

# Iran's Mohajedeen e Khalq: MEK Money Sure Can't Buy Love

But it can buy a lot of politicians

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*Iran's radical pseudo-Marxist cult Mohajedeen e Khalq, better known by its acronym MEK, is somewhat reminiscent of the Israel Lobby's American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in that it operates somewhat in the shadows and is nevertheless able to punch well beyond its weight by manipulating politicians and understanding how American government functions on its dark side. MEK promotes itself by openly supporting a very popular hardline policy of "democratic opposition" advocating "regime change" for Iran while also successfully selling its reform credentials, i.e. that it is no longer a terrorist group. This latter effort apparently convinced then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on 2013 as she and President Barack responded to the group's affability campaign by delisting MEK from the government list of terrorist organizations.*

This shift in attitude towards MEK was a result of several factors. First, everyone in Washington and the Establishment hates Iran. And second, the Executive Order 13224, which designates Iran's Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization, *ipso facto* defines any group fighting against it as one of the good guys, justifying the change

MEK is best described as a cult rather than as a political movement because of its internal discipline. Its members are, according to the testimony of those who have somehow escaped, subjected to considerable indoctrination best described as brainwashing. Though not exactly imprisoned, adherents are kept isolated and separated insofar as possible and cannot contact their families. Their possessions are collectivized so they have no money or other resources. If they are in contravention of the numerous rules that guide the organization they are punished, including physically, and there are reports of members being executed for trying to escape.

The current head of the group is Maryam Rajavi, the wife of the deceased co-founder of MEK, Massoud. She is reported to be politically savvy and speaks excellent English learned in part to enable her to communicate with adoring American politicians. The group itself was founded in 1965. Its name means "People's Holy Warriors," derived from its Marxist/populist roots and its religiosity. It was not unlike the Taliban which developed in adjacent Afghanistan. During the 1970's it rebelled against the Shah and was involved in bombing and shooting American targets. It executed U.S. Army Lt. Col. Lewis Hawkins in 1973 as he was walking home from the U.S. Embassy and in 1975 it killed two American Air Force officers in their chauffeur driven car, an incident that was studied and used in CIA training subsequently as an example of how not to get caught and killed by terrorists. Between 1976 and 1978 the group bombed American commercial targets and killed three Rockwell defense contractors and one Texaco executive.

MEK welcomed the Iranian revolution and also the occupation of the U.S. Embassy but soon fell afoul of the Ayatollah Khomeini regime. It eventually moved to join Iran's enemy Saddam Hussein in Iraq and participated on the Iraqi side in the bloodletting that followed when the two countries went to war in 1980-8. For that reason alone, MEK is particularly hated by most Iranians and the repeated assertion that it is some kind of "Iranian democracy" alternative is ridiculous as the people in Iran would never accept it. In terms of the duplicity surrounding its marketing, it is reminiscent of Iraqi con artist Ahmed Chalabi, who also had little following inside Iraq but was able to convince Pentagon geniuses like Paul Wolfowitz that he represented some kind of democratic movement. At the time Chalabi was also secretly working for Iran.

MEK was protected by Saddam and later by the U.S. invaders who found a weapon to use against Iran useful. They were housed in Camp Ashraf near Baghdad, and later, after Ashraf was closed, at so-called Camp Liberty. In 2013, when the Iraqis insisted that they go elsewhere the President Barack Obama facilitated their removal to Albania under the auspices of the United Nations refugee program, with the \$20 million dollar bill being footed by Washington. The organization's political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), meanwhile established itself in Paris under the control of Maryam Rajavi, in part to place it closer to the American and European sources of its political legitimacy and financing. In 2001, to make itself more palatable, the group had renounced violence.

The MEK folks in Albania have become a bit of a problem. Through various additional migrations they have multiplied and now number around 3,000 and have largely adhered to their cultish ways even though one of the original objectives of the move into Europe was to somehow deprogram and "deradicalize" them in an environment far removed from Iran-Iraq. Part of the problem is that the Albanian government likes the U.N. subsidies used to support the MEK associates, but it will not let them work as they have no legal status and they cannot resettle or lead normal lives. So they resort to criminal activity that includes promotion of fraudulent charities, drug trafficking and even a form of slavery in which their own people are sold and traded as laborers. The temporary solution has been to move the MEK out of a rundown university property in the capital Tirana to a more remote site in northern Albania dubbed Ashraf-3, but local people believe that that is just kicking the can down the road and that MEK should be forced to go somewhere else, preferably in the United States, which seems to like them so much.

Also, Albania is majority Muslim and has been subjected to the same Saudi Arabian ultra-conservative wahhabi promotion backed by lots of money that has plagued many states in the Middle East. Albanians accustomed to the mild form of Turkish Islam suddenly found themselves confronting the Sunni-Shia divide and also the MEK as agents of both Saudi Arabia and Israel. Many outraged Albanians see the unreformed MEK in their midst as a terror time bomb waiting to go off, but the government, under pressure from the U.S. Embassy has not sought their removal.

Meanwhile back in the United States everything involving the non-deradicalized MEK is just hunky dory. MEK and the NCRI are enemies of Iran and also seem to have plenty of money to spend, so they buy high ranking American speakers to appear at their events. Rudy Giuliani and John Bolton have appeared regularly, as have Senators John McCain, Lindsey Graham and Jeanne Shaheen. At a 2015 appearance in Paris, Giuliani brought the crowd to its feet by calling for "Regime change!" after shouting out that the "Ayatollah must go!" In August 2017, Senators Roy Blunt, John Cornyn, Thom Tillis and Carl Levin met with Rajavi in Paris. Newt Gingrich also considers himself a friend of the Iranian resistance while Elaine

Chao, Secretary of Labor and wife of Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell spoke in Paris for five minutes in 2015 and was paid \$50,000. The payments made to the other politicians have not been revealed.

And then there is the Saudi and Israeli angle. Saudi Arabia is now the major funder of MEK/NCRI. It's intelligence chief Turki al-Faisal spoke before the group in 2017. Israel funded the group in its early days and its external spy service Mossad continues to use MEK stay-behinds in Iran to assassinate scientists and tamper with computer systems. The CIA, which recently expanded its anti-Iran task force, it also working closely with MEK. And Giuliani, Bolton, Chao are all in the White House inner circle, which, not coincidentally, is baying for Iranian blood.

Lost in all of the above is any conceivable American interest. It is difficult to even make the claim that Iran threatens the United States or any vital interest and the drive to decapitate the Mullahs, both literally and figuratively, really comes from Riyadh and Tel Aviv. And there is potential collateral damage where it really might matter as MEK cultists continues to sit and fester in a holding pattern maintained by Washington in the heart of Europe. What comes next? War of some kind with Iran is appearing to be increasingly likely given recent remarks by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, threatening to crush the Iranians. Is Washington intending to send the MEK warriors on sabotage missions inside Iran, something like the resistance to the Germans in World War 2? Maybe Giuliani and Bolton know the answer to that question.

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