

Terrorist Organizations Are Cults

**Masoud Banisadr
United Kingdom**

Abstract

In this paper, I attempt to show that there is a difference between an act of terrorism and a terrorist organization. Therefore each should be dealt with differently. I further argue that a terrorist organization is a cult or must change into a cult in order to survive. Therefore, to deal with terrorist organizations we must understand how to deal with cults. The most important action is to take cult members, including radicals and potential recruits of terrorist groups, out of isolation, psychological or physical, rather than push them even more into isolation from wider society.

American novelist Mary McCarthy said, "In violence we forget who we are." When we do forget, we forget what humanity is. Then the life of other human beings becomes as valueless as the life of an insect. This change of perspective happened to me during my membership in an organization that changed from a small guerrilla organization into a popular one, and then into a terrorist group, and eventually into a cult.

Based on my experiences and my observations of other members of terrorist and cultic groups, I will in this paper:

1. Attempt to show that there is a difference between an act of terrorism and a terrorist organization. Therefore, each one should be dealt with differently.
2. Argue that a terrorist organization is a cult or, if it is not, it has no choice but to change into a cult to survive.
3. Show that the key to this transformation is isolation of members and creating in them a phobia and paranoia toward the outside world.

4. Argue that a long-term solution to the issue of terrorism depends on breaking the isolation and the phobia for members and potential recruits.

Background

For almost twenty years, I was a supporter, a member, and then a representative of a cult called Mojahedin e Khalq e Iran—in short, MEK (or Mojahedin). This organization is included among the list of terrorist groups in the United States (US) and, until recently, in the European Union (EU). Of course, because MEK's terrorism is against the Iranian government, Western nations tend to consider its members good terrorists; therefore, contrary to their label, MEK members have had a free hand to do almost anything in the US and in Europe.

When I began introducing myself as a supporter of MEK, neither MEK nor I was who we are now. When the policy of MEK changed solely into violence, we soon both forgot who we were and changed into the opposite of our previous selves.

In 1979, I was a 25-year-old Ph.D. student in the Engineering Mathematics department of the University of Newcastle in the United Kingdom (UK). I had a very happy life. I was married, had a beautiful two-year-old daughter, and was madly in love with my family. Financially, I was from a moderately wealthy family. Politically, I was a liberal in any sense of the word, and therefore against the tyranny of the Shah's regime.

Although it had a violent history during the Shah's era, MEK at that time promoted the slogan, "Independence, Freedom, and Democracy for Iran." In addition, its members portrayed themselves as the champions of women's and minorities' rights. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, MEK's policy, at least on the surface, was nonviolent—even actively against violence. With its slogans and policy of nonviolence, its past history of struggle against the Shah's dictatorship, and about a hundred martyrs, MEK soon changed from a small guerrilla organization into a popular one, able to attract tens of thousands of young people, mainly university and other students and intellectuals, to its public meetings.

On the 20th of June, 1981, everything suddenly began to change, and change quickly. In a matter of a year or two, neither MEK nor I were the same as before. To be precise, we both changed into the opposite of our former selves. On that day, Rajavi, the leader of MEK, proud of himself for having converted the organization from at most a few hundred members of a clandestine group into a popular one with tens of thousands of supporters, felt he could be an Iranian Lenin and could repeat the Bolshevik's October Revolution. He asked all his members and supporters to pour into the streets of Tehran and other major cities and overthrow the government. He thought when these young students began marching in Tehran, people would follow them and they could have their velvet revolution, forcing the revolutionary government to surrender the leadership of the country to them. Well, members and supporters came, but the rest of the people did not. The result was the arrest and sometimes the execution of hundreds of MEK's young supporters, many of them under 18 years of age.

On June 21st, MEK changed from a popular organization into a clandestine, terrorist one, isolated from the wider society. Within a year, MEK lost more than 7,000 of its members and supporters, either in street battles or through executions. At the same time, the group claimed responsibility for the killing of more than 2,000 of the top officials and supporters of the regime.¹ In July 1981, Rajavi and many top members of MEK left Iran for refuge in Paris.

Four years after leaving for Paris, Rajavi announced his marriage to Maryam, the wife of his First Lieutenant. He also announced the beginning of a process called "Ideological Revolution," in which he gave all MEK members a "choice": either leave or accept him as ideological, or absolute, leader.

Although I was a member of the political section of the organization, I was never involved in MEK's violent acts and was never in isolation when the group functioned in Iran. Later, I represented them in the United Nations (UN) and the US. Nevertheless, as a member of a cult, I was changed completely into somebody who was a complete stranger to my past self.²

Terrorism versus Terrorist Organizations

I don't want to bore you with academic definitions of "terrorism" or "cult" and the differences of opinion that exist among scholars, cultures, and governments on these issues.

One can define terrorism as both an "act-based" event (targeting of civilians) as well as [*sic*] *an* "actor-based" phenomenon in which non-state actors engage in political violence in order to affect [*sic*] desired political outcomes. The US State Department acknowledges that there is no single definition of terrorism. It uses the term "terrorism" to mean premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. "International terrorism" means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country. On the other hand, the definitions used by scholars tend to place more emphasis on the intention of terrorists to cause fear and terror among a target audience with the aim of persuasion that transcends the harm caused to the immediate victims.³

If we stick to this term, "terrorism," and forget about denial, which usually comes when things go wrong or a noisy journalist swims against the current and reveals the truth, or at least part of the truth, then we can call some political organizations and many governments, including some Western governments, terrorists. Therefore, I am going to separate an act of terrorism from labeling an organization as a terrorist group.

I will call an organization a terrorist organization if its *only* tactic, or at least its *main* tactic, for reaching its goal is an act of terrorism. According to this definition, I will not call any government or popular political organizations, even if they use terrorism to deal with their enemies, terrorists because they are dealing with other problems of society as well; terrorism is not their sole tactic or the pillar of their actions in dealing with their daily problems and objectives.

Terrorist Organizations versus Popular Organizations

To have a terrorist organization, you need two main ingredients: 1) injustice, and 2) a leader—or better yet, a charismatic leader: “Injustice emerges when the development of the freedom of an individual or group of individuals is being constrained by another or others, without the existence of a morally justifiable necessity.”⁴

In the world in which we live, there is no shortage of serious injustice everywhere we look; still, injustice does not need to be real to actually exist, as long as your audience accepts it as real and serious enough to fight for. Therefore, what is important is not injustice by itself, but the relationship between your audience and their perception of injustice. If you can convince your audience to accept that an injustice exists, and that it is serious enough, then you are on; but the pool you can fish from (i.e., for potential supporters) is limited to those who believe there is injustice and that it is very serious. Therefore, I can say that the difference between different organizations and individuals who feed on the misery of people or on injustice depends on the pool that they fish from.

So here is the main difference between a terrorist organization and a popular one that has used or uses tactics of terrorism, but at the same time is dealing with other people’s problems: *A terrorist organization is bound by the morality of its leader, while a popular one is bound to the popular view and the morality of the greater society.*

When you intend to have the moral and financial support of the majority of ordinary people in your country or within your religion, you must abide by their moral code, and if you intend to take power and rule them, you must have some answers for their other problems, apart from the issue of injustice. The majority of ordinary people do not condone terrorism in all situations, and when they do condone it, it must be within certain norms and conditions. For example, all, or at least most, Muslims accept defensive *Jihad*.⁵ Most people anywhere in the world accept this policy in defense of their country against foreign aggression or occupation. And when the country is occupied by outsiders, its people might even accept any kind of defensive method, including terrorist

suicide attacks, even against noncombatant occupiers. But they will not always accept such actions, and will not automatically accept the actions without any reservations. This explains why, when we are dealing with Palestinian suicide actions, many Muslims, and even non-Muslims, say they understand why such actions have been taken, although they generally condemn the killing of ordinary people. And they might neither condemn the organization that has committed that act, nor consider that organization to be a terrorist group.⁶ Even so, if the suicide attack is the only action or tactic that organization uses, and if the group continues using the same tactics without considering any of the moral codes and boundaries of the people as a whole, or any restrictions on the timing of such actions, then again it is very difficult for that organization to hold on to the support of the majority, even within its own group.

Now consider Al-Qaeda and the act of terrorism of 9/11. Although the majority of Muslims around the world might not love the United States government and might consider it a bully, still, overall, the majority of Muslims in almost all countries not only condemned the terrorist act of 9/11 from the bottom of their heart, but also recognized Al-Qaeda as a terrorist organization and condemned it vehemently. And this is where we must differentiate the two types of organizations from each other. Al-Qaeda's pool for fishing, contrary to some comments in the West, is not in general the ordinary Muslim community. Al-Qaeda has its own pool. And contrary to Palestinian organizations, it doesn't need to be bound by the morality of the majority of Muslims. It can even kill Muslims "in the name of Islam." As a matter of fact, the majority of the victims of Al-Qaeda have been Muslims, not non-Muslims. Look at the events in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Pakistan. Al-Qaeda doesn't claim to be an alternative to this or that government; therefore, it doesn't need to have a solution for other problems of the people, and therefore it doesn't need to commit itself to doing other things apart from terrorism under the banner of the *Jihad*.

Looking at these two examples, one can see that the main difference between the two types of organizations is that a popular organization is bound by society's morality, while a terrorist organization is free in this sense, and strangely its members are bound instead by the morals or principles of the organization or its leader.

In Table 1, you can see other essential differences between the two types of organizations:

Change Them or Lose Them

At this point, I want to discuss what happens to the morality of the members when the organization transforms from popular to terrorist. If the organization's sole or main tactic is terrorism, sooner or later it must begin changing the morality of its members because it cannot match the morality of the society from which they have come. The organization must either change the member's morality and belief system or accept factions within and defections from the group on a large scale.

During the Shah's era, MEK carried out only a few terrorist acts—mainly against American military advisers stationed in Iran, and one or two acts against the Shah's top generals. At the time, they were bound by the popular view and moral code; therefore, the group's slogan was "Better a revolutionary killed in vain than he kills an innocent by mistake."⁷ During the new phase of the organization's actions after the revolution, in isolation from wider society, the extent of MEK's terrorism and its moral code changed completely.

After the 20th of June, 1981, when its "velvet revolution" failed, MEK changed its tactic and went after the head of the regime.⁸ By then, the group's leaders were thinking that Ayatollahs cannot run the country because they are not sophisticated enough and don't know anything about how to run a 20th century country. They were saying to us supporters that the regime has no alternative but to become dependent on imperialism and change into lackeys of America. They were saying the only person within the Iranian establishment who might be able to work with Americans and save the regime from collapsing was Ayatollah Behashtii. Therefore, on the 28th of June, 1981, MEK exploded the centre of the Islamic Republic party and killed Behashtii, along with more than 70 top officials of the new establishment. But because MEK still was a popular organization—or its members still thought so—and their act of terrorism was not against one person, but a building, and they didn't know who was there and who was not, they therefore never claimed nor denied the operation vehement-

Table 1

Subject	Popular Organization (with acts of terrorism)	Terrorist Organization (with terrorism as its pillar or only activity)
Pool	Society or majority of people.	Selected section of the society.
Ideology	Has shades of gray.	Black and white (either with us or against us). ⁹
Morality	Bound to morality of society.	Bound to the survival of the cult and its leader. ¹⁰
Action and Tactic	Varies, and might include violence.	Only or mainly acts of terrorism.
Organization: Checks and Balances	Democratic or semi-democratic. Bound to the view and support of the people, and from within, through the structure of the organization. ¹¹	Clandestine organization; self-nominated, dictatorial leader; no checks and balances for the leader. ¹² In the case of Al-Qaeda, has evolved into some sort of franchise. ¹³
Finance	Mainly by society.	Mainly by members and supporters. ¹⁴
Answers to Needs of its Audience and Members	If you claim to be an alternative (e.g., not a terrorist organization), you must have an answer for other problems of the society; and in the case of members, to be able to face their material needs as well as their moral and emotional ones.	You educate your audience and members to see injustice as the only real and important matter worth dealing with, and that they have to put everything else aside. Through Mind control, you will control the needs and emotions of your members, forcing them to see the needs of the organization and its leader as their own needs. ¹⁵
What Members Gain	They gain the respect of society and perhaps a job, fame, and public responsibility. They can have family and a normal life in addition to what they are doing.	They lose a normal life, their individuality, and their normal self. They gain equality and even superiority.* Denial of death and fear of pain gives them courage unachievable in ordinary life. They find a sense of belonging and a new collective 'self' and 'individuality.' They are glorified by titles such as hero, Mojahed, vanguard, or martyr. ¹⁶ *For example, in MEK, the women's ranks are higher than the men's, and all leadership council members are women. They gained their superiority through selflessness or, as they used to say, through being 'nothing-ness or nobody-ness' more than men. Also, in the case of women suicide bombers, they reach equality and even superiority through death. ¹⁷)

ly and publicly as their own. At the same time, they were benefiting from the fruits of the operation, as a display of how powerful they were. But gradually, as they realized that their support was restricted only to their members and organizational supporters, they put their shyness aside, and they claimed all their terrorist activities, including the killing of more than 2,700 people in the two years since the killing of Behashtii and other officials. As an example, I can mention a suicide operation, the killing of Ayatollah Madani, a religious representative of Khomeini in Tabriz,¹⁸ and another suicide operation, the killing of Ayatollah Dastghayb, a religious representative of Khomeini, in Shiraz.¹⁹ By the way, if I am not mistaken, these are either the first or among the first suicide operations of Muslims in modern times.²⁰ Another significance of this operation at Shiraz was that, for the first time, a female operative and not a male had performed a terrorism act in a Muslim country. Other significant aspects of these operations included:

- Breaking the taboo of suicide. Muslims, like Christians, believe suicide is a great sin, and the one who commits it is worthy of going to hell.
- Breaking the principal related to taking no action in public places. Other innocent people were among the deaths.²¹
- The fact that many suicide bombers killed their victims during Friday sermons, where the Mosque and any place in which people pray traditionally are considered as sanctuaries. According to the religious rulings, even churches and synagogues are safe from violence.
- The fact that they killed a member of the clergy, an Ayatollah, an old noncombatant person—again, along with women and children, all prohibited by Islamic law and principles.²²

As you can see, when your tactic and strategy changes to solely terrorism, you cannot be bound by popular morals. At the same time that the group loses the support of wider society, its members and organizational supporters become more important.²³ Then the organization faces this dilemma: What should it do with the morality and beliefs of its members and supporters? After all, they are, or were,

ordinary individuals from the same society, bound by the same code of morality and beliefs, and responsible at least in front of their family and friends.

The answer for any organization at this point of transition is obvious: "Change them or lose them." By 1981, there were a few other organizations, some as famous as MEK, such as Fedayyan, who were fighting the Iranian government. They had almost the same history as MEK. But, unlike MEK, they didn't change into a cult; as a result, they, along with all the other similar organizations, sooner or later faced division and the loss of most of their members and supporters. All of them were forced to change their strategy and tactics, and some were as decent as to announce their dissolution. MEK, in contrast, instead of changing its strategy and tactics in order to survive as an organization, changed itself into a cult.²⁴ In isolation from wider society, and through the most sophisticated methods of mind control, it changed the morality and belief system of its members and as a result didn't face any division or mass defection.²⁵

By then, we (members and supporters) were changed and were not thinking as ordinary persons or individuals any more, but as members of the organization—or, as we used to call ourselves, Mojahed (literally, struggler). Let me read here what was going on in the mind and heart of one of those members, 24-year-old Gohar Adab-avaz, who killed a religious representative in Shiraz. In this operation, Gohar Adab-avaz, with her suicide attack, killed Dastghaib, the representative of Khomieni in Shiraz, and another 12 people. Before this operation, she wrote in her will:

I don't think I am the owner of my own existence. My existence belongs to God, people, and the Mojahedin organization. If my life can pave the way (for others), it will be a worthwhile present for this path. I with an awareness and eager decision am waiting for that day.

It was written that, till very late the night of the operation, she was helping others to prepare everything for the next day's operation. On the day of the operation, before going out, she gave her watch and 14 Tomans of money that she had to her *masoul* (person in charge of him) and said, "I know what I am going out for and I have pointed all my

attention toward the heart of the enemy." When she was passing under a tray containing the Koran, a mirror, and water, as is the Iranian custom for going on a journey, in this case a journey toward infinity, she kissed the Koran and asked God for help.²⁶

Terrorist Organizations versus Cults

I am sure you are well aware of the different definitions that exist for the term *cult*, and I am not going to bother you with a lengthy discussion about what is and what is not a cult. And to avoid further difference of opinion, I am not going to talk about small, peaceful cults, but extreme ones. Most everyone knows of them and knows how they act.

In my view, to have an extreme cult, you must have three main ingredients:

1. A charismatic leader.
2. A doctrine, a cause, or an ideology.
3. Isolation, psychological and/or physical, from the wider society, or perhaps, as Lifton calls it milieu. In isolation, you can have dependency of group members on the cult or leader, you can have obedience, and eventually you can control the minds of your disciples.

Now, if you compare the main ingredients of both a terrorist organization and an extreme cult, you can see that both share the first two elements; namely, a charismatic leader, and a cause or an ideology. What remains for a terrorist organization to change into an extreme terrorist cult is Isolation from larger society.²⁷

Hate and Phobia: A Path Toward Absolute Isolation

Questions that you might ask concerning the ideology of a terrorist group include the following: Is the ideology of a terrorist organization important and decisive? Is the organization bound by the moral code of that ideology? My answer to the first question is that the type of ideology or doctrine, although it might be important at the beginning for current and potential group members, and could play a decisive role then, gradually it will lose its importance. It is the leader who defines the ideology and where it goes. For

example, MEK and Al-Qaeda both have claimed that their doctrine is "true Islam," and at times they both have demonstrated great dogma regarding the behavior of their members, to fit with Islamic principles concerning individual behavior—things such as not eating pork or drinking alcohol. They also have used the Islamic vocabulary extensively to legitimize their actions, using words like "lesser *Jihad*" to legitimize terrorism and "greater *Jihad*" to control the minds and behavior of their members. But at the same time, both have shown that when the principles of Islam are in conflict with the interests of the cult, it is the interest of the cult that comes first. In my view, the main ingredient of the ideology of these groups is to believe in the world of black and white: People, governments, and other organizations are either with them or are against them; there is no grey area. The immediate result of believing in a black and white world is hate, paranoia and phobia.

I don't think there is any need for me to talk about hate because we have seen more than enough of it in the media, unfortunately sometimes from the liberal side as well (I mean this in terms of the liberal-democracy side, and not of the political position of the politicians or writers or reporters who act as agents of hate in the West). An example is a short, controversial, anti-Islam film made recently in the Netherlands by a member of parliament, Geert Wilders.²⁸

The second result of this ideology is phobia. The difference between phobia and fear, in my opinion, is reflected in two elements: First, fear generally is rational, but phobia as a rule is irrational. Because of this irrationality, it is very difficult to overcome a phobia. When you have a phobia about a mouse or a spider, for example, it is not rational because neither of them is likely to harm you seriously, but still you are horrified by them. This irrationality stops you from facing your fear and finding out the truth of the matter. The second element is disgust. A phobia is a mixture of fear and usually disgust. Both irrationality and disgust, as elements of phobia, force you toward isolating yourself from the so-called enemy and eventually from whoever has some kind of connection with the enemy, and later from whoever doesn't think like you. Gradually, you see other people as inhuman or subhuman. In MEK, we used to call them "ordinary" people, and as a result, it was an insult to us to be called ordinary.

In a tiny book called *Advice to Revolutionary Youth* (Rahnamodha'e be'a javanan enghalabi), we can see how MEK used to define "ordinary" people. According to this book, "...[the] mind of those who grew up during the Shah era, through education at school and high school and especially Western programs and movies of television, were educated and directed toward things unrelated to our problems and cultures. Gradually they were becoming 'stupefied', 'narcotised', and eventually rotten and corrupt." In the same book, MEK separated us from ordinary people by defining a MEK member as "Those who have rejected the education which was given to them by the system; they reject fake heroes like Bruce Lee and instead find the real heroes of the people; they read and memorize stories of revolutionaries and Mojahedin, and also they start memorizing and singing revolutionary songs and poems. They learn about the characteristics of Mojahedin and try to duplicate them in their own daily life. Then they face new questions. 'How can one be?', 'How can one live?', and the most important of all, 'How can one die?'"

This was the start of a path toward the world of black and white; toward "either with us or against us," toward hate of outsiders, including one's own family and friends, looking at them as animals surrendered to their animal instincts.²⁹

When something disgusts you, you get rid of it or avoid it without thinking; you do it instinctively. This is what happens when terrorists kill ordinary people. They see them as "sub-human," and so they are disgusted to touch or communicate with them. These ordinary people are those who have either helped the enemy or at least have surrendered themselves to the evil of the time; they are as low as animals or insects, surrendered to their animal instincts. Therefore, their murder is as easy as the killing of an insect and, at most, "a price" (as we used to call it) for freedom, evolution, the happiness of the rest of the people, the glory of your idea, or whatever else you would like to call it. What is important is that you kill them as you kill an insect, without thinking, instinctively.

Isolation and Phobia: Key to Changing Organizations into Cults

In the Al-Qaeda recruit manual, explained by Timothy Noah, we read:

Isolate, Isolate, Isolate! Although recruiters are advised to take care at first not to separate a recruit from his "family, society, and reality," eventually it becomes necessary to "create a favorable environment." This is achieved by "removing him from the bad environment in which he lives" and putting him into "a good environment designed to improve his faith." Until that happens, keep the recruit busy listening to lectures and reading religious pamphlets, especially "those that discuss Heaven and Hell, eternal paradise or eternal damnation," etc. The manual contains a long list of recommended texts ("The jihadist library is large and full of books that were written with martyrs' blood"), audiotapes, and video clips downloadable from the Web."³⁰

In isolation, you can change your members' principles and beliefs, or, as Schein's three steps³¹ suggest, you can unfreeze their beliefs, change them to what you want, and freeze them again. In isolation, they will not face problematic moral questions and don't need to question their new morals and code of practice.

Unfortunately, isolation of members and even supporters of a terrorist organization progresses or increases, day by day, from both sides. First, from the organization side: Even if the leader of the organization doesn't intend to create a milieu situation for mind control within the organization, just because of the violent nature of the group and its acts of terrorism, it has no alternative but to enforce strong secrecy principles within the group, and control members' communications and their relationship with the outside world. At the same time, wider society pushes the members and even supporters of a terrorist organization inward. It does this through the passage of laws, such as the Patriot Act in the United States and the UK's act making

"glorification" of terrorism a crime. There has been so much obsessing over terrorism that the media creates an atmosphere of hate, disgust, and fear toward not only terrorists, but even against the minority groups that the terrorists might belong to.

MEK: Isolating Members and Supporters from the Wider Society

From the beginning, the announced sole strategy and tactic of the MEK organization was "amred [sic] struggle," or in another word, terrorism, even if with a label of revolutionary terrorism or guerrilla war. The relationship of all members to the outside world was highly controlled and under surveillance. Still, for the first few years, many members used to live in their own homes with their own families. Later, with the introduction of terms such as "collective houses" and "professional revolutionaries," most of the high-ranking members were forced to leave their jobs and their families and live in these collective houses, and to change into professional revolutionaries. After the revolution, as they were looking to gain popular support, many lower-ranking members had to leave their secret lives behind and start communicating with ordinary people, their family, and friends. Therefore, for almost three years (1979–1981), although all members and most of the organizational supporters were "professional revolutionaries" and were not allowed to have private lives of their own, still many could have some sort of relationship with the outside world and ordinary family and friends. Then, from 1981 onward, all members and organizational supporters from both sides gradually were put under pressure to isolate themselves more and more from the outside world and ordinary life. By 1982, even the organizational supporters outside of the country, in Europe and the United States, were forced to leave ordinary life behind, start living in collective houses (called *Base*), cut their relationships with family and friends (unless for soliciting), and, step by step, use different tricks, including claims of hard work and not having any free time, to look for other sources of information. Their source of information became restricted to the organization's sources.³² Eventually, by 1990, during another phase of "ideological revolution," all members were forced to divorce

their spouses and forget about sex as long as they were alive.³³

Phobia and Disgust: Key to Being in Society Yet Isolated from It

How can a group let its members live in the society, among ordinary people, behaving normally, even having ordinary relationships with others, and at the same time remain isolated from them? MEK, under its slogan of "corrupted society," Al-Qaeda with its definition of *Jahillyya*, Marxist cults under their banner of the bourgeoisie, and, I presume, other cults under different slogans isolate their members from wider society, not only physically but most importantly mentally. Isolation of members sometimes is easy, when you have the luxury of geographical isolation, as Al-Qaeda has in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and MEK has in Iraq. Interestingly, although MEK has lost its mentor and financier, Saddam Hussein, and there is a new government in Iraq in a friendly relationship with Iran, still the organization insists on stationing 3,400 of its remaining members in Iraq and is not ready to move, even to European and American countries!³⁴ The main reason for this insistence on not expanding is that they don't want to lose this heavenly isolation; they know very well that in Europe and America they would face many problems keeping their members in isolation.

But what about people like me, who had to live outside of Iraq? Here comes the mental isolation. I believe that phobia, paranoia, and disgust are the reasons for mental isolation. Although one lives in the wider society and apparently behaves normally, his inner disgust and phobia toward the enemy and society as a whole will help him to keep his new moral code and beliefs in isolation from the morals of the society as a whole. In other words, one can have an outer personality totally different from the inner one.

You hate all relationships outside of the cult; the ordinary behavior of people disgusts you. You have a phobia and paranoia toward the wider society. Still, you can act and behave "normally" as a means to help reach the cult's goal.

How can you do it? Let me give you an example. I wonder if you have seen one of those TV reality shows that forces people to face their phobias, their disgust, face and even

touch snakes, for example, or eat disgusting things. In this kind of show, ordinary people face their phobias and disgust, even with a big smile, for the prize established by the program producers. Doing this does not mean the experience will change them, and from the next day they will become a snake catcher or forget about their disgust toward that food. They do it for money. And in cults they do it for the goal of the cult. But at the same time, their phobias and disgust keep them from changing internally.

Now let me explain the changes in us, the MEK members, by giving you a few short facts about myself. In 1981, my family and I gave up our private life. We surrendered all our belongings to the organization and started living in the collective houses. In 1982, to help the organization, I lied to my beloved parents for the first time. I said I had a brain tumor, to get money for my treatment, without thinking of how much pain they suffered as a result of this news [breaking moral codes of our society and family]. In 1985, I burned all my past history, including my private photos, and my writings—even my dissertation and thesis [breaking the few emotional links to the past, or, as we used to call it, destroying our bridges behind us]. Next affected was my love for family and friends. As long as I can remember, I had loved my mother more than anybody else. In 1985, when I heard about her sudden death, not only could I not mourn for her, but I was not able to shed even a few teardrops because doing so was a sign of attachment to family and friends. Then, in 1986, after my wife left the organization, I stopped seeing her, although I loved her very much. Eventually, in 1991, MEK went through another “ideological revolution” phase, during which all members were asked to divorce our spouses, not only in reality but in our minds and hearts. Even those who had already lost their spouses had to go through this phase and divorce their loved ones in their memories and emotions. The expression at the time was that being touched by our spouses was like sleeping with or being touched by the body of a dead person that had been rotten for a few months.

Being in Society Yet Isolated from It

At the time, the story of divorce for all members within MEK was a secret. They didn’t want anybody outside of the cult to know about it. At the same time, I was the group’s

representative in the UN and the US. They were very much worried that my wife would find out about the MEK divorce requirement and announce it publicly, which could greatly restrict the group politically. Therefore, they asked me to go to London, visit my family (after a few years of not having seen them), buy them presents, take them to the park, even make love with my wife—all with the condition that I control my emotions and feelings and not fall for them. To the contrary, I was to hate every minute of it because whatever I was doing was completely opposite to the common behavior of the organization's members. I think that was the most difficult job I ever did while I was a member of MEK. I was under immense pressure from both sides. My feelings toward my family still were not completely dead, and at the same time I had to show love and care without feeling love, but, to the contrary, feel disgust. I did so only through remembering the teachings of the organization about this issue. Disgust and phobia (toward becoming an ordinary person and eventually betraying the "Resistance" and falling for the enemy) were helping hands to keep me away from returning to my old self.

Apart from the phobia of and disgust toward becoming an ordinary person with ordinary emotions and feelings, cults create a phobia toward their enemy. MEK in one stage created this phobia toward imperialism and the United States, and in another phase toward the Iranian regime. I remember when, the first time I travelled to the United States and had to meet members of Congress, I still was suffering from that phobia toward them. While I was as full of charm as possible, shaking hands and showing a smile, inside, my feeling was disgust. Phobia and disgust help cults to keep their members isolated from wider society and their enemy, engulfed in their own teachings and propaganda. In addition, you have to realize that phobia and isolation have a resonant effect on each other: An increase in one will intensify the other; in turn, that strengthening will increase the first one. Isolation and phobia are keys to what Lifton calls milieu control, and I believe that, besides having a charismatic leader, milieu control of members is the key to having a cult, or to changing a group into an extreme cult.

What Can Be Done?

Whenever we face terrorism, immediately we face two questions: First, Why—why do people join terrorist organizations? My answer is simple: injustice. Find the root of injustice and destroy it, and you have destroyed that which fuels the ideology of terrorism. But unfortunately, I think as long as we have not attained a perfect world, there always will be some sort of injustice present in different parts of the world. It will be impossible to dry out the roots of injustice and, hence, the roots of some sort of terrorism. Therefore, the second question is: What can be done against terrorism?

Until now, Western governments' policies, especially US and UK policies toward Al-Qaeda, have centered around either:

1. Violence against violence. Examples are in Sudan, Afghanistan, and Iraq. As a result, not only has Al-Qaeda not diminished but instead has flourished. The group proclaims that its struggle has changed from offensive to defensive, in this way hoping to be acceptable to many Muslims.³⁵
2. Compromising liberal values such as "freedom of speech" or "presumed innocent till proven guilty," and "not committing torture." Recent laws in the US and the UK against terrorism, such as the Patriot Act and the Terrorism Act 2006, which includes a section against the "glorification of terrorism," are examples. The Abu-Gharaib and Guantanamo Bay disasters are symbols of these policies. Others include creating more hate and phobia among young Muslims living in Europe and the US, forcing them into even more mental isolation.

Breaking the Spell of Isolation and Phobia

If isolation and phobia are key to a cult's success in keeping its members and recruits within, surely breaking the power of these factors is the key to saving these individuals from destroying themselves and damaging others. I understand that doing this is not as easy as saying it. To solve this problem, I think we must separate short-term solutions of the problem from long-term solutions. Facing an immediate and real threat against civilians might force us to use an iron

fist. But we have to be aware that this approach is not part of an enduring solution; moreover, on many occasions, it acts against the solution to the problem, as it did in the case of MEK during the 1980s in Iran, when the Iranian government wanted to solve the problem with an iron fist. The result then was to push us supporters even deeper into the organization and to give MEK's leaders even more ammunition with which to continue the work of its propaganda machine.

Also, we have to realize that when we arrest terrorists, we are not dealing with common criminals! Do you remember the case of Patty Hearst?³⁶ We are dealing with brainwashed people, and we have to help them rather than punish them. How can we punish people who are welcoming death and pain?

Let me give you two examples: (1) The case of Khalid Shikh Mohammad, who pled guilty in order to be executed by the United States and become a martyr. Now what do you want to do with him? If you accept his confession, you have to accept that he is guilty for 9/11 and kill him, making him a martyr—the best prize that you can give to him and Al-Qaeda. If you do not consider him guilty, what was the purpose of his trial in the first place? (2) The case of an MEK member. He was under 18 when he was arrested during an armed struggle. The penalty for MEK membership and armed struggle in Iran was execution; therefore, his execution was certain. But in this case, the court was more interested in not killing him, to avoid negative propaganda for Iran and to stop MEK from benefiting from the execution of its members and having a new martyr to celebrate. Consider what he said in the court, from an MEK publication:

In his trial, Daryosh Salhshoor; said: "...I was one of those who fought with the Shah's regime and stood against military tanks. The only thing which forced me to take arms and stand (against this regime) was to believe in Mojahedin, which I had and I have and I will have till my last drop of blood. According to this belief I could feel that the present regime has chosen to have the same direction as America. As I am bloody against Americans and I will be, I took arms and this is the

reason of this trial.... Here whoever believes in this path is called *Moharab* (fighting against God), but I don't care, as from the beginning when I chose this path, I was ready for any accusations, I am a follower of Imam Hussein; they accused him in Karbela, as well. They called Prophet Mohammed mad, and Imam Ali apostate. Why should I be afraid of anything as I am following their path! You can execute me, you can call me ... I know the verdict of this court; I know the chance of my execution is 100 percent. Many of my friends were executed too; I will go toward them..."³⁷

He said all of this when he was asked by the judge to say something that would make the court lenient, to pardon him because he was under eighteen.

A long-term solution for this problem requires new laws—not laws that compromise our values³⁸, but laws that recognize the problem of cults and mind control, laws that put a stop to modern slavery. By law we can stop people from committing suicide. Why can't we stop them from killing their individuality? Is the killing of your personality and individuality less criminal than the killing of your body?

At the same time, we have to educate people, especially the Muslim minority, about the cultic character of terrorist organizations. We have to let both them and wider society understand that this issue is neither about Islam nor any other religion or ideology, nor is it about the injustices that people suffer around the world. It is about mind control and those who benefit from the misery of others.

The media can play a great role in solving this problem, or they can make it worse. Let me give you an example: Recently, during Israel's attack on Gaza, there were demonstrations in different cities of the UK, including one that I attended in a small city north of the UK. To my surprise and the organizer's surprise, there were more than 2,000 demonstrators. Later that evening, I was expecting to hear about that demonstration on the BBC local news, but, surprise, there was no mention of it at all. I don't want to mention the other news of that evening to explain the silence policy of the media. The BBC in this case went as far

as rejecting even the government's call to broadcast an appeal to help Gaza's victims.

Even if one has less sympathy toward the Palestinian cause than I do, there are many other incontrovertible injustices in the Middle East. In my view, the media in the West, with their unbalanced reports of news about injustices, can and will help terrorist organizations to recruit. And terrorists should thank them greatly. When we employ a different tactic, it works. When we accept the reality of injustice, and talk about it, this approach shows another possible avenue apart from terrorism that we can take to face this problem. For example, Channel 4 in the UK, just by showing some fairness toward what is happening in the Middle East, has slowed the attraction of young Muslims in the UK toward extremism.

What I am trying to say is that, to confront cults, you have to take them out of isolation. Force them to abide by the moral code of the majority and to be dependent upon the support of the majority. Even financial isolation will not work. To the contrary, the dependency of these organizations on ordinary people will force them out of their isolation and force them to change themselves. This dependency will restrict them and their tactics to the morals of the majority, while their independence means they will depend on their members, which will result in more exploitation of them, more brainwashing, and more extremism.

Notes

¹ The MEK publication, *Mojahed*, 4th of July, 1983, announced the number of people killed by MEK at 2,800. *Mojahed*, 8th of September, 1983, announced the names and particulars of 7,746 people, members and supporters of MEK and other organizations, killed either via armed struggle or by firing squads.

² If you are interested in knowing more about MEK, I can suggest two books. One is by Professor Ervand Abrahamian, called *Iranian Mojahedin*; the second, called *Masoud, Memories of an Iranian Rebel*, I have written.

³ See Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malekova, "Education, Poverty, Political Violence, and Terrorism: Is there a Causal Connection?" NBER working paper, July 2002, 4. Cited from *Dying to Kill* by Mia Bloom.

⁴ See *Terror and Terrorism: A History of Ideas and Philosophical-Ethical Reflections*, by Brig. Gen. Edwin R. Micewski, Ph.D., Director of the Institute

for Humanities and Social Sciences, National Defence Academy, Vienna. Cited from *Cultic Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2, *Special Issue: Terrorism*. pp. 234, 238.

⁵ "Theological opinions (*fatwas*) expressed by the religious authorities declare that it is permissible to put to death people who are, either directly or indirectly, involved with powers that repress Muslims. These religiously motivated opinions also state that it is permissible to kill Muslims who help to enslave their brothers in religion." See *Suicide Bombers; Allah's New Martyrs*, by Farhad Khosrokhavar, p. 68.

⁶ "Martyrdom operations" in many cases are deemed the only answer to opposing the vastly superior military capabilities of the other side. In the words of the founder and spiritual leader of the Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin (assassinated by Israel in March 2004): "Once we have warplanes and missiles, then we can think of changing our means of legitimate self-defence. But right now, we can only tackle the fire with our bare hands and sacrifice ourselves" (The Daily Star, Beirut, Feb. 8, 2002). Sheikh Lutfullah of Lebanon's Hizb'allah (party of God) echoed Yasin's sentiment after the 1983 bombing of the US Marines' barracks in Lebanon when he commented, "Oppressed people cannot always be expected to behave in a reasonable manner." (Great Decisions '86, New York: Foreign Policy Association, p. 36; cited from *Dying to Kill* by Mia Bloom, p. 4.)

⁷ "Would the guerrilla fighters kill anyone other than the blasphemous armed oppressors? Never!" (The statement of the Mojahedin in response to the recent accusations of the Iranian regime [i.e., Shah's regime]; First edition, 1977; p. 15.)

⁸ "The Mojahedin countered state terror with its own brand of 'revolutionary terror.' Rajavi, from his Paris exile, denounced all high-ranking officials as 'collaborators with tyranny,' and as such deemed them appropriate targets for 'revolutionary justice' (M. Rajavi, "Message to the Collaborators," *Nashrieh* 8, 9 October, 1981). Meanwhile, Khiabani, now leading the clandestine network, launched military operations. By the autumn of 1981, the Mojahedin were carrying out daily attacks assassinating officials, ambushing *Pasdars* [revolutionary guards], and throwing bombs at komiteh centers, IRP offices, and homes of prominent clerics. These attacks, according to a government report published in mid-November, took the lives of 504 *Pasdars* (*Iran Times*, 20 November, 1981)... The Mojahedin also carried out a series of daring suicide attacks—what can be best described as 'propaganda by deed.' On 6 July, 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, and exploded two hand grenades, killing himself, his intended victim, and 17 *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, successfully ambushed the country's chief of police in the middle of Tehran.... 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 Friday prayer in Yazd, detonated a hand grenade, killing himself, 13 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..." (Ervand Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, pp. 220, 222).

⁹ Strangely, President Bush gave the same slogan on 20th February, 2001, and also labeled his "war against terrorism" a crusade, both of which fell into the hands of Al-Qaeda. Many Muslims saw the "war against terrorism" as a "war against Islam."

One Al-Qaeda ideologue, to justify the group's black and white ideology and the killing of other Muslims, states: "A vanguard must set out ... marching through the vast ocean of *Jahillyya* [ignorance, implying that ordinary people are not Muslim but ignorant. If you look at *Jahillyya* throughout Islamic history and philosophy, it has a much deeper meaning, but let us for now stick to this simple definition.], which encompasses the whole world. Unless they separate themselves from the influence of the *Jahillyya* they will be contaminated and unable to follow the true path followed by the *Salaf*. [*Salaf* means *ancestor*, but here he means *prophet* and the first few of his disciples. By the way, this is why Wahabiis don't like to call themselves Wahabii but prefer to be called Salafii instead; this includes all Al-Qaeda members. Anyway, let me continue...] We must free ourselves from the clutches of the *Jahili* society ... it is not a worthy partner for compromise. Our aim is first to change ourselves so we may later change society. (Cited from *AL-Qaeda*, by Jason Burke, pp. 54, 55.)

¹⁰ Micewski explains: "Whilst terrorism is not bothered about either morality—moral law—or the public law that rests upon it, terrorism does not hesitate to go public with claims that are devoid of any moral or legal claim." (from *Terror and Terrorism: A History of Ideas and Philosophical-Ethical Reflections*, by Brig. Gen. Edwin R. Micewski, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, National Defense Academy, Vienna. Cited from *Cultic Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2, *Special Issue: Terrorism*, p. 224.)

¹¹ In a little book called *Democratic Centralism*, MEK (when it was a popular organization) outlined its form of organization. In that book was mentioned that "MEK is against one-man leadership and it believes if the organization is being led by just one person, it will end up in some sort of dictatorship." The book's formula for leadership of the organization was a committee of highest experts or vanguards of the group. At least as long as the group had popular support inside Iran, even if the organization was a one-man show, still it pretended that it was run by a group of vanguards, called *Daftar Siasi* or the political bureau, and it seemed that these people were

controlled by a central committee. Then, after MEK left the country, on its path toward changing into a cult, first in 1981, it introduced a new title called *Masoul Aval*, or "first person in charge," who was Masoud Rajavi. Then, at the end of its transformation into a cult, in 1985, MEK, by announcing Rajavi's marriage to Maryam Azdanlo, wife of his First Lieutenant Abrishamchii, announced a new era in the life of the organization, which joined the ideological leadership of Masoud and Maryam Rajavi. Later, Abrishamchii, in his famous speech that became a book explaining the ideological revolution of MEK, announced that anybody within the organization has a *masoul* or a person in charge, except for the Rajavies, who are not responsible in front of anybody except God. Later, in 1990, during another phase of the organization's "Ideological Revolution," all members, apart from divorcing their spouses, had to go through a procedure called "Signature of Sins." This meant that they had to accept all the sins of their leader as their own, or accept all his sins except one, the armed struggle against the Khomeini regime. I believe that now, by surrendering all their weapons to the American Army and under pressure from the EU and having to announce the end of the armed struggle, they have to accept this "sin" of their leader, as well. As you can see, in losing their popular support, the MEK had to move step by step from being a terrorist-political organization into being a cult, with no checks and balances for the leadership.

¹² Abrishamchii, First Lieutenant of Rajavi, in his speech about ideological revolution, emphasized: "As it was mentioned in the political bureau communiqué, all those below the ideological leader are conditioned to their immediate *masoul* (superior or person in charge). But Masoud Rajavi, at the top of the organization, is conditioned to whom or answerable to whom? Nobody but God. And Maryam as co-leader has no superior but God, as well as Masoud Rajavi. MEK's published speech of Abrishamchii, about ideological revolution, pp. 47, 48

¹³ "Al Qaeda operates globally and independently of states. They take state support when they can get it, but they are not manipulated directly by states, and that makes them particularly dangerous. Al Qaeda is less like a state and more like an NGO [non-government organization] with multiple independent franchises. Its terrorists can strike—whether in Bali, Casablanca, Riyadh, Istanbul, Madrid, or New York and Washington—without the direct support of states. These franchises are likely to survive the death of its "corporate parent." Al Qaeda is no longer a regular terrorist organization that can be defeated by killing or capturing its leader; it is a global insurgency that spreads revolutionary fervour throughout the Muslim world. We can target its operatives, but its ideas and inspiration are ultimately far more dangerous. Bruce Hoffman has identified four different types of al Qaeda operatives." (Excerpted from Hoffman, "The Leadership Secrets of Osama Bin Laden.") This has been cited from 'Dying to Kill by Mia Bloom; But the whole article can be found in <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200304/hoffman> ; Bruce Hoffman is the director of the Rand Corporation's Washington, D.C., office and the author of *Inside Terrorism* (1999).

These four types of operatives include "1) Professional cadres. The most dedicated element of al Qaeda. Teams are carefully selected, provided with specific instructions, and generously funded. 2) Trained amateurs. For

example, Ahmed Ressay, arrested in December 1999 at Port Angeles, Washington after entering the United States from Canada with explosive materials in the trunk of his car. Ressay had some background in terrorism.... Unlike the professional cadres, however, Ressay was given only open-ended instructions.... 3) Local walk-ins, independent Islamic radicals who come up with terrorist-attack ideas on their own and then attempt to obtain funding from al Qaeda.... 4) Like-minded guerrillas and terrorists. This group embraces existing insurgent or terrorist groups that have benefited over the years from either Bin Laden's largesse or his spiritual guidance; that have received al Qaeda training in Afghanistan or elsewhere; or that the organization has provided with arms, material, and other assistance in order to further the cause of global *Jihad*." (Cited from *Dying to Kill* by Mia Bloom, pp. 187, 188.)

¹⁴ "The essential feature of this new terrorism is its privatisation. It is financed through charitable foundations, or by wealthy individuals such as Arab businessmen in the Gulf, by the drug trade (opium in Al Qaeda's case), the extortion of funds from shopkeepers and businessmen, the illegal sale of cigarettes or other goods in Western countries (as in the United States), or by taking Westerners hostage." (The Abu Sayaf group in the Philippines specialises in taking tourists hostage.) (From Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers*, p. 163.)

¹⁵ MEK's message to students on the opening day of schools after the summer holiday of 1981 was this: "This year's first lesson is Resistance," and the MEK asked students to prioritise resistance, and choose joining armed pickets over their education (MEK's publication *Nashrieh*, October 9, 1981).

¹⁶ "Ernst Becker in *Denial of Death* writes: 'It is not death that man fears the most, it is death without some sense of personal significance.' Starr in *Feet of Clay* writes: 'The dying Keats, in despair at the lack of recognition accorded him by his countrymen, desired that his name should be left off his tombstone and only these words engraved upon it: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." If so wonderfully gifted a poet as Keats could thus express his disillusion, what is it possible for the ordinary person to say about himself? 'I lived, I died, I know not why. I shall not be remembered.' Therefore, dying for a cause by itself can create great incentive for terrorists and suicide bombers; on top of that some terrorist organizations promise ascent to heaven to their disciples as well. 'Sacrifice and risk—when employed on behalf of the group—become valuable virtues, rewarded by social status. Thus, the culture ... transforms individual risk and loss into group status and benefit, ultimately cycling that status back onto the individual. The higher the risk, the higher the status.'" (From Argo, 'Banality of Evil,' in *Dying to Kill*, C-153, p. 87.)

"Individuality and martyrdom: ...It allows young men to become individuals because it promises them that, when they die, they will have all the things they have been denied in life, namely a paradisiacal existence. Whereas tradition made martyrdom an exceptional and above all painful, phenomenon designed to move believers to pity and to strengthen communitarian bonds in symbolic ways, a modernity in which there is no hope of self-realization generates a type of martyrdom that is readily accessible to any young man who wants it. Dying a holy death allows them

to accede to dignity through sacrifice, whereas everyday life is dominated by insignificance and lack of dignity. It gives meaning and dignity to those who have been dispossessed of them. Martyrdom can give rise to two kinds of individuation through death. The first is what might be termed an optimistic individuation: the individual risks death but has a positive self-image, whatever the outcome. Death is a possibility but the individuals concerned have no intention of dying as such and, if possible, try to escape death.... Pessimistic version. These martyrs are no longer concerned with life on earth. To be more accurate, they want to die and to take with them as many as possible of those they see as the enemy." (Cited from *Suicide Bombers* by Mia Bloom, pp. 49,50.)

¹⁷ "Women in combat belong to a totally new world, a world outside a normal woman's life.... They have taken up a life that bears little resemblance at all to the ordinary existence of women. Training and carrying weapons, confronting battle conditions, enduring the constant emotional strain of losing close associates, facing death almost every day are situations that most women not only wish to avoid, but feel ill at ease with. But not the women fighters of the LTTE. They have literally flourished under such conditions and created for themselves not only a new women's military structure, but also a legend of fighting capability and bravery (from Ann Adele Balasingham, *Women Fighters of the LTTE*, p. ii).

"...The most famous among the women was Dhanu, who hid her explosive beneath her sari, giving her the appearance of pregnancy, and went to meet Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on May 20, 1991. When he clasped her hand as she respectfully kneeled before him, she detonated the device, killing both them and several bystanders instantly. Dhanu became heroine and symbol of the LTTE. The story of Dhanu reached mythic proportions. The perceived heroism of this woman, who committed suicide for her people and her faith, is used as an example to win over new recruits." (In Robert I. Roberg, *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999, p. 25; cited from *Dying to Kill* by Mia Bloom, p. 159.)

¹⁸ MEK's publication, *Nashrieh* ... December 11, 1981.

¹⁹ MEK's Publication, *Nashrieh* ... December 18, 1981.

²⁰ "Suicide terror predates the modern manifestation of car bombs that began in Lebanon. It is neither unique to the modern period nor confined to any single region or religion. The early historical antecedents of terrorism include the Jewish zealots and Sicarii in the first century AD, during the time of the Second Temple until its destruction in 70 AD, The Hindu thugs in India from the time of Herodotus until 1836, the assassins of the twelfth century, anti-colonial movements in Malabar, and the Japanese Kamikaze during World War II. By examining these early examples of terrorism we can deduce certain general patterns that emerged and draw similarities between these early illustrations and the more recent phenomena. The common themes that emerge from the early case studies provide a template of what is happening today: the role of early education in creating adherents, the appearance of charismatic and ambitious leaders, disputes over occupied territory, and the ways in which religion was manipulated to induce followers to kill in the name of God" (from *Dying to Kill* by Mia Bloom, p. 4).

²¹ Of course, whenever ordinary people were among the deaths, they used to name them as agents or spies of the regime, or *Baiji* (members of the mobilization teams)...” Interesting, that among their terrorist activities at the time, they claimed the explosion of three bombs close to where Khomeini used to live (MEK’s publication *Nashrieh*, April 23, 1982) but denied other bombs that were exploded and included casualties of ordinary people, which could not be accepted even among MEK’s own organizational supporters. They claimed the acts were done by the regime itself, (MEK’s publication *Nashrieh*, September 10, 1982) or by another one (MEK’s publication *Nashrieh*, October 8, 1982). But they were not hesitant of even killing the manager of a state agency that by law had to give a rental report for all tenancies (MEK’s publication *Nashrieh*, May 14, 1982), or the head of a local organization for helping farmers (MEK’s publication *Nashrieh*, July 23, 1982). As a matter of fact, in the view of MEK and its supporters, whoever was supporting the regime was criminal and worthy of being killed. Later they changed very much as they started considering people were either with them or with the regime; therefore, whoever is not with them is collaborating with the regime and worthy of being killed. Therefore, within one year, they killed more than 2,000 people and proudly announced it themselves (MEK’s publication; *Nashrieh* number 55; 24/9/1982 also in MEK’s publication *Mojahed* Number 163; 4/8/1983 the number of killed by MEK between 20th of June 1982 and 20th of June 1983 was announced as 2800 people.). Of course later, as they gradually lost all their supporters in Iran due to their being killed either by execution or during armed struggle, they had to send terrorist teams from Iraq; therefore, it was not so easy to target high officials, and so they started exploding oil pipe lines (MEK’s publication *Mojahed*, June 14, 1993) or putting bombs in places like the tomb of Khomeini, which could result in the killing of ordinary people. (MEK’s publication *Boltan*, October 16, 1992).

²² The Rules of *Jihad*: Muslims generally realize that *Jihad* has its rules and conditions. In the Quran, God has emphasized that no one should violate these rules and overrule them. Abu Baker, the first Caliph after the prophet, referring to the Quran and the prophet’s sayings, instructed those who wished to consider themselves Muslim soldiers, “Do not betray; do not carry grudges; do not deceive; do not kill children; do not kill elderly; do not kill women; do not destroy beehives or burn them; do not cut down fruit bearing trees; do not slaughter sheep, cattle, or camels except for food. You will come upon people who spend their lives in monasteries; leave them on what they have dedicated their lives...” (from *Heirs of the Prophet Muhammad* by Barnaby Rogerson, p. 162). Furthermore, Ali, the fourth Caliph, set out more rules to put a stop to killing, including safeguarding POWs. He says, “No one turning his back shall be pursued; no one wounded shall be killed; whoever throws away his arms is safe.” Ali had pardoned with goodness. The dead from both sides were buried; only captured arms and animals could be held as war booty (from *Heirs of the Prophet Muhammad* by Barnaby Rogerson, p. 298).

²³ “[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 travelers”; 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—some former members of the National Council believe that the Mojahedin could have ironed out its differences with Banisadr and the Kurdish Democratic Party. It destroyed Iranshahr when that paper [the *Mojahedin*] dared to publish a series of interviews with prominent exiles mildly critical of the organization. It freely accused critics of being SAVAK agents." (from Ervand Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 249)

²⁴ Arthur Dole establishes four conditions for recognizing a cult; looking at these conditions, one can see how MEK gradually, since 1979, started changing into a cult and by 1985 had completed its transformation. These "Four conditions for recognizing a cult: 1) Compliance: Measures the extent to which members sacrifice their own goals, serve leaders who make decisions, and comply with group norms. 2) Exploitation: Implies the group seeks power unethically. A cult manipulates, abuses, and uses people. 3) Mind Control: Measures the extent to which members are deceived, leaders use personal dominance, and the group uses coercive persuasion. 4) Anxious Dependency: Reflects a cult situation in which dependency can be absolute and fear tends to color all experiences." (From "Are Terrorists Cultists?" by Arthur A. Dole, Ph.D., ABPP Emeritus Professor, Psychology in Education, University of Pennsylvania. Cited from *Cultic Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2. *Special Issue: Terrorism*, p. 204.)

²⁵ Of course, they lost almost all the remainder of their public supporters, especially in Iran, when in 1983 Rajavi met Tareq Aziz, Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, and signed a peace treaty with him and later moved the MEK bases to Iraq.

²⁶ MEK's publication, *Nashrieh*, March 19, 1982.

²⁷ There are a few historical examples of how a popular organization or followers of a belief, when they have restricted their actions to terrorism, gradually have changed from a popular organization into a cult—examples like the assassins who became the cult of Hassan Sabah, Zealots, Thugs. And even in our time, apart from MEK, one can see how PKK in Turkey changed into the cult of Abdullah Ocalan, and LTTE in Sri Lanka changed into the cult of Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

²⁸ Film made by member of parliament Geert Wilders. Mr. Wilders says his film will show that the Muslim holy book is an inspiration for murder (BBC, February 16, 2008). I saw the film, and I found it the best propaganda tool for Al-Qaeda, to say Islam is not the Islam of 1 billion people but the Islam of a few thousand terrorists.

²⁹ "To be silent before the oppressor is no different than cooperation with him. To be silent before this power-ridden aggressor means only subjugation. On the other hand, rioting and mere shouting at the aggressor

will not be effective unless it is based on a well-evaluated plan and program. It is because of the opening of correct and effective means of fighting against the aggressors and injustice that the vanguard of the movement, the superior, most intelligent, most devoted, and bravest sons of the people, have accepted the responsibility of forging this road." (The statement of Mojahedin in response to the recent accusations of the Iranian regime [Shah's regime], reprinted 1979, p. 17 (reprinted and published in Iran by MEK in 1979, p. 17).

³⁰ <http://www.slate.com/id/2214507/>

³¹ Margaret Thaler Singer, *Cults in Our Midst*, pp. 74, 75.

³² Even if this was a restricted source of information, it was never put in an official code of practice or written law.

³³ At the beginning, sex after life, namely in heaven, was allowed; but later, as members found out, because they might start fantasizing about sex after life, that was forbidden, as well.

³⁴ Many members have European and American passports or refugee status; still, their main slogan these days, as Rajavi puts it, is: "If Ashraf (Base) resists—the world will resist"; and without the Iraqis' insistence, they are not forced to leave Iraq.

³⁵ The images of the two armies, Israelis in Palestine and Americans in Iraq, are virtually indistinguishable from each other for most Muslims. Many of these foreign volunteers would likely prefer to fight Israelis in Palestine, but the Israeli border is virtually impenetrable. So focusing on Iraq and killing US soldiers is the next best option (from *Dying to Kill* by Mia Bloom, p. 169).

³⁶ Patty Hearst was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a small, political terrorist cult, in 1974. She was locked in a dark closet for weeks, and was starved and raped. Later, she became an active member of the group. She passed up chances to escape and participated in a bank robbery, for which she was convicted and served a jail term.

³⁷ MEK's publication *Nashrieh*, number 18, December 18, 1981.

³⁸ "Preventative detention and sedition laws can send a message to Muslim communities that they are mistrusted and targeted for special attention; such laws engender suspicion, heighten paranoia, and possibly run the risk of amplifying deviance in those pockets where it might exist. While limited preventative detention might be justified with adequate judicial safeguards, governments, in treading a delicate path, should err in favour of free speech, which is not only a fundamental freedom at the heart of the society we are trying to protect, but a useful ally in the so-called 'war on terror.' Legislation that restricts free speech can certainly engender suspicion, induce non-cooperation, and destroy the credibility of community leaders seen to be in collaboration with governments that are running apparently contradictory policies.... It is also vital for authorities to keep in mind that terrorist violence is not limited to Muslim groups. Aum Shinrikyo was a syncretistic, Japanese Buddhist cult that employed a weapon of mass destruction, sarin gas, in its attack on the Tokyo subway. A narrow focus on Muslim groups might blind us to potential problems in cultic groups around

the world most often the subject of query or complaint to the cult-watch network." (Stephen Bruce Mutch, Ph.D., LL.B. (UNSW), Department of Politics and International Relations, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. "Cultism, Terrorism, and Homeland Security," *Cultic Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2, *Special Issue: Terrorism*, pp. 170, 171.)

About the Author

Masoud Banisadr, Ph.D., was born in Tehran in 1953. In 1976 he traveled to the United Kingdom where he earned a Ph.D. in chemical engineering and engineering mathematics at Newcastle University in 1981. Dr. Banisadr joined the Mujahideen-e-Khalq Organization (MEK) in 1979 and served as its representative in the United States from 1990-96. He left the MEK in June 1996. He wrote a memoir of his experiences entitled, *Masoud: Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel*, published by SAQI Books, London in 2004. He has been active in exploring and explaining cult manipulation and has written many articles in Farsi about cults, available on his Website. www.banisadr.info.