

## What is a destructive cult? How can we recognize it? Part three

### Few Examples: MeK (Mujahedin e Khaleq)

Mojahedin e Khalq (MEK) of Iran, or Mojahedin of Khalq, (MoK), known also as they prefer to translate their name into English: 'People's Mojahedin of Iran or PMOI' or sometime they like to call themselves as their supposedly coalition umbrella organisation 'National council of Resistance of Iran or NCR' or many other names they use in different situation and for different purposes.

Although I was member of MEK for almost 17 years and in my memoirs<sup>i</sup>, I have described MEK in detail and in length; but at this point I prefer to cite their story from an independent expert; Professor Ervand Abrahamian<sup>ii</sup>, especially as the material taken from his book has not been totally challenged by the organisation itself<sup>iii</sup>.

'The roots of the Mojahedin reach back to the Liberation Movement of Iran (Nehzat-e Azadi-ye Iran): the nationalistic, liberal and lay-religious party formed in the early 1960s by Mehdi Bazargan<sup>iv</sup>{First Prime minister of Iran after the revolution 1979 }.

'The Uprising of June 1963. with Borujerdi's {supreme Ayatollah at the time} death, Khomeini re-entered politics with a vengeance and began to denounce the {shah's} regime unequivocally. His denunciations - unlike those of his more conventional colleagues- avoided the issue of land reform and instead focused on such highly explosive topics as court corruption, constitutional violations, dictatorial methods, election rigging, granting of capitulations to foreigners, betrayal of the Muslim cause against Israel, undermining of Shii values, unremitting expansion of the bureaucracy, and the neglect of the economic needs of merchants, workers and peasants<sup>v</sup>. Not for the last time, Khomeini had chosen to attack the regime at its weakest points. Khomeini's denunciations, together with those of other clerics, sparked off major demonstrations on 5 June 1963<sup>vi</sup> caused a generational split in the Liberation Movement as well as in other political organizations. Within a few months of the event, three younger members {led by Mohammad Hanif Nejad} formed a small discussion group to explore new ways of fighting the regime, and in a secret letter addressed to the leaders of the parent party, blamed them for the 'disaster' and for failing to muster a 'more effective challenge to the Shah', This discussion group later formed the nucleus of the Mojahedin.'{P: 85}

'Most of the early leaders of the Mojahedin were young, they were university educated, particularly in engineering colleges within Iran; and they were the sons of the traditional, the provincial and the religious-minded bazaari middle class. Of the fifteen in the Central Committee and the Ideological Team, all were born between 1938 and 1948, and most between 1943 and 1946. Many of them had therefore been in their late teens at the time of the 1963 Uprising and in their early twenties when the discussion group first formed. All but two of the fifteen had attended university; six had graduated from the Technical College. Nine were engineers. Thirteen had attended Tehran University. Almost all came from lower-middle-class homes: twelve came from clerical or religious bazaari homes.' {P: 91}

In 1971; Mojahedin decided to disrupt the lavish festivities of August 1971 to celebrate the anniversary of 2500 years of the monarchy. They decided to blow up the main electrical plant in Tehran and thus throw all the festivities into darkness. Searching for dynamite, they approached a veteran communist with whom they had shared a prison cell during the 1963 uprising. However, he

had meanwhile turned police informer. Consequently SAVAK {Secret police of the Shah's Regime} trailed some of the Mojahedin leaders for seven months; and on 23 August, a few days before the scheduled bombing, rounded up thirty-five members of the organization. Four members of the group who escaped arrest tried to kidnap Prince Shahram, the Shah's nephew, with the hope of exchanging him for their colleagues, but his armed guards foiled the attempt. After lengthy interrogations SAVAK arrested another seventy suspects together with their relatives and acquaintances, some of whom were afterwards released for lack of evidence. ... Those on Mass trials of 1972 included eleven of the sixteen-man Central Cadre elected in 1968, including Rajavi.' {PP: 128, 129} The military judges dealt harshly with the defendants. Eleven were sentenced to death; 16 to life imprisonment; 11 to prison terms ranging between ten and fifteen years; and 25 to terms varying between three and nine years. Nine of 12 condemned to death were executed in April and May of 1972. ... Two of those condemned to death, Bahman Bazargani and Rajavi, had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment. {P: 135}

By mid - 1975 the Mojahedin ... suddenly and without visible warning, shook the whole opposition, secular as well as religious, by publishing a vehemently anti-Islamic tract,... From then on there were two rival Mojahedin organizations. One was the Muslim Mojahedin which refused to relinquish the original name and accused its opponents of gaining control through a bloody coup d'etat; after the Islamic Revolution it managed to regain fully the original title. The other was the Marxist Mojahedin which initially took the full name of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran: then in 1978 assumed the label ... of the Marxist-Leninist Branch of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran; and finally during the revolution merged with some Maoist groups to form the Sazeman-e Paykar Dar Rah-e Azadi-ye Tabaqeh-ye Kargar (The Combat Organization on the road for the emancipation of the working class.'{P: 145, 146}

'The Muslim Mojahedin survived partly in the provinces, partly in sections of the Tehran bazaar, but mainly in the gaols. The organization was especially strong in Qasr Prison where Rajavi headed their commune. ... 'The Muslim Mojahedin was rapidly brought back to prominence by the dramatic events of 1977-1979. ... In January 1979, only three weeks before the final collapse, the regime let out the last batch of political prisoners. They totalled 162 and included all those serving terms longer than fifteen years. Among them was Masoud Rajavi of the Mojahedin.' {P: 170}

By February 1979; 'the revived Mojahedin was under the firm control of Masoud Rajavi and his hand-picked entourage, most of whom had been in his commune in Qasr Prison. Mussa Khiabani, Rajavi's right hand man, had been among the sixty-nine tried in 1972. { Another one } Mehdi Abrishamchii, another visible member of the new leadership, was a 33 year-old former chemistry student at Tehran University. ... Whereas Rajavi and Khiabani, and to a lesser extent Abrishamchi, Davari and Saadati, were often in the public eye during 1979-80, the rest of the top leadership, organized into a secret central cadre remained out of the limelight waiting for the day when the organization could risk coming out fully into open. ... It should also be noted that all of them accepted Rajavi's pre-eminent role: some because they had belonged to his prison commune; others because they looked up to him as the leading survivor of the early heroic days; and others because he had refused to waver in the dark days of 1975-76 and had consistently opposed both the Maoists and those advocating a rapprochement with the anti-regime clerics. Other veterans of the early days, who had remained true to their faith but for one reason or other did not accept Rajavi's pre-eminent role, quietly withdrew from the leadership: some dropping out of politics entirely; others

acting merely as Mojahedin sympathizers. Thus from February 1979, Rajavi's circle of trusted followers headed all the key positions within the Mojahedin.' {P: 174}

'The new leadership stuck to the principal teachings of the early Mojahedin. This is amply illustrated by a series of lectures which Rajavi delivered at Tehran Polytechnic immediately after the revolution and which the organization soon published as its main ideological handbook. Entitled Tabayan-e jahan (Explaining the world) ... these lectures reiterated much of the early Mojahedin teachings about historical materialism, the class struggle, the relationship between base and superstructure, the transformation from feudalism to capitalism, and the inevitable coming of the classless tawhidi {monastic} society. They also reiterated the early Mojahedin views on Western imperialism, the importance of the 1963 Uprising, and the need to reveal the revolutionary essence of true Islam. Only in one respect did they differ from the earlier tracts: they scrupulously avoided criticizing the ulama {Religious leaders}. In fact, these lectures were so similar to the early Mojahedin pamphlets that some of Rajavi's opponents accused him of 'plagiarism'<sup>vii</sup>. ... The Mojahedin in the past had had little to say about democracy and political pluralism - that little had been unflattering. The Mojahedin of the later years threatened by the ever-increasing power of the clergy, eagerly adopted as its very own the cause of democracy and political pluralism.'{P: 183, 184}

'By the fateful day of 20 June { 1981 }, the Mojahedin - together with Banisadr {Then president of Iran} - were exhorting the masses to repeat their 'heroic revolution of 1978-9', pour into the streets, and overthrow the 'dictatorship of the mullahs' which, according to them, was a hundred times worse than the detestable Pahlavi regime. {P: 206, 207}

'On 20 June 1981, vast crowds appeared in many cities, especially in Tehran, , ... { But } The success of 1978-9 had not been duplicated. Having failed to bring down the regime, Banisadr and Rajavi fled to Paris where they tried to minimize their defeat by claiming that the true intention of 20 June had not been so much to overthrow the whole regime as to show the public that Khomeini was as bloodthirsty as the Shah and that the opposition had made one more attempt at unarmed protest before resorting to armed resistance<sup>viii</sup>. 'Our true intention', Rajavi now claimed, 'had been to educate the public about Khomeini's real nature.'<sup>ix</sup> The victims of 20 June would have been surprised to hear that the whole venture had been an exercise in public education. Whatever their true intentions, the Mojahedin soon hailed 20 June as their 'Ashura, their Karbala, and their day to stand up and die rather than submit to tyranny.' {P: 218, 219}

'On 28 June, a large bomb ... blew up the IRP {Islamic Republic Party} headquarters in Tehran, killing Beheshti {The head of Iranian Judiciary} , four cabinet ministers, and an unknown number of party functionaries<sup>x</sup>. .... The bomb unleashed a reign of terror unprecedented in Iranian history. Blaming the Mojahedin, the regime struck at the opposition in general and at the Mojahedin in particular. In the six weeks following the explosion, over 1000 were sent to the firing squads; almost twice the number of royalists executed after the revolution. And in the next nine weeks - after another mystery bomb demolished the Premier's office, killing both Bahonar and Rajai {Then president and prim minister of Iran}- an additional 1200 were executed. By early November, the number of known executions had reached 2665 Mojahed; '. {P: 68}

At the same time, MEK claimed between 20<sup>th</sup> June 1982 and 20<sup>th</sup> June 1983 they were able to kill 2800 of the revolutionary guards and supporters of the regime<sup>xi</sup>.

'Once it became clear that the June 1981 Uprising had failed, Rajavi decided to leave Iran and continue the struggle from abroad. ... Having received political asylum {from France} , they announced to the world that they would soon be returning home to replace the Islamic Republic with a Democratic Islamic Republic.' {P: 243} When 'Mojahedin realized that the second revolution was not at hand, and so began to prepare for a prolonged armed struggle; organizational militancy now took precedence over political expediency. Hard core militants became more important than 'fair-weather friends' and 'fellow travellers'. the 'quality' of members more important than quantity of sympathizers; organizational discipline more important than the appearance of internal democracy; and ideological purity in the rank and file more important than frequent contacts with outside sympathizers especially if such sympathizers could contaminate the ordinary members. Thus the outward reaching attitude was replaced with an inward-looking attitude that treated allies as if they were potential enemies. The new view perceived those who were not fully for the Mojahedin as being against it. Having reached those conclusions, the Mojahedin began to squeeze 'half-hearted friends' out of the National Council<sup>xii</sup>. Some former members of the National Council believe that the Mojahedin could have ironed out its differences with Banisadr and the Kurdish Democratic Party. MEK destroyed Iranshahr<sup>xiii</sup> when that paper dared to publish a series of interview with prominent exiles mildly critical of the organization. It freely accused critics of being SAVAK agents.' {P: 249}

'By the autumn of 1981, the Mojahedin were carrying out daily attacks assassinating officials ambushing pasdars {Revolutionary Guards}, and throwing bombs at komiteh centres {Revolutionary centres shaped after 1979 Iranian Revolution}, IRP offices {Islamic Republic Party, governing party after the revolution}, and homes of prominent clerics. These attacks, according to a government report published in mid November, took the lives of 504 Pasadars (Revolutionary Guards)<sup>xiv</sup>. ... The Mojahedin also carried out a series of daring suicide attacks -what can be best described as 'propaganda by deed'. On 6 July {1981}, a Mojahedin band outside Amol, dressed as pasdars ambushed and killed Hojjat al-Islam Shariati-Fard, the chief prosecutor of Gilan. On 4 August, another Mojahedin band assassinated Dr Ayat, in broad daylight in the middle of Tehran;... On 11 September, a 22 year old Mojahed attempting the Friday Prayer at Tabriz walked up to Ayatollah Baha al Din Madani, the City's Imam Jom'eh { Friday Prayer's Imam}, and exploded two hand grenades, killing himself, his intended victim, and seventeen pasdars. ... On 29 September, another mojahed blew up himself and Hojjat al-Islam Hasheminezhad, the IRP leader in Khorasan. This Mojahed was a 17 year old high school student who had joined the organization during the street demonstrations of 1978. On 8 December a 21 year-old woman killed herself and Ayatollah Abol Hosayn Dastghayb, The Imam Jom'eh of Shiraz, by walking up to him after his Friday sermon and exploding a hand grenade hidden under her full chador. ... The assassination campaign continued into 1982. On 26 February, a 20 year old Mojahed shot dead Hojjat al Islam Mostawfi Hojjati Just as he was concluding his Friday Prayer. ... On 7 March, another young mojahed, armed with a machine gun, in the middle of Tehran successfully ambushed the country's chief of police. ... On 15 April, a 15 year old mojahed threw a hand grenade at Hojjat al - Islam Ehsanbaksh, the Imam Jomeh of Rasht. On 2 July a 22 year old mojahed, attending Fiday Prayer in Yazd, detonated a hand grenade, killing himself, thirteen Pasdars, and Ayatollah Ali Mohammad Sadduqi, the city's Imam Jom'eh and one of Khomeini's closest advisors. ... On 15 October, a 20 Year old college student, chanting pro Khomeini slogans, exploded a hand grenade just as he embraced Ayatollah Etaollah Ashrafi, the Imam Jom'eh of kermanshah<sup>xv</sup>...' {P: 220, 222}

On 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1983 MEK announced names and particulars of 7746 of their members and supporters killed either in action or by execution. While about the same time, they announced; killing of 2800 of the Regimes supporters and revolutionary guards<sup>xvi</sup>.

'The number of assassinations and armed attacks initiated by the Mojahedin fell from the peak of three per day in July 1981 to five per week in February 1982, and to five per month by December 1982. The total number of executions - at least, those announced by the regime - dropped from the high of 375 in 17 - 22 September 1981: there were 56 in 27 October - 3 November; 14 in 7-14 May 1982; and 4 per week by August 1983, In all, during the four years following 21 June 1981 reign of terror, including the violent sieges and street confrontations, took the lives of 12,250 political dissidents, three-quarters of whom were Mojahedin members or sympathizers<sup>xvii</sup>. The Karbala of the Mojahedin had proved to be far, far bloodier than that of Imam Hussein and his seventy-two companions.' {P: 223}

'On 27 January 1985, Rajavi announced that he had appointed Maryam Azdanlu to be his co-equal leader. The announcement, dedicated to the memory of Rajavi's first wife, explained that this appointment would give women equal say within the organization and, thereby, would launch a great ideological revolution within the Mojahedin, the Iranian public, and the whole Muslim world. Until then, Mojahedin activists had known Maryam Azdanlu as merely the younger sister of a veteran member, and the wife of Mehdi Abrishamchii, one of Rajavi's close colleagues. The Mojahedin claimed that such decisive action on behalf of women's equality was unprecedented in world history. Five weeks after the initial announcement, the Politburo and the Central Committee - at least, those members who conjured proclaimed that the Mojahedin had asked Rajavi and Maryam Azdanlu to marry each other both to deepen this great 'ideological revolution', and to avoid the 'insoluble contradictions' that would appear when an unmarried pair worked together closely<sup>xviii</sup>.

To have remained co-leaders,' the proclamation argued, 'without being married would have been mere bourgeois formalism' - only true believers claimed to grasp the inner meaning of this argument.' {P: 251} 'The proclamation went on to list the reasons why the organization had eagerly followed Rajavi's great revolutionary leadership'. ... The proclamation also mentioned almost in passing that Maryam Azdanlu and Mehdi Abrishamchii had recently divorced in order to pave the way for this 'great revolution'. The proclamation added that divorce rarely took place among the Mojahedin. Even more bizarre, the proclamation ended by reminding the readers that the Prophet Mohammad had intentionally caused much controversy when he had married the recently divorced wife of his adopted son. The proclamation was signed by thirty-four members of the Central Committee and its Politburo: This was the very first time the organization had revealed the names of the top leadership. (Some former members argue that the Central Committee had been drastically reorganized at the time of the marriage in order to replace critics of Rajavi with the staunch supporters.) Whatever the true reasons behind the marriage, the results were crystal clear. The marriage worked both to isolate further the Mojahedin from the outside world and, at the same time, to initiate a voluntary purge within the organization itself. In the eyes of traditionalists, particularly among the bazaar middle class, the whole incident was indecent. It smacked of wife-swapping, especially when Abrishamchii announced his own marriage to Khiabani's younger sister. It involved women with young children and, even more unforgivable, the wives of close friends- a taboo in traditional Iranian culture. To top it all, the reference to the Prophet was not only irrelevant but also outrageously irreverent. The incident was equally outrageous in the eyes of the secularists,

especially among the modern intelligentsia<sup>xi</sup>. It seemed to confirm their worst suspicions about the Mojahedin's 'petit bourgeois' nature. It made mockery of other people's intelligence. It projected onto the public arena a matter that should have been treated as private issue between two individuals. It reminded them of the Shah who claimed to champion women's rights both when he had launched his white Revolution and when he had designated his empress to be his heir until his son came of age - especially when Rajavi organized a large wedding ceremony packed with his staunch admirers pledging allegiance to the co-leaders and their ideological revolution. Even the poses taken by the Rajavis for their wedding pictures reminded many of the previous occupants of Niavaran Palace. Sceptics also raised two rhetorical questions: what contributions either intellectual or organizational, had Maryam Azdanlu made to deserve to be co-leader; and why, if she was such a committed feminist, was she now giving up her own maiden name to take that of her husband (something most Iranian women did not do and she herself had not done in her previous marriage.)? Puran Bazargan, Hanifnezhad's widow (Hanifnezhad was one of the founders of MEK, and first leader of the organisation) and the very first woman Mojahed, wrote an open letter describing the marriage as an insult to the memory of the early Mojahedin<sup>xx</sup>. She also stated that much of the wedding reminded her of the Shah; and that the divorce, the abandonment of children, and the marriage to the wife of a close friend was unprecedented in political movements.' {P: 252, 253}

'By mid - 1987, the Mojahedin Organization had all the main attributes of a cult. It had its own revered leader whom it referred to formally as the Rahbar (Guide or leader) and Masoul-e Avval, and informally as the Imam-e Hal (The present Imam) - this title was strikingly similar to that of Imam-e Zaman (Imam of the Age) which Shii throughout the ages had used to describe their expected Messiah. The organization had granted unlimited powers to its charismatic leader: Rajavi, as if to flaunt his powers, with a mere stroke of the pen in late 1986 dissolved the entire Central Committee and set up instead a 500 - person Central Council. The Mojahedin had created a rigid hierarchy in which instructions flowed from above and the primary responsibility of the rank and file was to obey without asking too many questions. It had produced its own handbooks, censorship index, world outlook, historical interpretations and, of course, distinct ideology - an ideology which, despite the organization's denials, tried to synthesize the religious message of Shiism with the social science of Marxism. It had its own slogans, insignia, icons, relics, ceremonies, rituals, and liturgy. It had formulated its own esoteric terminology injecting new meaning into old Islamic words and sometimes coining entirely new terms. It had its own history, martyrs, hagiographies, honoured families. It even had its own calendar: each year it observed 6 September, the assigned date for the organization's formation; 31 January, the death of its very first martyr; 19 April, the execution of the first batch of leaders; 25 May, the execution of the three founding fathers; 20 June, the attempt uprising against the Islamic Republic; and 8 February, the martyrdom of Khiabani and Ashraf Rabii {First wife of Rajavi}. The organization had adopted its own dress code and physical appearance. It had developed an all-consuming hatred for the clerical regime and, at the same time, the burning conviction that its own radical version of Shiism was the one and only true interpretation of Islam. It had begun to see the world as divided into two contradictory forces: on one side was the Mojahedin, the vanguard of the select, and those willing to accept its leadership; on the other side was Khomeini, the forces of darkness, and anyone refusing to accept the Mojahedin leadership. It had set up in Iraq its own communes {That now days is called by the MEK as 'City of Ashraf'}, printing presses, offices militia, training camps, barracks, clinics, schools, and even prisons, known as 're-education centres'. The Mojahedin had formulated its own vision of the forthcoming new revolution:

according to this vision, the Islamic Republic would inevitably collapse because of mass unpopularity; the people would then pour into the streets with slogan 'Iran is Rajavi, Rajavi Is Iran', and miraculously the Mojahedin would be able to establish the Democratic Islamic Republic. Clearly by 1988 very few outside the inner circles of the true believers accepted such a far-fetched notion of the future. As the New Revolution took on the shape of the second coming, the Mojahedin became increasingly a world unto itself.' {P: 260,261} 'From mass movement to religion-political sect: The Mojahedin at their height, especially in June 1981, had truly been a mass movement.. ... Their impressive record of heroism and death was an additional force, especially since the country's political culture placed great value on the mystique of martyrdom. They thus felt strong enough in June 1981 to attempt a mass insurrection against the regime, hoping to duplicate the 1979 revolution against the Pahlavi monarchy.' {P: 258}

'Finally, the Islamic Republic in June 1986 won another major victory in its campaign to isolate the Mojahedin. It persuaded the French government to close down the Mojahedin headquarters in Paris as a preliminary step towards improving Franco-Iranian relations. ...The French promptly expelled Rajavi, his staff, and many of his followers. Unable to find refuge elsewhere in Europe, Rajavi put the best face possible on this defeat: he said that he was moving the Mojahedin headquarters to Iraq because they had accomplished their original mission in Europe, which was to educate the West about the evils of Khomeini<sup>xxi</sup>. Few outside of the ranks of the true believers found such arguments persuasive. The Mojahedin was now isolated geographically as well as politically. '{P: 258}

We will follow the rest of story of MEK from an independent report recently prepared by: Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, Judith Larson of RAND<sup>xxii</sup> for the U.S. Secretary of Defence:

'After invading Iran, Saddam Hussein began to supply funds to enable the MEK to extend the reach of the NCRI's (Political wing of MEK) European publicity campaign against the IRI (Islamic Republic of Iran) as payment for any intelligence that the MEK could offer regarding Iran. In 1986, in exchange for Iran's assistance in securing the release of French hostages held in Lebanon, France attempted to expel the MEK leadership and end the MEK's use of France as its western base. That year, the MEK leadership cadre accepted to join forces and fight with Saddam's military. Saddam provided the MEK with protection, money, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, tanks, military training, and the use (but not the ownership) of land. With these resources, the MEK leadership established new compounds in Iraq and encouraged MEK supporters in Iran and elsewhere to relocate to Iraq<sup>xxiii</sup>. Approximately 7,000 members, comprising approximately 80 percent of the exiled MEK population, went to those camps. Rajavi named the MEK contingent in Iraq the National Liberation Army (NLA) to portray the MEK as a more legitimate insurrectionist group.

In exchange for his support, the MEK provided Saddam with intelligence on the IRI, interrogation and translation services, and direct military assistance. The MEK launched numerous raids across the border into Iran, clashing with Iranian military forces and the IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guards corps), sometimes with the assistance of the Iraqi military. On July 25, 1988, shortly after Khomeini's cease-fire announcement, the MEK launched its largest mission, Operation Eternal Light, hoping to deliver the final blow to the IRI. Rajavi hoped that, through a demonstration of its manpower, the MEK could incite a domestic revolt against the IRI. He ordered the entire MEK contingent in Iraq to invade Iran, assigning each NLA brigade a province to "liberate," anticipating that the Iranian military and public would support the MEK and turn against the IRI. However, the envisaged military and

popular support in Iran did not materialize –at least in part because the MEK had allied itself with the instigator of the war and had killed Iranian conscripts- and the operation was crushed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Operation Eternal Light invasion cost the MEK more than 1,500 NLA lives (approximately a quarter of the MEK contingent living in Iraq) and prompted the Iranian regime to carry out a mass execution of more than 4000 MEK members and sympathizers living in Iran. Nevertheless, the Rajavi leadership leveraged the quasi-military character of the NLA and the failure of the mission to consolidate its control over the MEK and to initiate a series of policy changes that continued the transformation of the increasingly insular organisation into a cult.

### **Exile in Iraq, 1988 – 2003**

Despite the MEK's many asserted military "successes", these operations failed to undermine the IRI and instead intensified the Iranian public's negative view of the MEK, primarily because of its willingness to kill Iranian conscripts. Although it has not conducted a large-scale military action since 1988, the MEK continued to commit acts of violence in Iran and abroad, aiming at Iranian government or military targets but sometimes injuring or killing bystanders. Some of these attacks have occurred in the United States and Europe. The MEK often asserts that it has been blamed for attacks conducted by unaffiliated or splinter organisations. However, the MEK itself, through its NCRI, claimed responsibility for more than 350 attacks in 2000 and 2001 alone. The MEK service to Saddam continued after Iran-Iraq war. For years, the group provided security services in the region around its camps. In the aftermath of the first {Persian} Gulf War, the MEK is widely believed to have assisted Saddam in the violent suppression of the Shia and Kurdish uprising of 1991. MEK officials strenuously deny any involvement in the atrocities against Shia and Kurds, alleging that they were attacked by combined Kurdish and Iranian forces and that the MEK did not even defend itself. However, the allegations of the group's complicity with Saddam are corroborated by press reports that quote Maryam Rajavi encouraging MEK members to "take the Kurds under your thanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards."<sup>xxiv</sup> as well as the timing of Saddam's conferring the Rafedeen Medallion –a high honour in the Iraq military – on Masoud Rajavi. Whatever the truth of the matter, much of the Iraqi public believes that the MEK did commit violent acts on Saddam's behalf against Shias and Kurds.<sup>xxv</sup>

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States and United Kingdom and overthrow of Sadam Hussein's regime; MEK was forced to surrender all its weapons. Since then the MEK claims that it formally rejected the use of violence. 'Although there is limited documentary proof of this decision in either English or Farsi, ... There may have been a change in the status of the MEK's leadership as well. Ever since the commencement of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Masoud Rajavi has been missing. It is unknown whether he is in hiding or whether he is even alive. In his absence, Maryam Rajavi, the "president-elect" of Iran according to the NCRI, has become the sole visible leader of the MEK. However, portraits of both Masoud and Maryam Rajavi continue to be displayed in all buildings at Camp Ashraf.'<sup>xxvi</sup>

Reviewing the history of MEK, the reader can realize why I chose MEK as a very appropriate and complete example of a destructive cults. It seemed they have had what ever characteristics other cults have had. Like Zealots they thought with increasing violence in both sides and forcing the enemy to suppress and repress its sympathisers, pretending to be oppressed, they can force people into rebellion and revolution. In stealth, deceiving friends and enemies alike, killing or harming their



enemy and opponents via infiltration into their camp, pretending to be a friend, breaking all norms and traditions of their culture and their people to achieve their goals, they were well ahead of Zealots and Assassins. Also in betraying their country and their people, working hand in hand with the enemy of their people to achieve their goals, they can teach Assassins one or two lessons. Their strange doctrine which is a mixture of religion and socialism is remainder of Jim Jones's teachings. Also Rajavi's marriage to wife of his close friends, will remind us what David Koresh did. As his order to members to divorce their spouses, leave their children, and accept celibacy for life and after life is reminder of Hassan Sabbah who ordered members to castration or Applewhite and his Heaven Gate cult.

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<sup>i</sup> MASOUD; Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel; Published by SAQI Book; 2004

<sup>ii</sup> Ervand Abrahamian is professor of history at Baruch College, City University of New York. The Iranian Mojahedin was published by Yale University press New Haven and London – 1989

<sup>iii</sup> Abrahamian book is 307 pages, with facts and figures and references from MEK's publications, his interview with Rajavi himself, which can not be rejected by the organisation easily. As it is a balance and factual and reliable book about the organisation, it has been referred to by academics, researchers and government's agencies such as United States' state department; many times since its publication. Of course MEK was not happy at all to be called a 'cult' by Abrahamian and perhaps this point alone was enough for them to write a book supposedly answering 'Abrahamian's 'lies, distortions and fabrications'. Their answer to Abrahamian's book which was published 'not by MEK' itself but supposedly one of their sister organisations, is very interesting to read as it is one of the clear example of reaction of cults toward their critics. It is called 'Facts and Myth on the People's Mojahedin of Iran'. It is 97 pages, where 62 Pages of the book are photos and copies of mainly their own publications, and propagandas materials. This book was written by Towhidii the chief editor of MEK's Farsi publications and in my view is one of the clear example of how logic and rational of a brain washed person within a cult works. Most of the material that I have coded from the Abrahamian's book has not been rejected by MEK in their published book against Abrahamian.

<sup>iv</sup> Abrahamian; Iranian Mojahedin P: 81

<sup>v</sup> Foot note 16 of the book; The Shah claimed that the clergy opposed the regime because of land reform and women's suffrage. However, Khomeini, in his proclamations during 1961-4, never mentioned land reform and only once, in passing, criticized the electoral law. For his proclamations during this period, see; Fayzieh Seminary, Zendeginameh-e Imam Khomeini -the life of Imam Khomeini- 1979, vol. II, pp. 1-177; Fifteenth of Khordad Group, Khomeini va jonbesh - Khomeini and the movement- 1974, pp. 1-106.

<sup>vi</sup> On the climax of that year's Moharram {This uprising also might be referred to as 'Moharram', the Arabic month of year that it occurred, or 'Ashorra', the day that it occurred or 'Karbala', the place that it occurred. As uprising of Imam Hussein, grandson of prophet Muhammad, against ruler of his time is very important and significant in understanding the philosophy of Martyrdom among Muslims, including those who misuse it for brainwashing and forcing their disciples into self-sacrifice, and suicide operations, I will explain it in Appendix A} celebrations. Unarmed demonstrators, shouting 'Imam Hosayn protects us from injustice' took to the streets of Tehran, Qom, Mashhad, Tabriz, Shiraz, and Isfahan. And the {Shah} regime retaliated by using massive fire power. According to the opposition, the casualties totalled as many as 20,000. According to an American observer, they reached a few thousand. And according to the authorities, they numbered no more than a few hundred. One can question these figures, but one cannot question the significance of the whole crisis which became known as the 5 June (15 Khordad) Uprising. The crisis revealed that a group of clerics bitterly opposed the regime. It raised the clerical opposition to a level where it could easily overshadow the secular opposition, notably the Tudeh {Pro Soviet Communist} party and the National Front. It left a deep mark on these organizations and divided them along generational lines. It proved to be a dress rehearsal for the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979, especially in its use of Moharram and Shii protest symbols. And, most significantly, it propelled Khomeini onto the forefront of the political arena. After a brief spell in prison, he was deported to Turkey and from there he moved to the Shii centre of Najaf in Iraq.' Iranian Mojahedin P: 21

<sup>vii</sup> P. Bazargan {First female member of PMOI and wife of the founder of the organization Hanif-Nejad} and T. Haqshenas, Az bonbast-e Aqa-ye Rajavi ta fedakari-ye Abrishamchi -From Mr. Rajavi's impasse to Mr. Abrishamchi's sacrifice- 1986, p.3

<sup>viii</sup> Interview with Masud Rajavi, reporter from Iranshahr {an Iranian paper published outside of Iran} cited from MEK's publication Nashrieh 21 - 6 January 1982;

<sup>ix</sup> M. Rajavi, The mass demonstrations of 20 June- Nashrieh 43, 18 June 1982

<sup>x</sup> Mojahedin never claimed or denied doing this terrorist act. They credited themselves whenever they felt right for doing it, and become silenced about it whenever they felt that they might be called 'terrorists'. But it is known fact that it was done by MEK. Look at RAND report 2009: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG871/>; The Mujahedin-e Khalq in IraqP: 57

<sup>xi</sup> MEK's publication; 'Mojahed' Number 163 dated: 4<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1983

<sup>xii</sup> Political wing of MEK, started as coalition of MEK and few opposition parties and personalities outside of Iran, such as Banisadr the first president of Iran, and KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran), gradually it lost almost all its independent members and changed into a political mouth piece of MEK

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<sup>xiii</sup> Famous Iranian weekly paper, published outside of Iran, that first was supportive of MEK and when for the first time criticised MEK, found it very hard to stand against the organisation's vicious propaganda attack and that was the end of the paper.

<sup>xiv</sup> Iran Times, published outside of Iran, 20 November 1981

<sup>xv</sup> All these terrorist activities have been proudly announced in MEK's publications and Abrahamian has taken this list from the organisation's materials. Who ever was killed by MEK, was named by the organisation as 'revolutionary guard' or 'mercenary of the regime' while the list of those who were killed by the organisation shows that many of death have been innocent passer buys.

<sup>xvi</sup> MEK's publication; Mojahed 168; 8/9/1983

<sup>xvii</sup> Mojahedin Organization, 'the eternal martyrs of freedom: the names and specific information on 12,028 martyrs of the new Iranian revolution', Mojahed 261, 6 September 1985 pp 1-182.)

<sup>xviii</sup> Politburo and Central Committee of the Mojahedin Organization, Proclamation Introducing the New Leadership - 1985 - pp. 1-15

<sup>xix</sup> P. Etezami -pseudonym-, 'concerning the marriage and its great ideological revolution', Jahan 30 -April 1985-, pp. 19-23

<sup>xx</sup> P. Bazargan and T. Hagshenas, Az bonbast-e Aqa-ye Rajavi ta fedakari-ye Aqa-ye Abrishamchi - 1985- pp. 1- 24

<sup>xxi</sup> MEK's publication in English; Iran Liberation V/8 - 10 (8 -21 June 1986)

<sup>xxii</sup> To see full report please refer to: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG871/> (Last seen 22/10/2009)

<sup>xxiii</sup> The largest of the compounds was Camp Ashraf, located in Diyala Province, approximately 20 miles from the Iranian border. The camp was named in honour of Masoud Rajavi's first wife, Ashraf Rabii, who was killed by Iranian troops in Tehran in 1981.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Rubin, Elizabeth, 'The Cult of Rajavi', New York Times Magazine, July 13, 2003, PP: 26, 31. As of February 27, 2009.

<sup>xxv</sup> RAND report 2009: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG871/>; The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq; PP: 60, 63

<sup>xxvi</sup> RAND report 2009: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG871/>; The Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq; P: 66