

**Homyra Wassehan, 45 years old**

*Born in Tehran, Homyra lived in Ashraf.*

[she has an article in VSD.fr March 2, 2011 which we need to ask for copy of]

*What made you decide to become part of the MeK?*

From the time I was 14, I could see how the regime stops women from doing what they want to do and from studying, and I wanted to support them. My family was also supportive of the MeK. Seeing what Khomeini was taking away, I became active, and the only organization that had the message of freedom was the MeK. We were very active in the schools, and Khomeini was stopping us every step on the way.

In 1980-81, I was 15 years old and I was imprisoned for 5 years. My crime was giving out pamphlets by an MeK member who was arrested. They were torturing me, and that's when I got the symptoms of a bleeding ulcer. I dropped to 70lbs because of bad food and beatings. Also, we would all give our food to the children there whose mothers were arrested, so we did not have a lot to eat. My kidneys shut down. Afterwards, they started me on dialysis, but they still wouldn't give me the right food.

I was put in solitary for 6 months. There was a heater there that constantly dripped, so I was sleeping or sitting in water all of that time. I began to get arthritis. When they saw how sick I had become, and knew my health would not let me go on and fight again, then they freed me. "There is nothing left of you to fight." This is what they said when they let me go.

I was in the hospital for 6 months. Then, after about 18 months, I left Iran, and when I escaped the country they imprisoned my parents for two months. I was newly married to an MeK person; he went back to Iran and they imprisoned him and executed him. Also during this time my uncle was in prison. They had told my mother that they would free him and that she could come with money to the prison. When she went there, she saw his picture in the book of those who were killed. The shock was so bad, it stopped her heart and killed her.

There were three small ones left in the home, myself, my 6-year old sister and 5-year old brother. (don't know where this applies, need to cut) My older sister (50 now) got arrested in the 2008 election demonstration and is in prison now. When she was originally arrested, they gave her the death sentence. All for joining a demonstration. It was the holy day of Ashura. We found out later that another reason was that she had gone to Ashraf to visit my aunt, cousin, and another uncle. They said she was 'mohareb' ("enemy of God"). She is sick in prison and has a fibroid that needs surgery. They will send her for that and then bring her back to prison. Also, she has a heart problem that needs surgery, but they cannot do anything until the fibroid is done.

Her daughter got thyroid cancer – they say it was because of the shock of her mother being arrested.

*We hear a lot from the mullahs that the families of the MeK are ashamed that they are doing this, that they are begging them to stop. What would you say back?*

They are worried about my sister, but they don't blame the MeK. They blame the regime. My sister wasn't like me, wanting to be a freedom fighter; she was just a normal person in a demonstration. My point is that this regime is so bad that all of the families have become hostages because of having family in Ashraf.

*How have you found the strength to survive your own health problems?*

At the time they arrested me, I didn't know a lot, but over the 5 years as I saw all of my prison friends executed, I saw that by coming out and doing this, it is the only way I can make a change to stop these things.

*What is your message to those who suffer physical problems?*

Even though you might be physically frail or sick, that is not everything; having hope and going on – that is what is important.

*Do you have a message you would like to give to the women of the West?*

My message is the same as that of the 1,000 women in Ashraf: women in the West can believe in freedom for Iran and can stand with them and fight for that freedom.

*Grateful thanks to our translator, Nasrin Saifi, who works at the University of California Berkeley, and whose cousin lives in Ashraf.*

## MEK Interviews: February 2013, Paris France

***"I have a lot of hope; if I had not, I would not be here."***

**Maliheh, 52 years old**

*When did you first learn of the MeK?*

I came to know the MeK in 1357 (1978) in the midst of the Revolution. I had heard about them through a man who participated in the Shah protests along with everyone else. He was later martyred. During the demonstrations, we used to raise pictures of the martyrs and because I have some religious foundations, that's why I chose the mujahedin.

*What are your strongest impressions on the MeK as a group? Individuals?*

What I knew of religion was very traditional; it was what surrounded me, from my family. When I got to know the mujahedin, I found that their view was very different from what I knew, and that is why I was so attracted to them and chose them as an organization and an idea that I would follow, and is the reason why I'm still standing with them. What I can tell you about is their progressive views and the values that they have, and how they appreciate the value of women and equality of gender.

*Given your expectations from what you had heard/learned, did you find the label terrorist to be warranted?*

At the time that they were called terrorists, I was still living in Iran. You must have a strong faith in your value system and in their organization. When you believe in them, all of their dangers become your dangers and are taken upon yourself.

I am myself a supporter. I didn't know anybody in Ashraf, and have never been, but I have been a political prisoner myself, and my husband was a political prisoner who was martyred. I must say that after I spent time in prison and after my husband was murdered, I was much more motivated to follow through in the movement. I felt that I had more of a responsibility to carry both his burden and mine.

Before prison, I used to participate in the MeK gatherings and protests. I was arrested when I protested in the biggest demonstration the mujahedin ever had (1.5 million in 1981). I was arrested because I stood up for my rights as a woman. On that day, they were shooting straight on the people (before, they had been just shooting to the side, but on this day they had permission). I was a witness to the shooting, but we were all running away in the street, shouting slogans. At some point, we were surrounded and all arrested, along with about 15 of the people around us. I was keeping our home at the time, and my daughter was 9 months old. When I was arrested, many different people took care of her; sometimes friends, and also my mother. In prison, there were no meetings allowed with the outside world, so I did not get to see her while I was there. When I witnessed that some of the other prisoners were so young and some so old, but yet they were so strong, it kept me strong as well. In general, the vast majority of them were MeK supporters.

*Could you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?*

What memories do I have from prison? The entire period you spend in prison – every second, every minute – is a memory, and repeating those memories is not so easy. This particular memory I will share: a mother was to be executed, and at the moment they were taking her, she was holding her 1 ½ year-old child, and they wanted to separate them. I was wearing a blindfold, so I just heard them, and I heard the mother calling out to the child, 'Zahra, Zahra' as they were separating them, and the child was calling back. I knew this mother. They took her away and that same night she was executed. After I left prison, I followed the story (of Zahra). Her grandmother had taken over caring for her. She is now married and has children of her own, but to this day carries the psychological wounds of that experience.

***Could you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?***

I was tortured in prison. It seemed to me as if the guards must be sick: How is it possible that a person can take pleasure in tormenting another person and feel nothing about it? What we saw was that when the torturer was not present, the other guards were trying to fill in his shoes. As a woman, they wanted to break you down because they thought it was beyond your means to survive. That was what they thought, that we could not endure the torture. But we *did* endure it and we *did* stand firm in our beliefs. It seems to me that what they wanted to see was a woman breaking down, not standing up, and when they saw that we were standing firm, they were the ones breaking down. They were not human beings.

Nobody knew that I was in prison, although I was there for about 2 years. Compared to others, it was not such a long time; I feel quite ashamed talking about it. The more you see of other people's pain, the less you feel your own.

What was special in my case - perhaps I was lucky, perhaps unlucky – is that they did not identify me, so I was never sentenced. I feel I was unlucky, actually, because they could not find anything on me. They just got tired and let me go. What they wanted from me was my husband, and when they finally found him and arrested him, they had no use for me. At the time, I wasn't sure what he was doing; I was active on my own, and he was active on his. He was a freelancer, and a very strong activist. It was actually an interrogator who told me that he had been arrested.

My story began after I got out of prison. That's when I tried to find my husband. A very short while after, I found out where he was, and found out that he had been executed. I was never told why.

I was very young, barely 22 and had a child, and I had no one to take care of me in my country. When you are a woman who has been in prison, and when you have been imprisoned because of an idea that the entire system is afraid of, nobody will give you a job and people fear you. When I think back, I cannot even imagine how it was possible that I endured all of that. It seems to me that prison was easier than being on the outside.

This has not changed how I feel about the mujahedin. I feel proud of the fact that I was able to survive with my integrity intact. When you are a lonely woman with a child, you might

be driven to do anything, but I did not. I kept my integrity and my faith in God. If you have no vision and no values, then it is not possible for you to keep your integrity. There are many good people out there, but I wanted to stand on my own two feet, so I wouldn't allow people to help me.

I left very late because I was in the hospital when I got out, but I always wanted to follow up on my ideals, to find the thing that I was looking for, that I was fighting for. Twelve years ago I was able to leave Iran (I am 52 now).

I had been looking for the mujahedin when I came out, where they were and what they were doing, but just after I arrived here (France), I found them all and became a drop of water in that ocean. It was like being reborn. A new life. People that I had been looking for for so many years – there they were. My daughter is doing fine. She lives here now, and has 2 sons.

*Do you have a message you would like to give to the women of the West?*

To the women in the West: If you do nothing for the women of Iran, at the bare minimum what you can do is to be close to this movement, do what you can to support this organization. This is the way in which you can do much more for the women of Iran because Iranian women, while being oppressed, are also fighters.

I have a lot of hope; if I had not, I would not be here. I have hope for a better future for my people, and I have belief and hope for this organization. I am sure that with the help of this movement, my people will see freedom.

I would like to thank you for listening to me.

-----  
***"I'm a mujahedin on a mission."***

**Mojgan, 49 years old**

*(shot in the leg)*

I am a mother and an Ashrafi. My father was an engineer, my mother kept house. I have one brother, 5 years younger.

*When did you first learn of the MeK?*

I was 15-16 years old during the Revolution. I got to know the mujahedin through some of my friends in school. They were a bit more active than I at the time, and they told me about them. I felt as though I had been searching for something, and when I got to know them it seemed like I could find everything in their group. I became active in school and I participated in demonstrations. I became part of their network – whatever they did, we were part of it. My father did not agree with the Shah, but it was just an opinion he had – he was not an activist.

*What are your strongest impressions on the MeK as a group? Individuals?*

I did not wear the hijab at the time and did not come from a religious family, but the MeK's belief system, their activities, their courage, the fact that they were fighting for freedom to such an extent – this was very attractive to me. The way they treated women was different – even young women were given important tasks to do.

After the big demonstration in 1981, the regime's agents were looking all over for the mujahedin, to arrest us. Despite my family's disagreement, I left home. Very often, it happened that I didn't know where to go at night. I couldn't find homes to visit. I was in touch with all of my friends, and we were all active together, but it was all in secret.

***Could you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?***

I was to meet a friend of mine and we were supposed to do something. Another friend of ours had been arrested, so those at the prison knew about our meeting after torturing her. People from Evin prison were waiting for us at the meeting. They had brought their car, and when they saw us gathering, they took me and pulled me into the car, and I was brought to Evin prison. It was a terrible time, because while in the car on our way to Evin, they were looking around to find any other youngsters who looked suspicious to grab and take with them. I remember driving by a young girl and they said she looked suspicious.

At the gate of Evin they blindfolded me. The worst part was witnessing that my other friends had been so badly tortured. They were bloody, and the guards confronted me with them to scare me. That was terrible for me.

In the space where you enter, the interrogation area, everywhere you hear the screams of people being tortured. Even under the blindfold you can see the trail of blood.

There were so many arrests made that they had no time to bring people in as one, so we all sat together. They had so much information about me before I was arrested that they didn't feel they needed to bother with me and could just send me right into the prison. They tested me before I went from the interrogation area to the prison – they wanted to see where I stood. I wasn't actually tortured, but they do beat everybody when they are arrested. For a long period of time I was told I was going to be executed. They wanted to be sure whether I still felt the same way about the mujahedin after that, or had changed my mind. But a friend of mine and I both had the same story – we were a team. Another friend who had been going to the meeting was beaten very badly because she was the head of our team. By coincidence we were placed in the same room one night, and we talked and we agreed on what to say when they asked us. She told me what they had been asking her about, and what they asked about me, so that we would have the same story. She wanted to save me. Then she and my other friend were both executed. The one who had revealed our meeting place felt so bad that anything should happen to me.

For a long time my family did not come to visit me. The interrogator came and told me to call home. My mother had no idea that I was in prison, even though I had been away. The interrogator gave me the phone first so that she would know it was me, then he took the phone away and said that they had found me in the street and had arrested me, and they would let her know when I would be executed.

Several months later my family was allowed to come and see me through glass. They were so broken down, they couldn't even talk properly. They were expecting me to be executed at any moment. It was very hard for me; in my heart I felt it was not good idea for them to come and visit.

I was in prison for 5 years. I knew a lot of MeK people in prison, and from outside prison as well. All the time, we were together.

The Iranian regime has a special hatred for the mujahedin, but especially toward the women because they do not expect them to behave the way they do. They believe them to be second class and weak. Confronting the regime is absolutely not the role of women. What I found amazing was that not only did I have to confront the mullahs' regime, but also my father who was an intellectual. He was so against the way I was acting out, so I was caught between this and my family too. They were so afraid that I would get arrested and could not accept that I would take all these risks and still be an activist.

During a period of time that I spent in another prison, there was a delegation that came from Montazeri. The delegation took over responsibility for the prison for a period of time, and took it away from the administration. They took over all the documents of all the prisoners in the jail, and because they took all of that away, they gave amnesty to the people in the jail. Prisoners were given time to spend with their families. People who had been injured were let out for a period of time to spend with their families. In that period, some who were given the time fled the country.

Those that were hospitalized actually fled from the hospital and many went to Ashraf. We knew that they were going to escape, and even collected money for them in the prison. We knew that they were not coming back.

In that period of time, I was also free. I heard afterwards that when the regime found out about the people who fled, they just took everyone to Evin, and things became worse.

The mujahedin sent units to Iran to help the people leave the country at that time. I remember when we were fleeing the country that because I had been arrested, if they got me again they would do us much more harm. One of the units got me out of Iran to Ashraf, but I went back to Iran twice because when you arrived in Ashraf, you were given a choice - you could stay or you could go back and help others to get out, so I went back. It was very difficult and I remember every bit of it. It was dangerous because they knew us, since we had been prisoners. Smugglers helped us out.

So I made two hard choices in a very short period of time: one was to choose to flee and come to Ashraf, and two was that after being in prison for so long, I chose to come back and help the others, because someone else actually did risk their life to help me. I thought, it's not good for me to feel that now that I have everything, I don't care for the rest. Just like me, the others needed to come out.

I was at Ashraf 1366-72 (1987-93), and once again in 1374 (1995), but before the bombing of Iran started the second time, we had already left Ashraf to help the resistance outside.

They were trying to organize the network outside in different countries and cities. They set up presidential offices.

I was hit by a bullet just before the Iran-Iraq war ended, at the time that they had a truce, and we moved towards Tehran. I remember they were saying (even though I myself was part of a team) that we lived in houses and there was immoral activity going on, but I knew this not to be true.

I remember a different incident that the Iranian regime has been spreading information about. They tried to say that we were part of an Iraqi brigade, but we had nothing to do with the Iraqis. When we participated in that move [to Ashraf], we decided to sacrifice ourselves so that we could make a path for others. Many were killed and many were wounded, and many became hostages.

Many people are relatives of mujahedin, so they know the truth about them. I must admit that the two times that I went back inside Iran to help others, I was so amazed at how people supported us.

We were actually part of the first team that was specific to women. It used to be all men who worked with the smugglers. During this time, the others had worked so much with the smugglers, so the image I had was very different from them. They found it very hard to work with a team of women. The first time, they were very hard on us. They changed their minds after a while, because they saw that we were running as fast as they were running, so they started calling us sisters. But the first time I went to Tehran, I remember, we had the addresses of people and we were supposed to find them to go and get them. We had a short time in which to leave the smugglers, find the people, and come back. I remember that I was given an address the first time to stay that night, but the people whose address I had said that they were very afraid and told me not to come. So I spent that night outdoors, and I had no idea what to do. All of the people I knew, I had been told never to seek them out, because then it would be known that I was there. I remember that there was a cab driving by, and when I saw it I thought it was a miracle, that I could just sit in the cab and not have to sleep in the street. While we were driving, I tried to talk to the driver to figure out whether he was friendly to the mujahed, or with the regime. He was a young man, and I finally told him I was with the mujahed, and he was shocked. He pulled over and stopped. He said, 'why are you telling me this?' He was very afraid. I said to him, 'the fact that I'm telling you this, I'm the one who is risking my life. So then he said 'what can I do for you?' I said, 'right now I have nowhere to sleep, and if I am on the street, they can have me arrested at any moment. Then he started thinking and said, 'I've heard of the mujahedin, but I've never seen one.' So he took me to his home, but he was thinking, 'what am I going to tell my mother?' It was one or two in the morning.

He told her that I was staying the night and would have to stay a couple of days, and she said nothing. I think she knew. He ended up driving me to all of the addresses during the three days that I spent there. He was actually such a good man; he collected a lot of money for us, and he was willing to look like a part of our group so that people would believe we were all together. The last night before we left, he gave me a card and said, 'if you come

back, or your friends, tell them to call me and I will help.' I very often think of that taxi driver.

The second time I went back, it was the same thing - people were so good to me. The work we were doing was risky and hard.

The second time we had to leave for Zahadan to catch up with the smugglers, but we had lost the ticket to get there, so the day before I went to a travel agency. I checked them out and they seemed to be normal citizens, and I said that I would like to speak to the manager. I was pretending to be someone else, wearing a long black veil, but they thought I was a hezbollahi. They brought me to the manager, and I said that I was a mujahed and was here on a mission. At first he was really shocked, but then said that I had to come with him immediately because he was very terrified. He put me in his car and just left. He asked why I did it this way - wasn't I afraid he might be with the regime?

He ended up helping us with all the tickets, but he told us please, don't just do this again, tell someone 'I'm a mujahedin on a mission'.

*Do you have a message you would like to give to the women of the West?*

To the women of the West: I believe that the history of the struggle of the women who fight is very rich and that's the reason we have sister Rajavi. It's like all of the history and all of the struggling of these years have come together and are symbolized in her. When our leadership was taken over by a woman, there was a change in the quality of our work, and it was amazing to watch how the men changed.

I have seen with my own eyes many of those people who have been martyred; all the pictures, all the young girls. I believe that even though in western countries the women seem to have all the rights, it is still not the case. There are things that you don't see that keep it from being the case.

I believe that everyone can come together and use this experience of ours so that they are not indifferent to what is happening in the world - so that there will come a day that the whole world is united and people are not so polarized, and there is no longer a whole group of people thinking that our pain is not theirs.

**"We Saw Justice in Them":  
Interview of Mahin Saremi,  
Iranian Women's Activist, Political Prisoner and Torture Survivor**

by Carole R Fontaine

In a small apartment in a 'bedroom' community of Paris, three Muslim women of middle years and older have laid a spread with typical Persian hospitality, waiting for guests from the United States to visit. Dried apricots, lakum, sweetly scented teas, fresh fruit (with the obligatory small cucumbers that so delight the people of Iran), pistachios, and other dainties are laid out, waiting on the coffee table, though it is unlikely that their

conversation can be sweetened by mere foodstuffs. Mrs. M, the resident, looks lovingly at the glass cabinet where she has proudly displayed her five dead children, members of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (the 'notorious' PMOI, or in Persian, MeK), all tortured and martyred by the murderous regime in Tehran. Extremist Shi'ite mullahs have terrorized a whole people for over thirty years, since the uprising against Shah Pahlevi was hijacked by the opportunist Ayatollah Khomeini. His government continues to interfere and threaten the region in their quest to head a worldwide Caliphate that will rule the broken West, as well as wipe Israel from the modern map. Into this mess, a group of Christian women Human Rights activists, interested in how to make common cause with the brave women of the Arab Spring of 2011, determine to meet with any Muslim women who feel free enough to share their experiences of repression, torture and the heavy price of dissent.

After the loss of her last child, Mrs. M simply packed a small overnight bag in her home in Tehran and began to walk to the border of Pakistan, unheeding of any personal danger. After all, after losing five brave children and a husband, what more could the mullahs do to her? After her long journey – eventually accomplished – she was able, with the help of the PMOI stationed in their base camp Ashraf City on the Iraqi side of the border with Iran, to make her way to France. There, in the small community of Auvers-sur-Oise, live the members of the National Council of Résistance in Iran (NCRI), a political support group that lobbies for the survival of the PMOI under the Shi'ite puppet government of al-Maliki, the Iraqi sell-out who speaks Arabic with a Farsi accent. The fate of those in Ashraf City is the constant subject of prayer and action for the families who have lost children and family members in the struggle for a free Iran. The old women remember the Shah well, but what is experienced now by their people is a thousand times worse, they say--and who is to blame them?

In 2009, the hollow men of the Iraqi government, working hand in hand with Tehran and at their directives, determine to expel and extradite the PMOI members back to Iran, where they await torture and execution. Both the United States and the United Nations are implicated in the fate of the PMOI: the US invasion of Iraq first bombed, then exculpated all of the residents of Ashraf City, who had been dubbed terrorists by Iran and given that status under the Clinton Administration as a 'gesture of good will' to Iran, in return for a conspicuous lack of reform in the area of Human Rights abuses under supposed moderate Khatami. During a thorough investigation by the Pentagon, ranking US officials in Iraq, and in cooperation with the CIA, not one act of terrorism could be found to have been committed by any of the dissidents in Ashraf. Subsequently, the US granted all the residents US Identity Cards with Protected Person status under the Fourth Article of the Geneva Convention, which protects civilian groups. The United Nations commissioners for Refugees and Human Rights agreed with this designation, considering it necessary in order to protect these long-time opponents of the extremist fanatics who run Iran. The Pentagon, the European Union, the generals, and even the Vatican all urge the US Department of State to remove the label of terrorism from this long-suffering group so they may obtain visas and get to safety outside Iraq, but to no avail. In order to maintain the fiction that the puppets in Baghdad have 'stood up' in their own freely (sic!) elected government, such that US troops might 'stand down' and leave their debacle in the desert to the locals, all promises to protect Ashraf City are abandoned. Obama, elected with such high hopes, and given a Nobel Peace Prize for simply *not* being George W. Bush, does nothing--Guantanamo