

# III

## Congressional Outrage

The State Department continued to violate the elementary principle of objectivity throughout the preparation of the report, discrediting the paper even before publication. When the findings were eventually released, the congressional reaction was harsh.<sup>1</sup> Several points left no doubt about the report's bias, establishing it as a one-sided recounting of old accusations. First, by not engaging in a dialogue with the representatives of the Mojahedin and National Council of Resistance, the State Department had violated the spirit of the congressional request.<sup>2</sup> Second, by repeatedly rejecting calls by members of Congress for such dialogue, the Department aggravated concerns about a hidden agenda on Iran. Third, by remaining oblivious to widespread criticism in the media and Iranian-American community, both of whom called for no prejudgments and direct discussions with the subjects of the report, the authors made it clear that they were not interested in a fair report.

Prior to publication, Wendy Sherman replied to all inquiries by members of Congress by repeating the same points that was later rehashed at greater length in the report on October 28.<sup>3</sup> Again, in November, Ms. Sherman sent letters essentially identical to the one she had written in July, to different groups of congressional members.

Rep. Robert Torricelli issued a news release in which he called the report "biased," adding:

"A thorough and timely assessment of the situation in Iran and its major players would have enabled the United States to adopt a comprehensive and suitable policy toward Iran. By not consulting with the Mojahedin or the National Council of Resistance (NCR), the State Department's report is noncompliant with the desire of Congress to obtain an accurate and balanced

picture of the resistance group." Torricelli called "for a new study that includes direct discussions with representatives of the Mojahedin or the NCR."<sup>4</sup>

Another influential member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Rep. Dan Burton, said:

I am disappointed that the State Department has, once again, issued an incomplete report on the People's Mojahedin of Iran. The State Department continues to thwart the will of the U.S. Congress, which has made clear its preference that, in the context of the preparation of the report, there be discussions with the Mojahedin. Without such discussions, a truly objective report is impossible.<sup>5</sup>

Rep. Gary Ackerman, Chairman of the Asia Subcommittee, described the report as "noncompliant with the spirit of the law," and said: "The language in this legislation was intended to achieve an unbiased assessment of the resistance with no prejudgments. Such a report could only be achieved with direct dialogue. It is for this reason that I am extremely disappointed in this report."<sup>6</sup>

Another House member, Rep. Edolphus Towns, described the report as "not acceptable," adding: "This whitewash report is a gift to the Iranian regime. This contradicts the mandate given by the Congress." The Congressman called for a new independent study prepared through dialogue with the Mojahedin.<sup>7</sup>

Senator Dave Durenberger criticized the report and its authors in a harshly-worded statement:

"I regret that the State Department has issued a report on the People's Mojahedin of Iran that appears to mirror the same bias against this group that has been evident for some time... It is apparent that the State Department never planned to issue a fair report and ignored our request to interview the people who were the focus of the report." The Senator joined the call by other members of Congress, saying: "I would recommend that an independent study be conducted that permits all interests the right to provide input."<sup>8</sup>

### **The Press**

*The New York Times* reported on congressional criticisms of the report, writing: "The State Department upset many members of Congress today by issuing a scathing report about a prominent Iranian opposition group without meeting with officials from the

group, as more than 100 lawmakers had asked it to do."<sup>9</sup> It added: "Many members of Congress support contact, arguing that they can speed the demise of Iran's religious government and can be a moderating influence on the Mojahedin, which maintains military bases in Iraq, near the Iranian border."<sup>10</sup> The paper cited the Department's allegations against the Mojahedin and the views of several legislators, quoting Paul Marcone, chief of staff for Rep. James A. Traficant, Jr., as saying that, "Mr. Traficant supports meeting with the Mojahedin because he thinks they are probably the best hope for democracy in Iran in the short term and we should at least try to help them."<sup>11</sup>

In an article entitled "State Dept. Report Denouncing Iranian Rebel Group Is Criticized," *the Washington Post*, wrote:

None of the report's scathing assessments of the Mujaheddin came as a surprise. Mujaheddin representatives here surmised weeks ago what the State Department would say, and they published a detailed response in advance... To some extent they succeeded in preemptively raising questions about the report's value by complaining publicly that the State Department refused to talk to them as part of its research... Reps. Gary L. Ackerman (D-NY), Robert G. Torricelli (D-NJ) and Dan Burton (R-IN), all senior members of the House Foreign Affairs committee, issued statements yesterday criticizing the State Department and the report.<sup>12</sup>

Following the clerical regime's November 6 Scud missile attack on a Resistance base, a report by Reuters questioned the State Department's claim that the Iranian Resistance lacks a popular base and is not a political alternative to the regime:

The United States says the Mujahideen Khalq are not an important Iranian opposition group, but this week's flare-up in the struggle between them and Iran's rulers suggests Tehran does not share that view... The latest violence came just days after the U.S. State Department, in a long-awaited report, concluded that the Mujahideen "are not a viable alternative to the current government of Iran."<sup>13</sup>

Other media featured stories also highly critical of the State Department report. An editorial appearing in *the Indianapolis Star* said:

Congressional anger at the State Department is warranted. It is justified not only because State officials ignored the congressional mandate to consult

with the Mujahedeen but because the present regime in Iran is a principal source of funding for terrorists involved in hostage-taking, assassinations and bombings around the world and numerous Americans have been among their victims. Helping the Mujahedeen would help counter the threat of the radical regime now in control of Iran.<sup>14</sup>

In Washington, a spokesman for the Mojahedin described the report as "a bunch of bold-faced lies."<sup>15</sup>

### **What Did the Experts Say?**

Professor Marvin Zonis, a prominent Iran expert, whose name was mentioned in the report's list of experts, commented on the Department's report in an interview with the Chicago Public Radio. "There were a number of different groups in Iran, some were totally Marxist-communist, and some totally Islamic, and others were fairly democratic, which merged together and broke up and merged together and broke up and finally emerged as the present organization," Zonis said of the Mojahedin's history.<sup>16</sup>

In a review of the post-revolutionary period, when the regime tried to eliminate all opposition, especially the Mojahedin, Zonis noted the Mojahedin's reluctance to enter into an armed confrontation. He added:

Eventually there was a very, very messy confrontation between the Mojahedin and the regime in June of 1981, which was just more than two years after the shah's overthrow. The clerics really decided to stamp out the Mojahedin. The leader of the Mojahedin, Mr. Rajavi, and then president of Iran, who was not a Mojahedin member, Bani-Sadr, both fled Iran together into exile in Paris. The regime then began a campaign of mass slaughter of Mojahedin members, and most of the brutality of the regime has been directed against them.

Q: What happened to the exiles? What became of what we know today of as the Mojahedin-Khalq?

Zonis: Well, Massoud Rajavi set up shop in Paris and lots of other Mojahedin fled Iran, because it was clear at that time that it was either death or exile. Lots of people fled and lots of sympathizers set up chapters all over the world, collecting money, printing publications supporting Rajavi in Paris.

The French government, not unusual for France, I am sorry to say, eventually buckled under pressure from Iran and decided they would rather have good relations with the clerics than provide haven for Rajavi, even though I remind you they provided haven for Khomeini against the shah. They threw Rajavi out of the country and that is how he ended up where he

is today, in Baghdad, because that was the only country in the world at the time which did not care about good relations with Iran. So Iraq now has a relationship with the Mojahedin-Khalq, and they have bases there. Other groups, I guess, Kurdish groups who also oppose Iran, they also have bases in Iraq close to Iran. Amazingly enough, the Mojahedin decided the political movement alone was insufficient and they needed to build an army which would be able to go into Iran militarily and rouse the population so that the regime could be overthrown...

Q: Let's go on our policy with the Mojahedin-Khalq. They have got an office in Washington, D.C. They are lobbying somebody there and here we see the State Department has come out last week and said that they are fundamentally undemocratic... and they are no alternative to the regime that is currently there now in Iran, although they do not support the regime there in Iran but these people are not an alternative. Why did the State Department say this about the Mojahedin-Khalq?

Zonis: I think there are two issues that are operating in the minds of the State Department people who wrote that report. One, the Mojahedin are associated with the murder of several American armed forces personnel, whom I can remember were assassinated on the streets of Tehran as a way to overthrow the shah. The United States believes that the Mojahedin-Khalq were responsible for those assassinations. The Mojahedin line is that they did not do it... I have no way to judge that.

The second thing in the mind of the State Department, I believe, is the view that Rajavi, the leader of the Mojahedin, is essentially non-democratic and, worse, would impose another kind of socialist Islamic dictatorship on Iran. And that is essentially how they come to the conclusion that it is not a progressive step.

My own view is that, of course, it is a terribly mistaken view. While the Mojahedin are not my favorite group and are not particularly democratic, they certainly would never create an Iran which was an enemy to the rest of the world and which supported terrorism all over the world.

Q: So what kind of government do you think they would have if they would come to power?

Zonis: Well they would certainly have a republican form of government. Actually Mr. Rajavi, I think as a way to move the political process faster, designated his wife as the President of Iran. So believe it or not, Iran would have a female president. It would be a republic and she would run it. And it will be along Islamic lines, with a high degree of internal discipline. It reminds me of some of these third world socialist movements of the 60s even. But the key is that they have no interest in terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, broadcasting the Iranian revolution. What they want is to build the Iranian economy.

Q: Who in the United States supports them? I saw that Robert Torricelli called the State Department report incomplete and biased.

Zonis: That is right. You mentioned that the Mojahedin had an office in Washington, which is correct. They also have offices in other cities, but the

Washington office is especially important because the Mojahedin spend a great deal of energy lobbying with the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States. In fact the reason the State Department did this report on the Mojahedin was because a very large number of congressmen were induced by the Mojahedin to demand an investigation of U.S. policy and why the U.S. had not dealt with the Mojahedin. So there were more than, I cannot remember the number, but I think it was almost 200 congressmen who urged the United States to do business with the Mojahedin. I think there were even some senators. So they have a lot of support in Washington...<sup>17</sup>

### **Green Light**

The firing of three Scud-B missiles at an Iranian Resistance base on November 6 caused further concern about the implications of the biased report. Had it encouraged Tehran to commit more crimes? Many U.S. congressmen endorsed this view in statements issued after the attack. Rep. Ed Towns said: "I had said that this report is a gift to the Iranian regime and the missile attack proved that. This is a shame that the State Department's report is being used as a green light to stage one of the most blatant crimes by using weapons of mass destruction."<sup>18</sup>

Rep. Torricelli pointed out the discrepancies in U.S. policy on Iran in his statement of condemnation, writing:

Regrettably, a recent State Department report about the Mujahedin is being interpreted as a "green light" for Iran to conduct terrorism, even though Iran is considered officially by the United States as an international outlaw. The United States should not cross signals when it comes to terrorism.<sup>19</sup>

Another congressman, Rep. James Traficant, wrote to President Clinton:

...The request for an objective report is indicative of Congress's intent to fully assess the political influence on Iran and its key players in order to develop a comprehensive and unbiased policy toward Iran. In defining the parameters of this extensive report, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act called for a direct dialogue between the State Department and the NCR. The October 28, 1994 report was incomplete in this respect and, therefore, not without potential bias.<sup>20</sup>

*The Houston Post* published a very critical article entitled "U.S. should back mujahideen fight," in which it reviewed the connection between the State Department report and the Iranian regime's missile

attack only days after its publication. The article stated:

It is possible that a State Department action had the effect of precipitating the Nov. 6 attack. Five days earlier, the State Department had issued a report scathingly denouncing the mujahideen as a terrorist organization with little support inside Iran. The official Iranian press hailed the State Department report as vindication of Tehran's battle against the resistance.<sup>21</sup>

The article criticized the policy of appeasing the regime in Tehran: "For the United States to decide that the Tehran regime is too strong to be overthrown is tantamount to surrender to terrorism. Iran is a growing menace to the world."<sup>22</sup>

The *Orlando Sentinel* also criticized U.S. policy on Iran. Basing its argument on the facts, the paper refuted the claim that the Mojahedin are not an important force in Iran. Pointing to the contradictions in U.S. policy, the article continued:

Alliances depend on a common enemy, not on shared values. This also speaks to another of the State Department's specious criticisms of the Mujahideen, that they were anti-American in the 1970s. Yep, they sure were. They were trying to overthrow the shah, whom the United States had forced on the Iranian people in a CIA-engineered coup and whose dictatorship the U.S. government was supporting. It was impossible at that time to be anti-shah and pro-American. But that was then and this is now. Who are our strongest allies today? Our worst enemies 50 years ago, Japan and Germany.<sup>23</sup>

### **Iranians Voice Outrage**

The biased report sparked resentment and anger in the Iranian community abroad. Iranian-American groups and societies issued statements, condemning it as a gift to the mullahs in Iran. At the grassroots level, individuals wrote to local newspapers and their representatives to declare their support of the National Council of Resistance as the alternative to the regime in Iran. An Iranian-American in San Antonio described the report as "the worst thing for the Iranian people and the best thing for Khomeini's heirs," adding,

It is time for President Clinton and the State Department to wake up to the realities of Iran and recognize the Iranian people's rights and democratic aspirations. Do not cater to the despots who rule Iran. The State Department should establish dialogue with the resistance and send a clear message to the mullahs, as was called for by more than 100 congressmen and 12 senators in a bipartisan initiative.<sup>24</sup>

*Democracy Betrayed*

The anger climaxed when the regime attacked a resistance base. Thousands of Iranians demonstrated in 15 cities throughout the world.<sup>25</sup> They condemned the regime and described the State Department's report as a green light for murder. Over 1,000 people gathered in front of the White House in Washington, D.C., to express their concern over the implications that the report had emboldened the regime to commit more crimes. The demonstration's resolution read in part:

Doubtless, the biased report by the State Department abounding in lies and distortions against the Mojahedin and the Iranian Resistance, encouraged the Khomeini regime to launch the missile attack on Ashraf camp. While condemning this report, whose writers and fomulators pursued no goal other than appeasing the criminal mullahs, we declare that this report is a reminder of America's unconditional support for the shah's treacherous dictatorship.<sup>26</sup>