

Subverting Iran

Washington's Covert War inside Iran

By [Gregory Elich](#)

Global Research, March 23, 2007

23 March 2007

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

Much attention has been given to the Bush Administration's preparations for possible war against Iran as well as its drive to impose sanctions. Meanwhile, a less noticed policy has been unfolding, one that may in time prove to have grave consequences for the region. There is a covert war underway in Iran, still in its infancy, but with disturbing signs of impending escalation. In the shadowy world of guerrilla operations, the full extent of involvement by the Bush Administration has yet to be revealed, but enough is known to paint a disturbing picture.

The provision of aid to anti-government forces offers certain advantages to the Bush Administration. No effort needs to be expended in winning support for the policy. Operations can be conducted away from the public eye during a time of growing domestic opposition to the war in Iraq, and international opinion is simply irrelevant where the facts are not well known. In terms of expenditures, covert operations are a cost-effective means for destabilizing a nation, relative to waging war.

There is nothing new in the technique, and it has proven an effective means for toppling foreign governments in the past, as was the case with socialist Afghanistan and Nicaragua. In Yugoslavia, U.S. and British military training and arms shipments helped to build up the secessionist Kosovo Liberation Army from a small force of 300 soldiers into a sizable guerrilla army that made the province of Kosovo ungovernable. The very chaos that the West did so much to create was then used as the pretext for bombing Yugoslavia.

According to a former CIA official, funding for armed separatist groups operating in Iran is paid from the CIA's classified budget. The aim, claims Fred Burton, an ex-State Department counter-terrorism agent, is "to supply and train" these groups "to destabilize the Iranian regime." (1)

The largest and most well known of the anti-government organizations is Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), operating out of Iraq. For years MEK had launched cross-border attacks and terrorist acts against Iran with the support of Saddam Hussein. Officially designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department in 1997, and disarmed of heavy weaponry by the U.S. military six years later, Washington has since come to view MEK in a different light. Three years ago, U.S. intelligence officials suggested looking the other way as the MEK rearmed and to use the organization to destabilize Iran, a recommendation that clearly has been accepted. (2)

Accusing MEK of past involvement in repressive measures by former president Saddam Hussein, the current Iraqi government wants to close down Camp Ashraf, located well outside of Baghdad, where many of the MEK fighters are stationed. But the camp operates

under the protection of the U.S. military, and American soldiers chauffeur MEK leaders. The Iraqi government is unlikely to get its way, as the MEK claims to be the primary U.S. source for intelligence on Iran. (3)

U.S. officials “made MEK members swear an oath to democracy and resign from the MEK,” reveals an intelligence source, “and then our guys incorporated them into their unit and trained them.” Reliance on the MEK began under Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld with the direction of Vice President Dick Cheney, and soon MEK soldiers were being used in special operations missions in Iran. “They are doing whatever they want, no oversight at all,” said one intelligence official of the MEK’s American handlers. (4)

The Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), is another organization that conducts cross-border raids into Iran. Israel provides the group with “equipment and training,” claims a consultant to the U.S. Defense Department, while the U.S. gave it “a list of targets inside Iran of interest to the U.S.” Aid to guerrilla groups, the consultant reports, is “part of an effort to explore alternative means of applying pressure on Iran.” (5) It has been noted that PJAK has recently shown an impressive gain in capability during its operations, both in terms of size and armament, a fact that can surely be attributed to Western support. (6)

Jundallah (God’s Brigade) is an extremist Sunni organization operating in Sistan-Balochistan province that has been launching armed attacks, planting explosives, setting off car bombs, and kidnapping. Based in Pakistan, it is unclear if this group is connected with the Pakistani organization of the same name, which has ties with Al-Qaeda. (7) Jundallah denies that it has any links to either Al-Qaeda or to the U.S. But Iranian officials claim that a recently arrested Jundallah guerrilla has confessed that he was trained by U.S. and British intelligence officers. There is no way to verify that such a confession has actually taken place, nor its reliability as it may have come as a result of coercion, but the claim would not be inconsistent with U.S. policy elsewhere in Iran. (8)

It is probable that in the coming months the Bush Administration will expand support for anti-government forces in order to more effectively destabilize Iran and gather intelligence. Already U.S. Special Forces are operating in Iran collecting data, planting nuclear sensors, and electronically marking targets. Separatist forces have cooperated in those efforts. “This looks to be turning into a pretty large-scale covert operation,” comments a former CIA official. U.S. and Israeli officials are establishing front companies to help finance that covert war. (9) To fully capitalize on ethnic discontent along Iran’s periphery, the U.S. Marine Corps has commissioned a study from defense contractor Hicks and Associates on Iran and Iraq’s ethnic groups and their grievances. (10)

That these separatist organizations clearly engage in terrorism hasn’t deterred the Bush Administration from backing them. The potential for baneful consequences is considerable. CIA support for the anti-Soviet and anti-socialist Mujahedin in Afghanistan spawned a worldwide movement of Islamic extremism. Western support for ethnic secessionists shattered Yugoslavia and the invasion of Iraq fired the flames of ethnic discord and made a shared life impossible. It remains to be seen if the Bush Administration can succeed in achieving its goal of effecting regime change in Iran. That process could have devastating consequences for the people of Iran. Those officials in the Bush Administration who advocated and implemented covert operations “think in Iran you can just go in and hit the facilities and destabilize the government,” explains a former CIA official. “They believe they can get rid of a few crazy mullahs and bring in the young guys who like Gap jeans, [and] all

the world's problems are solved. I think it's delusional." (11)

Gregory Elich is the author of Strange Liberators: Militarism, Mayhem, and the Pursuit of Profit. Gregory Elich is a frequent Global Research contributor.

<http://www.amazon.com/Strange-Liberators-Militarism-Mayhem-Pursuit/dp/1595265708>

NOTES

1. William Lowther and Colin Freeman, "US Funds Terror Groups to Sow Chaos in Iran," Sunday Telegraph (London), February 25, 2007.
2. "Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO), Global Security.org Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Sleeping Forces Stir in Iran," Asia Times, June 26, 2003. Gian Marco Chiocci and Alessia Marani, "Iranian Mujaheddin Gather Funds in Italy," Il Giornale (Milan), October 2, 2006.
1. Ernesto Londono and Saad al-Izzi, "Iraq Intensifies Efforts to Expel Iranian Group," Washington Post, March 14, 2007.
2. Larisa Alexandrovna, "On Cheney, Rumsfeld Order, US Outsourcing Special Ops, Intelligence to Iraq Terror Group, Intelligence Officials Say," The Raw Story, April 13, 2006.
3. Seymour Hersh, "The Next Act," New Yorker, November 27, 2006.
4. James Brandon, "PJAK Claims Fresh Attacks in Iran," Global Terrorism Analysis, March 6, 2007.
5. Ali Akbar Dareini, "Explosion Kills 11 Members of Iran's Elite Revolutionary Guards," Associated Press, February 14, 2007.
6. Broadcast, Islamic Republic of Iran News Network (Teheran), February 17, 2007.
7. Richard Sale, "Cat and Mouse Game Over Iran," UPI, January 26, 2005.
8. Guy Dinmore, "US Marines Probe Tensions Among Iran's Minorities," Financial Times (London), February 23, 2006.
9. Julian Borger and Ian Traynor, "Now US Ponders Attack on Iran," The Guardian (London), January 18, 2005.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Gregory Elich](#), Global Research, 2007

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: [Gregory Elich](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca