

## Operation Shining Sun

The long silence prevailing at the southern front of the Gulf war was broken with the heavy artillery fire of the National Liberation Army of Iran. A few minutes later, 15 NLA brigades launched an extensive attack on the 77th Khorassan division one of the Khomeini regime's crack forces. In an intense, 24-hour battle, the NLA forces captured 600 square kilometers of Iranian territory and seized control of the strategic international Dezful-Amarah highway, west of the city of Shush. Khomeini's 77th division was routed, suffering 2,000 deaths and 1,500 wounded. 508 of its forces, including several of the division's senior officers, among them two majors and one captain, were taken captive. The NLA brigades also seized more than \$100 million worth of war equipment and arms, some of which - including four M-47 tanks, one M-113 armored personnel carrier, 11 command jeeps, one mobile rocket launcher, anti-aircraft guns, ten anti-tank guns, five 106 mm guns and 750 G-3 and AK-47 assault rifles - were transferred behind the lines and the rest set ablaze at the site.



**Operation Plan** The NLA's major spring offensive at the southern front had been code-

The NLA's major spring offensive at the southern front had been code-named the "Shining Sun" operation. In addition to the gunner and artillery, combat support, reconnaissance, communications, infirmary and combat engineering units and battalions, 12 NLA combat brigades fought against the Khomeini regime's forces, comprised of the 77th army division, gendarmerie battalions and other reinforcements.

According to the operational plan, 12 combat brigades engaged the enemy on three axes and at nine different fronts along 30 kilometers of the enemy's defensive fortifications. At each of the northern, central and southern axes, four National Liberation Army brigades attacked the enemy positions. Command On Sunday, March 27, all National Liberation Army forces participating in the operation readied themselves for zero hour.



Mr. Massoud Rajavi, President of the National Council of Resistance and the Commander in Chief of the National Liberation Army of Iran, assumed direct command of the offensive.

At sunset, the NLA's infantry, armored and mechanized brigades began penetrating towards their designated positions. The artillery and gunner units, on full alert, awaited the order to open fire.

## Order to Fire

At 12:52 a.m. on Monday, March 28, the voice of Maryam Rajavi, Deputy Commander in Chief of the NLA, resounded on the wireless networks of all NLA units across the battle front. "... In the glorious memory of the People's Mojahedin's martyrs and all the martyrs of the National Liberation Army of Iran... Fire!" Thousands of guns, flares and a various types of weapons roared in unison and the silent, dark sky was lit up like day. The awesome fire and coordination between attacking forces and gunner and artillery units were so effective that the front line of the regime's defensive fortifications across the 30-kilometer front fell within half an hour. All the brigades broke through, although the enemy forces in this region were not only on full alert, but had been previously reinforced. After the enemy's front-line was crushed, the brigades engaged the Khomeini regime's forces of war and repression on three axes.



In these battles, the NLA's combat brigades advanced rapidly, cleaning up a vast area on both sides of the international Dezful Amarah highway and taking control of it. The battalion headquarters of the 77th division - including the HQs of the 291st, 134th and 110th battalions- and the 307th gendarme battalion were captured by NLA

combatants. Some commanders and much of their forces were taken prisoner.

The NLA's combat brigades also managed to capture and destroy the enemy's artillery HQs the artillery centers of the 148th and 315th battalions.

On the same night, the Khomeini regime launched counter attacks on four axes, each of which failed. On the central axis, the regime's reinforcements under the command of an experienced operational officer, Lieutenant Karim Safavi, were routed on the Dezful-Amarah highway by an NLA brigade. Lieutenant Safavi was killed. On the southern axis, a large group of reinforcements, sent from the



Ansar- garrison, was ambushed by NLA combatants, and its commander, Major Parviz Falahatkar, captured. On the northern axis, the regime ordered the 148th armored battalion to counterattack, but its forces were driven back by an NLA combat brigade. Finally at 7:30, Monday morning, after routing battalions of the 77th division and the gendarmerie along a 30-kilometer front and capturing the strategic Dezful-Amarah highway, 16 kilometers deep inside

Iranian territory, the NLA brigades gained full control of the battle zone.

The NLA artillery units maintained heavy, accurate fire on all enemy positions and supply routes and pounded the road to facilitate the advancement of the NLAs combat brigades.

The Khomeini regime's 110th, 291st, 85th artillery, 148th, 104th and 773rd battalions of the 77th Khorassan division, the 307th gendarmerie battalions, the 315th artillery and 134th battalions as well as the head quarters of the Ansar-2 garrison were routed in the NLA's "Shining Sun" operation.

After 24 hours of battle, the National Liberation Army's forces could transfer a significant portion of the \$100 million worth of captured war materiel behind the lines to be used in future operations. Much of the captured arms and ammunition was also used against the enemy during the operation. The rest of the materiel, either because the National Army did not need it or could not transfer it behind the lines, was destroyed. This included thirteen M-47 tanks, five M-113 armored personnel carriers, one 130mm gun, five Howitzer guns, nine 106 mm recoilless rifles, ten 82 mm anti-tank guns, 4-barrelled anti-aircraft guns, and a huge number of mortars, rocket launchers, heavy machine guns and other war equipment.

## Remarkable Military

The Reuter correspondent who was present at the battle front during the operation reported that four US-made M-47 tanks, 15 jeep-type vehicles, a mobile launcher for Soviet-made Katyusha rockets and four 106 mm recoilless rifles were among captured military equipment on display at the base.

A NLA commander said at the time of the report 414 Iranian soldiers were taken prisoner west of the town of Shush.

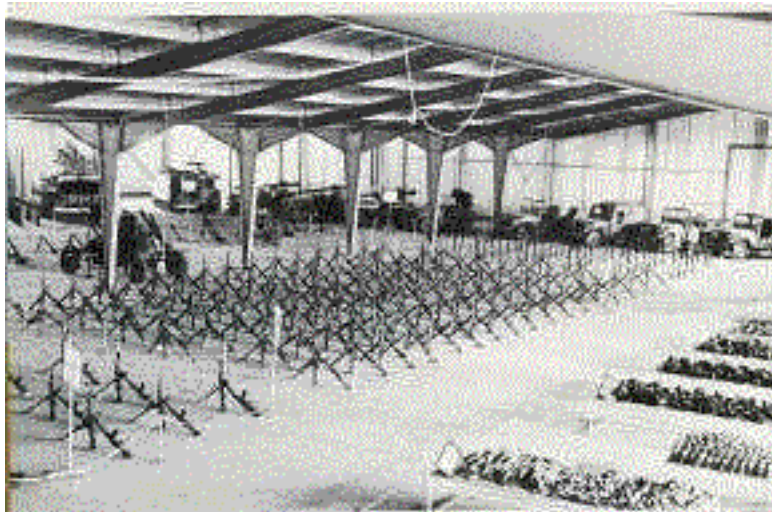
One of [the POWs] who identified himself as Captain Massoud Ghanbari, said, 'We heard artillery and thought it was Iraqi fire. Then suddenly my men and I were surrounded by NLA fighters and we surrendered.'



Two other prisoners, who gave their ranks as captain and major, gave similar accounts. "With veils covering their heads, dozens of women rode back into Fuka on NLA armored personnel

carriers from the front five km to the east. Captives included a considerable number of officers and NCOs. Some of captured weapons on display was Major Khalil Malekan, commander of the 110th battalion, 77th Khorassan division, who told reporters: “The operation was launched with complete advance reconnaissance and elaborate troop coordination. A large number of flares lit up the brigade’s operational zone. Our telephone wires were cut in the very first moments. After the start of the operation, the bases and positions, tanks, mortars, depots and the head quarters, fell one after the other. With the fall of the bases, the wireless fell into the hands of the NLA, and they disrupted our internal communications network and we could not contact our units

“At around 4 or 5 a.m., they reached the battalion headquarters. This demonstrated that they



had carried out reconnaissance at several stages because they knew the exact locations of the gunner platoon, the battalion headquarters and even the entry post. Those captured were quickly transferred, row by row and base by base, and handed over to other fighters to be taken behind the lines.

In terms of firepower, the rhythm of the shooting in the first moments did not differ

from that at the end. The continuity of their firepower was really something. And whenever they needed to realign fire, they asked for it on time and received it. In this way, the ammunition in our depots was soon ablaze. The overall fire strategy was good.” Colonel Behzad Mo’ezi, one of the most distinguished senior officers of the Air Force and an NLA military expert, describes the NLA’s performance thus: “One should note that the NLA is not a classical army. It is an educated and highly motivated army which has accurate planning and command capabilities and elaborate combat skills. The NLA faces forces who do not have any motivation to defend Khomeini’s dictatorship, and are joining the NLA in groups.

“This fact makes Khomeini’s forces of war and repression incapable of putting up any resistance against the NLA’s advances, both at present and in

## Desperate Reactions

The Khomeini regime, of course, realized the significance of the major victory of the “Shining Sun” operation better than anyone else. It reacted immediately. Official news bulletins began with a series of utterly false





claims which tried to portray the NLA offensive as an Iraqi attack accompanied by the Mojahedin. This was followed by three consecutive announcements that the regime had bombarded the operation zone. Responding to the claims, an Iraqi military spokesman denied any clashes or encounters between Iraqi forces and the Khomeini regime at the announced time and location, and described the regime's efforts as an attempt to detract from the NLA victory.

Televised reports of the operation widely broadcast by major international networks and western journalists' eyewitness reports of the offensive's prisoners and captured materiel shortly after its conclusion neutralized the regime's propaganda. Nevertheless, the desperate reactions of the regime indicate the gravity of the blows struck by the NLA and their

## Desperate Reactions

## New Horizons

Following the "Shining Sun" victory, thousands of NLA combatants, members of the General Command, and commanders of the NLA brigades gathered in the presence of the NLA's Commander in Chief, Massoud Rajavi, and the Deputy



Commander in Chief, Ma

Addressing the gathering, Massoud Rajavi declared, “The ‘Shining Sun’ operation signals the maturity of our military apparatus and heralds the shattering of Khomeini’s spell of repression. Operation ‘Shining Sun’ represents the emergence of a new phenomenon which heralds the dawn of peace and freedom in Iran.”

In routing a crack division of Khomeini’s military in an extensive offensive, penetrating 20 kilometers deep into enemy territory, and displaying the other characteristics mentioned, the NLA demonstrated a new level of strength. Conversely, the high vulnerability of Khomeini’s forces indicates a drastic shift in the balance of power in favor of the Iranian Resistance. This victory was a qualitative stride toward the NLA’s designated objective: Breaking the spell of Khomeini’s repression and paving the way to a general uprising by waging an all-out war on the Khomeini regime’s apparatus of war and repression.

## NLA Chief of Staff Describes Operation ‘Shining Sun’

In a news conference held in Baghdad on April 5 the Chief of Staff of the National Liberation Army of Iran Commander Mahmoud Atai'i discussed the outcome and accomplishments of the “Shining Sun” operation, which took place on March 28 in Khuzistan.

A large number of representatives of the international media - including Agence France Press, Reuters, Associated Press, the Middle East News Agency, Anatoli News Agency (Turkey), Gulf News Agency and the Jordanian News Agency as well as Monte Carlo Radio, ‘Voice of America,’ Cairo Radio, Turkish National Radio and Television, and a number of Arabic publications like A l-Anbaa A l-Seyassa Al-A rab and Al- Watan -Al-Arabi - attended the conference. Mohammad Seyedol Mohaddessin, head of the Mojahedin’s political department, introduced Commander Atai’i, who is also a member of the Mojahedin’s executive committee.

Mahmoud Atai’i, 39, is a metallurgical engineer who joined the Mojahedin 20 years ago. Commander Atai’I has been one of the highest-ranking commanders and officials of the



Mojahedin since the fall of the Shah. In the post-revolutionary parliamentary elections, he was the Mojahedin's candidate from Khoras san province. After the beginning of the armed resistance in 1951, he was in chae of the Mojahedin's operations and commanded hundreds of operations in Tehran and elsewhere. Since the foundation of the National Liberation Army in 1957, Commander Atai'i has served as its Chief of Staff.

## NLA Chief of Staff Describes Operation 'Shining Sun' Part 2

Enumerating the characteristics of the "Shining Sun" operation, Mr. Atai'i pointed out that Massoud Rijavi's direct command of the operation must be considered most significant. Commander Ata'i added: "Deppenetration and in extended front is well is heavy shelling by the NLA's artillery and gunner battalions are some of the characteristics of this recent operation. I can confidently say that the 77th, considered one of Khomeini's most capable and skilled divisions and known as an unbeatable division, will not be able to recuperate for a long time."

The NLA's Chief of Stiff evaluated the operation as a complete success and said



that all of the designated objectives had been fully achieved. He added that, ‘The operation was launched in southern Iran, in Khuzistin, which is of grave strategic importance to Khomeini. From the start of the war, the Khomeini regime has tried its best not to suffer any setback in this region, and put special emphasis on it. After the NLA attack on Kushk four months ago on the 92nd armored division of Ahwaz, the regime improved the alertness and readiness of its forces in this region.

As for the participation of women, he said: ‘‘The first incidence of women’s combat brigades in frontline fighting was a very successful and valuable experience. In this offensive, the 650th and 600th brigades were comprised only of women. Alongside other brigades, they penetmted several kilometers into enemy-controlled territory and attacked enemy positions.’’

## NLA Chief of Staff Describes Operation 'Shining Sun' Part 3

Mr. Ata'i pointed out used in armored and newly formed armored advancement and combatants, becomes more wide more effective strike at repression and fewer



Commander Atai'i said of Iran that, 'Any against Khomeini can Army. The only NLA's rules and freedom of thought and the NLA does not there are people who, although ideologically fighting against NLA.'

that, "For the first time, the NLA mechanized brigade in assault. the brigade and its units facilitate the enhance the mobility of NLA particularly is their battle zone spread. this naturally means a Khomeini's forces of war and NLA casualties."

of the National Liberation Army Iranian who wishes to fight join the National Liberation requirement is observance of the regulations. Everyone has political belief. For this reason, belong only to the Mojahedin.

not consider Mojaheds, are Khomeini in the ranks of the

The NLA's Chief of Staff said: "We are not planning for a long-term war But we will use all resources which enhance the mobility of our combatants in the battlefield. the armored brigade

produced a qualitative change, increasing the speed and strength of our offensive. Our objective is to destroy the regime's forces, to scatter them."

Commander Ata'i concluded: 'As an officer of the National Liberation Army of Iran, I hope that the NLA 'will soon accomplish its nationalist and patriotic task and not only free the people of Iran but also the people of the region from the Khomeini regime's warmongering and terrorism.'

## Avalanche of Fire

From atop the sentry tower the vast plain surrounding the base looks calm and still. The sky is gloomy and the fresh April wind pierces the skin, casting out sleep from the two guards' eyes. With it comes the distant echo of scattered artillery fire.

'That sound is the usual background music in this region.'" With his remark, the mustachioed guard grins and puts away his field glasses. His companion nods approvingly



from behind a 23mm anti-aircraft gun. The glow of the first rays of light flows down the towering mountains overlooking the plain to the east. From the other side of the base, a military march announces morning exercises.

With the base officer who is accompanying me, I say good-bye to the sentries and descend. In this short interval, the calm of a few moments ago has given way to hustled activity. Men and women combatants in olive green uniforms and polished boots join their battalions, clutching G-3 and AK-47 assault rifles in their hands. Soon the carefully flattened area the size of at least four soccer fields is carpeted in green. Each battalion commander stands next to his or her combatants.

## Avalanche of Fire Part 2

Attention!

The voice which booms through the loudspeakers onto the parade ground little resembles the dry, strident voices of the sergeant majors in a classical military, but arouses a disciplined and harmonious response. An honor guard of three women and three men commanded by a woman approach in a running march step. As they raise the Iranian flag and the Mojahedin emblem, a march is played. Between the two flags, large portraits of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, leaders of the Iranian Resistance, complete the scene.

After a brief speech by Ibrahim Zakeri, a commander of the National



Liberation Army of Iran and a member of the NLA's General Command, the combatants sing an anthem and march off the field in orderly rows. The NLA officer explains that the morning exercises, indicative of the NLA's traditional military discipline, begin each day's schedule.



This NLA headquarters base at the Iran-Iraq border in many ways resembles a large base in any army. Personnel carriers, jeeps and military ambulances are parked row after row in the motor pool. The sentry towers, obstacle courses and barracks could be anywhere. But this army's resemblance

The first thing which strikes the newcomer is the relationship between the NLA combatants. To describe the NLA combatants' interaction as merely "polite" does them an injustice. It goes beyond courtesy. The newcomer realizes that everyone, from officers to soldiers, is on brotherly terms. This unity manifests itself everywhere. Although the NLA observes military discipline, dry, rigid order is avoided. No officer treats his subordinates roughly. There are no traces of the conflicts, quarrels and that war of nerves common in military environments. The atmosphere of harmony is the more striking as combatants are volunteers who have joined the NLA from various parts of Iran and have different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. Although the Mojahedin, who form the pivotal force of the NLA, are Moslems, the National Liberation Army has no single ideology.

## Avalanche of Fire Part 3

After morning exercises, we go to the large mess hall where hundreds of combatants are having breakfast. We take our trays and join one middle-aged and two younger combatants. I ask the older one how he came to join the NLA. He replies that he is 47-years old and used to own a shop in the northeastern city of Mashad. Three months ago, he left his wife and five children behind to join the NLA: I've come to fight Khomeini. I could not sit idly by and watch everything destroyed. You know, he betrayed us, all of us Iranians.



Isn't it difficult for a person his age to live in a place like this? A smile appears on his wrinkled face which looks older than his years. He shakes his head and says: 'No, no! Oh sure, I can't run like some of these kids, but I'm ready to arm-wrestle with any of them.' With this, he thumps the back of the young man sitting next to him and laughs out heartily.

During the several days of my visit to the NLA's headquarters base, I encounter other middle-aged soldiers and in one case a 60-year-old man who also left his family in

Iran to join the NLA. But, on the average, NLA combatants range in age from 20 to 35 and commanders are generally over 30.

## An Army of the Educated



shelves of the base's spacious library.

The educational background of most combatants is perhaps their most unusual shared trait. At this base, there were a remarkable number of graduates from universities in the US, Britain, France, West Germany and even India and the Phillipines. Godfrey Jansen, a Middle East expert who visited the National Liberation Army's bases, called it "one of the most highly educated armies in the world." With the large number of western educated combatants, it isn't surprising to find books by Graham Green, John Le Carr/ and John Updike in their original languages on the

As you become acquainted with the backgrounds of these combatants, you are amazed at the harmony of this microcosm. You find a graduate in aircraft engineering from Northrop University in California heading the base's mechanics section. Working alongside him is a 19 year-old villager from Isfahan province who deserted Khomeini's army to join the National Liberation Army only a few weeks ago. When these two work and laugh together, it is hard to believe that heir social backgrounds are so

different and even contradictory. In the National Liberation Army, there are many such examples Maximum Self-Reliance

Perhaps because of the concentration of college graduates and professionals or perhaps by virtue of necessity, the NLA is distinguished by its self-sufficiency. At this base, everything is done by National Liberation Army combatants - from food preparation to technical services and installation, from political education to military planning. In the communications room, dozens of men and women combatants in laboratory overalls are working on communications equipment. Spread before them are disassembled FM and SW mobile and central wireleses to be tested or repaired. The combination of oscilloscopes and various electrical equipment, white-clad workers and fluorescent lights creates a kind of space-age laboratory atmosphere. Only the Farsi "No Smoking" signs and the red scarves of the women combatants recall the complex's setting.

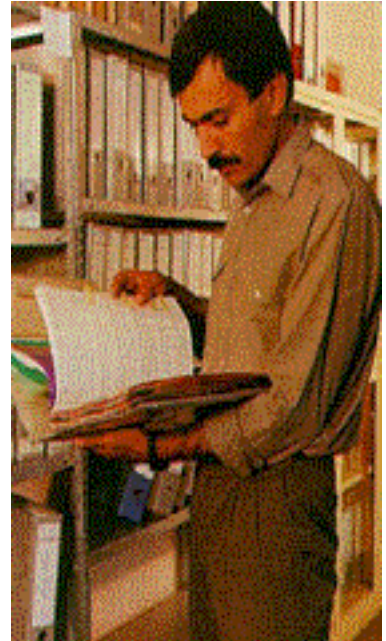
## An Army of the Educated Part 2

"We solve all the communications problems of the combatants," explains the young woman in charge of the laboratory. My accompanying officer adds that the high quality wireless communications between the NLA brigades and the General Command played a significant role in the NLA's first major spring offensive ("Shining Sun") against Khomeini's 77th division in March, west of the city of Shush.

Evidence of the orderly routine of the base is everywhere, but it is nowhere more conspicuous than in the kitchen. Even the large pots are so neatly arranged on the stoves that they, too, look like they are in parade formation! Everything is in its proper place, and despite the work

involved in feeding the large number of combatants, there is no chaos or confusion in the kitchen.

In an adjacent room, a number of combatants work over large tables preparing the rice, vegetables and meat for the cooks. Plastic buckets - the same size, same color, each tagged with a yellow sticker - hold the ingredients. Engrossed in their work, the combatants listen to an old Iranian song on a tape-recorder in the corner.



## Women in the NLA

As I tour the base, I am taken aback by the sight of a woman mechanic in a ditch under a jeep. I had expected to see women in the NLA's combat units, but for some reason it was a shock to encounter women with black hands and greasy overalls tampering with the engines and wheels of military trucks and jeeps at this remote frontier base.



Actually, women comprise one third of the NLA forces. My guide explains that women serve as commanders and combatants at all levels within the NLA. For the first time in the history of modern armies, two independent women's brigades entered into battle with Khomeini's forces in the NLA's first spring offensive, called 'Shining Sun.' Women are also actively involved in other battalions and brigades, whether armored, engineering combat support, artillery or logistics.

Despite the heavy physical labor, the NLA's female mechanics are rising to complete work on the vehicles before nightfall. I find an opportunity however, to talk to one of them and ask

Mehrnaz Hosseini if she finds any contradiction between her job and her gender? She smiles as she wipes her forehead with her sleeve. “Don’t you know what Khomeini has done to the Iranian woman? She’s not even a second-class citizen; she is sub-human.”

## Women in the NLA Part 2

Those of us who fight Khomeini are diametrically differently from him and his methods. In the NLA, women enjoy complete equality with men, not just on paper or in slogans, but in practice and on the battlefield.”



She pauses here for a moment and looks with obvious pride at the portrait of Maryam Rajavi on the wall. In the past several years, our active role in the Resistance has proved that we are totally qualified to reclaim our rights and are capable of taking on any responsibility - even the leadership.”

I ask my guide to arrange a meeting with a woman commander. He takes me to the office of Commander Ozra Taleqani. But for her olive fatigues and red scarf - the NLA’s standard uniform

for women combat-ants - it would be hard to imagine that Ms. Taleqani is a combat commander in an anti-Khomeini army. She speaks softly distinctly and with a pale smile on her lips. Behind this calm face, however, is a determined woman and a capable commander, as I see firsthand during combat drills and elsewhere over the following days.

## Women in the NLA



Commander Taleqani is a member of the Executive Committee of the People's Mojahedin. I ask her what effect the formation of the NLA has had on the Mojahedin. I ask her what effect the formation of the NLA has had on the number of women in the Resistance against Khomeini. "Its effect has been truly enormous," she replies. "Before the NLA was formed, women had an active role in the Resistance. Particularly with the People's Mojahedin. But the NLAs formation created an atmosphere which enabled each Iranian woman to find her place in the ranks of this army if she

is serious about fighting against Khomeini. No matter what her philosophy or outlook. It doesn't matter if she was a housewife, an office employee or a college student. Our motto is that anyone who is deterined to fight Khomeini can play a role in the NLA.



“The pressures of Khomeini’s medieval regime have been far greater on women than on men. Naturally, Iranian women are prone to join the NLA. In fact, the quantity and quality of women’s participation in the Resistance against Khomeini are outstanding and inspiring in this part of the world.”

## In The Operations Room

After lunch (a traditional Iranian rice dish with a sauce of beef and vegetables and a side order of yogurt) at the base’s crowded and lively mess vegetables and a side order of yogurt) at the base’s crowded and lively mess hall, my guide informs me that I can visit the base operations room. On our way, I try to imagine how such a room might look, picturing various scenes from World War II movies: Detailed maps of battle fields, a conference table with chairs neatly arranged around it, aerial photos... As we enter, I realize my fantasies were not far off.



The operations room of this NLA headquarters base - which covers a section

of western Iran - is a 20 by 30 meter rectangular hall. The walls are covered with detailed maps of the regions under this command, enlargements of photographs taken with a telephoto lens showing the bases and positions of the Khomeini regime forces and enlarged photographs of some of the memorable scenes of this base's victories. To one side of the hall are several large and remarkably intricate sandtables showing in detail the topography of various regions.

## In The Operations Room Part 2

The next day, when we visit the model-making workshop, I see how much energy goes into making these sandtables. Combatants use detailed maps to determinethe contours of the region in question. Each contour is then marked on a scale model by using wafer-thin



polystyrene sheets. Once the model is ready, scale model by using wafer-thin polystyrene sheets. Once the model is ready, they paint it and designate the characteristics of the region, i.e. forests, rivers, lakes and population centers. The models depict the deployment of the Khomeini regime's forces with remarkable thoroughness and accuracy, i.e. Every platoon, group, company, and battalion of the regime's Guards Corps

and military with its name, number of forces,

equipment and exact location of its bases. To reconnoitre and gather such detailed information from within the enemy's ranks is a formidable but worthwhile task, as attested by the qualitative growth of the NLAs victories.

On the opposite wall of the operation room, large glass cases display the various light weapons used by combatants of the National Liberation Army of Iran. Beside each is a little card bearing its name, type and technical information, i.e accuracy range, caliber, capacity, etc. Next to the display cases are an MG-3 heavy machine gun, G-3 assault rifle, AK-47 machine gun, various combat grenades and mortars, a bazooka, grenade launcher, an RPG-7 anti-tank weapon, and various semi-heavy weapons like a 106mm cannon and a 23mm anti-aircraft machine gun.

## In The Operations Room Part 3

Next to the weapons stands a lifesize mannequin in the complete uniform and equipment of an NLA infantry soldier. Seeing it, the phrase "armed to the teeth" takes on new meaning.

The conference table, unlike my fantasy, is in fact large, but simple and U-shaped with 15 chairs around it. Next to the commander's seat is an overhead projector with celluloid color diagrams.

An officer explains: "All NLA operations are carefully discussed and reviewed before being carried out. A thorough reconnaissance of the region where the operation is to be carried out is made and complete information gathered. Several operational plans are proposed, one of which is chosen at the command headquarters." All the maps, photographs and models in the hall enable the commanders to examine each operational plan, even to the point of choosing the weapons.



## Treatment Of Wounded

The base's clinic, located next to the barracks, is similar to an ordinary urban clinic as regards its size and facilities. A woman wearing the doctor's traditional white coat is in charge of the clinic. She explains that only emergency cases and chronic diseases are treated here. All other cases are referred to the NLAs main hospital.



Next to the dental section is the office of Dr. Abbas Shakeri. He is about 45 years old, thin, with glasses that seem slightly too large for his lean face. He is a skillful surgeon, whose appearance and background more suggest a chief of surgery at a hospital than a military doctor at an NLA base. Dr. Shakeri is a favorite with the combatants. He teases everyone and is never still.

An NLA officer tells us how in 1984, a Mojahedin combatant had been wounded at a remote point in Kurdistan and could not be immediately transferred to the clinic. Using a by minute operated and saved the man's life. In the past, when Resistance units lacked sufficient facilities, this surgeon performed emergency operations by candlelight without even having

minimal facilities. He modestly says: “Fortunately, my patients were die-hards and survived!”

Before long, Abbas Shakeri had developed a reputation as a “miracle worker” among the Resistance combatants and even the local people whom he treated. Dr. Shakeri says: “Today’s situation cannot be compared with the past. The NLAs medical network, run by doctors in or affiliated with the Army, extends to all the NLA bases and centers and provides various medical services, including dental and surgical, in its clinics and hospitals . “

The line of patients waiting to see the “miracle worker” outside his office is growing long. We say good-bye, although I regret not having more time to talk with a person who has been treating the Resistance’s wounded for seven years.

## From Tolstoy To Newsweek

It has been said that excessive militarization is the unavoidable problem of all the world's militaries. No such problem exists in the NLA. This is perhaps most apparent At the in the base's library. The large hall room lined with bookshelves is crowded with combatants reading at rectangular wooden tables. The librarian tells me there are some 3,000 books, mostly in Farsi and some in other languages. A glimpse at the shelves shows a wide range of styles and subject matter. In the literature section, one can find Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace and the plays of Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. In the periodicals, Persian weeklies and the latest issues of Newsweek are piled next to each other Perhaps in response to my look of surprise, the librarian says: "It's not that the combatants spend all their eisure time at the library! But reading, along with sports and television, are among their favorite pastimes."

It is only a few minutes distance from the library to the "confiscated weapons exhibit," our next destination. Dusk has already fallen. As we pass, there is a clamor from the dining hall. My guide explains:



“Occasionally, we have movies.” Both Persian and foreign films are available. Tonight they are watching “The Man Who Would Be King” and, as the noise suggests, obviously enjoying the masterly performance of Sean Connery and Michael Caine.

## The Firing Range

The next day, we go to the field near the base where the combatants are engaged in weapons drills and combat maneuvers. Beforehand, they have struggled their way through a two-hour obstacle course. Now they are carrying out a simulated assault on an enemy base. Amid th deafening row of machine guns, mortars and missiles blasting away the imagi- nary targets, the field commander explains, “Under such an avalanche of fire, no creature alive would dare to resist.”



Having seen the fighting ability of these combatants, their proficiency with weapons, and their unshakably high morale, one can better appreciate the NLAs brilliant victories, and particularly their minimal casualties while inflicting heavy damage on the Khomeini regime. In a short period, the National Liberation Army has become a deadly and immediate threat to



the mullahs' regime. It attacks Khomeini's forces in classical frontal assaults all along the 1,200-kilometer Iran-Iraq border. Despite repeated attempts, including several war-scale offensives, the mullahs have failed to strike any strategic blows to the NLA. The war between the NLA and the Khomeini regime's apparatus of war and repression has thus entered a decisive stage.

As the Khomeini regime is disintegrating, the NLAs avalanche of fire rolls forward. What chance does the regime stand?



## Breaching the Walls of Reception

It has been more than 15 years since Ibrahim Zakeri taught at the University, yet a professional tone and gesture is still evident in his words. When you ask him a question, he listens attentively, nods and then, in a strong, steady voice, responds with clear-cut phrases which leave his listener with no ambiguities. The conclusion of his speech is always marked with a faint smile.

I met the tall, heavily-built commander, his graying hair slicked

back, at the base's planning and operations room. Although his simple olive green uniform does not differ from those of other combatants, Ibrahim Zakeri, in his mid-forties, is one of the top 'generals' of the National Liberation Army of Iran and a member of its General Command.

The life of Ibrahim Zakeri bears little resemblance to a dull, traditional military career. Before the Shah's dreaded secret police, SAVAK, arrested him in 1973 on charges of affiliation with the People's Mojahedin, Ibrahim Zakeri was a professor of electrical engineering at Tehran's School of Communications. He is still an electronics whiz, and much of the Resistance's sophisticated communications equipment is his invention. After several years of torture and lengthy periods of solitary confinement, he was eventually freed only days before the February 1979 anti-monarchic revolution.

In the first post-revolutionary parliamentary elections, he was the Mojahedin's candidate from Abadan, in the southwestern province of Khuzistan. With the start of the nationwide Resistance in June 1981 Zakeri became a military commander. Later, Massoud Rajavi appointed him commander of the Mojahedin forces in Kurdistan and representative of the National Council of Resistance of Iran in that province.

Ibrahim Zakeri's 60-year-old mother, a sympathizer of the Mojahedin, was slain under torture at Evin prison. His wife was executed.

## Breaching the Walls of Reception Part 2

I ask him about the National Liberation Army's strategy. He explains: "The Khomeini regime's brutal repression has turned our society into an enormous prison. Our objective is to pave the way for a nationwide uprising by the people of Iran to overthrow the regime. But for the people to pour out of their homes and cry out in protest, the walls of repression must first be breached. This will be possible only after Khomeini's apparatus of war and repression has been destroyed, and this is what the NLA is doing."

Mr. Massoud Rajavi (the Leader of the Iranian Resistance and Commander in Chief of the NLA) puts this in clearer terms in his message on the formation of the NLA: Before all else, the National Liberation Army has the task of waging an all-out war on the repressive and warmongering apparatus of the Khomeini regime to pierce it, shatter it and march forward, in order to break the spell of Khomeini's repression. A university professor turned military commander and, 'pave the way to a general uprising.'



This definition leads to the assumption that such an uprising should start in Tehran. Why, then, are the NLA operations concentrated in the western regions of Iran? With a patience characteristic of his former profession, Commander Zakeri calmly and clearly answers the question: "In Iran, war and repression are flip sides of the same coin. Without the war to cover the repression,

Khomeini couldn't rule for a single day. All the executions, torture and repression and the nationwide Resistance against the regime are overshadowed by the war. Thus, Khomeini's agents of war and repression are necessarily identical. This means that striking at Khomeini's war machine directly affects the repression, and by the same token, every NLA assault on the regime's forces whether in the west or elsewhere has its own role in breaking the spell of repression in Tehran and other cities."

## Breaching the Walls of Reception Part 3

Do you have a sufficient number of forces to achieve your goal Commander Zakeri points to a picture on the wall of NLA combatants astride a tank confiscated from the regime: "When we speak of the National Liberation Army, we are not speaking of a partisan group or a small military force. This is an army with extensive combat ability. NLA brigades have demonstrated that in the short period after their formation, they have gained the ability to launch a classic frontal assault along a 30 kilometer front against one of Khomeini's crack divisions. Today, the NLA carries out its offensives throughout the 1,200-kilometer Iran-Iraq border and possesses mechanized forces and heavy artillery. This is our present situation. At the same time, volunteers are streaming in every day, both from inside Iran and from the fronts; soldiers and officers desert Khomeini's military and ask to join the NLA.

"Meanwhile, the regime's forces are weakening rapidly. The escalation of NLA operations has effectively enhanced this trend of desertions from the frontlines. Two files, for example, containing information on the personnel of the 147th battalion of the 30th Gorgan

division which fell into our hands during an NLA operation reveal that the defeatist attitude vis-a-vis NLA forces is rising sharply among Khomeini's forces. On just one page of these files, 11 of the 38 names listed were marked AWOL. Five officers, 20 NCOs and some 80 soldiers had de- serted from one company of the 23rd division.

“Whereas the number of prisoners taken during the initial NLA assaults in early 1987 did not exceed an average of 10, in November more than 500 of Khomeini's forces surrendered to the NLA in a week. In the ‘Shining Sun’ offensive 508 military personnel, including two majors and several other officers surrendered to NLA forces.



## Breaching the Walls of Reception Part 4

“If members of Khomeini’s military are presently joining us in groups, we believe that as the NLA continues to step up its offensives, they will join us in full formations: companies, battalions, even brigades. Such a forecast is completely realistic, if you bear in mind the trend.

‘At the same time, we have launched a very active publicity campaign via our radio and television and our publications. A great many of Khomeini’s soldiers listen to the Mojahedin’s radio at the fronts. We are using a combination of these means to prepare the grounds for a general up- rising against Khomeini. Given the current developments, we view our success in this regard as completely feasible.’”



I ask Commander Zakeri about the combat strength and military efficiency of

NLA forces. ‘When the NLA was first formed, operations were carried out on the scale of companies and battalions. But we were soon able to improve our command capabilities and troop concentration and launch offensives on the scale of a brigade and subsequently launch a full frontal assault with the participation of 15 brigades, and strike heavier blows to the enemy. The military tactics used by our combatants have both astonished and terrified Khomeini’s Guards and military commanders. While we have been dealing them such heavy blows, they have been unable to stop our rapid progress. This is an important reason why Khomeini dismissed the Chief of Staff of his armed forces after our biggest offensive.’”

## Breaching the Walls of Reception Part 5

Commander Zakeri goes to a second table on the other side of the room and indicates with his wooden pointer the vast plains and hills fashioned on a model: “These plains are close to Shush in Khuzistan province. The enemy bears strategic importance for his defense lines in this

region and thought them to be unpenetrable. ‘To attack the 77th Khorassan division’s lines of defense, our combatants attacked along three axes and were successful in breaching them in the very first hours of fighting.’”



He crosses to another table: “Do you see this? This is the scene of

the 'Shining Sun' offensive. The Khomeini regime had reinforced its 77th division to the hilt with the help of gendar merie forces. Our forces attacked this division at 12:52 a.m. The enemy forces were on full alert. Despite this, due to our forces' superiority in the battlefield, the enemy was caught by surprise. The NLA forces were in complete control of the scene of the operation for 24 hours during which they advanced 20 kilometers into enemy territory and overran several battalion headquarters. The regime was incapable of showing any significant reaction."

## I ask him about Iraq.

"The one invaluable benefit we have is the right of passage through Iraqi territory. But as far as military matters are concerned, we are totally independent. For example, we confiscated over \$100 million worth of weaponry from the Khomeini regime in the last offensive, and in some cases we have bought the special weapons we needed. Of course, in order to prevent any practical problem, we put Khomeini on the defensive coordinate with them whenever we wish to cross the border.





“I ask Commander Zakeri about the impact of the NLA’s activities on the Iran-Iraq war. I get the impression from the way he nods his head that he likes this question. We leave the sand models for a large wall map depicting the lengthy Iran-Iraq border. His eyes never straying from the map, the commander explains:

“For several years, since summer 1982, the alignment of forces at the fronts was fixed. Since the Khomeini regime viewed the other side as on the defensive, it had taken the initiative, concentrating its forces at desirable locations and evacuating them as it wished. It was free to choose the time and place of its offensives. Thus, despite a sharp decline in manpower over the past several years, this factor helped the regime to concentrate forces along the southern front and launch major attacks on Basrah or other targets in the south. This was the situation from winter ‘84 until last year

“When the NLA entered the scene and carried out extensive attacks on Khomeini’s forces all along the Iran-Iraq border, the situation changed. The Khomeini regime cannot feel safe anywhere, because it may be attacked by the NLA at that very location. This has led to a situation where the regime’s forces are pinned down along the border and have lost their mobility. In the past, the regime allocated maybe only 20% of its forces to defense and the rest were on the offensive. But today it has to allocate a larger percentage to defense.

“This is one of the most important factors which not only prevented the Khomeini regime from launching a large-scale offensive on the order of Karbala 4 and 5 this winter, but also to suffer a military defeat at Faw. A defeat which wiped out the only ‘achievement’ the regime had to show for its warmongering.

It should not be forgotten that Khomeini’s failure to mobilize manpower for the war is a direct result of the public’s acceptance of the Iranian Resistance’s demand for peace and, in particular, Mr Massoud Rajavi’s endeavors in this regard. I can only conclude, therefore, that the addition of the NLA to the war equation effectively changed the deployment of the regime’s forces from total offense to a much more defensive posture. This is, as you can see, an extremely unpleasant development for a regime that can survive only by warmongering and belligerence.



A smile appears on the commander’s lips and I realize that his answer to my question is completed. The door opens and a combatant brings a message. Commander Zakeri explains that he had been invited to the marriage ceremony of two combatants, and the message is a reminder that he must get going if he is to be there on time. As I shake his hand in farewell, he says with a smile, “You are going to hear more news about the NLA soon.” Something in the relaxed confidence of the former professor of electrical engineering is reassuring. As Commander Zakeri leaves the room, he waves with a final message: “See you in Tehran.”