

VI

History

The nineteenth century, coinciding with the rule of the Qajar dynasty in Iran, is remembered by most Iranians as an era of national subjugation by foreign powers, particularly Imperial Russia and Great Britain, both of which frequently infringed on Iranian national sovereignty. Control over Iranian oil fields made Britain the major power in Iran until the end of World War II. After the fall of Reza Shah's dictatorship in 1941, popular movements began to voice the Iranian resentment of British colonialism and the puppet regimes. In the late 1940s, Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq led the movement to nationalize Iran's oil industry. His movement had widespread support among the Iranian people, and the shah was forced in 1951 to appoint him as prime minister after parliament ratified the oil nationalization bill. Dr. Mossadeq's 27-month-term was devoted on the one hand to implementing the new law, and on the other to confronting the joint conspiracies of the court, reactionary clergy, and pro-Soviet communist Tudeh Party. The British essentially coordinated these conspiracies. Despite the ruling in Iran's favor on the oil issue by the International Court of Justice at the Hague and the U.N. General Assembly, British hostility towards Mossadeq's government persisted. In 1952, the United States allied itself with the British in this policy.

Unfortunately, Mossadeq's overthrow in a U.S.-engineered *coup d'état* convinced Iranians that the United States had replaced Britain in defending the shah and depriving Iranians of democracy and their national interests. The brutal suppression of student protests and the killing of three student leaders only four months after the *coup*, on the eve of Vice President Richard Nixon's trip to Iran in December 1953,¹ only served to confirm this view.

Democracy Betrayed

In a report submitted to President Eisenhower's National Security Council in 1953, U.S. policymakers explained their support for the shah:

Over the long run, the most effective instrument for maintaining Iran's orientation towards the West is the monarchy, which in turn has the army as its only real source of power. U.S. military aid serves to improve army morale, cement army loyalty to the shah, and thus consolidate the present regime and provide some assurance that Iran's current orientation towards the West will be perpetual.²

Mohsen Milani, author of *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution*, writes:

The coup had drastic consequences. First, because it was generally believed that the United States had saved his throne, the shah lost his legitimacy. From then on, he was tainted as an American puppet... and most important, the foreign-orchestrated coup seemed to have touched the very sensitive pride-nerve of some middle class Iranians who perceived the monarch as America's shah.³

John F. Kennedy's election to the Presidency in 1960 raised hopes that the new administration would make the defense of human rights and democracy a foreign policy goal, and therefore dissuade the shah from his repressive ways and limit his dictatorship. The shah's extended trip to the U.S. in late 1962, however, was followed by a widespread crackdown on popular protests by SAVAK and the army in the first half of 1963, dashing all such hopes. As Iran expert Shaul Bakhash puts it:

One result of these developments was to push elements of the opposition toward an increasingly radical position. The suppression of the 1963 protest movement persuaded young men of the National Front that constitutional methods of opposition against the shah were ineffective.⁴

Milani agrees that the historical consequences were profound:

The June uprising had a profound impact both on Iranian politics in general and on the ulama community in particular. In the literature of most opposition groups to the shah, the June uprising symbolized the end of peaceful coexistence with the shah and justified the start of the armed struggle against his regime.⁵

In subsequent years, the shah increasingly strengthened the secret police, SAVAK, which had been formed in 1957 with American support. Notorious for its use of torture, SAVAK grew to symbolize the shah's rule from 1963-79, a period also characterized by corruption in the royal family, one-party rule, the torture and execution of thousands of political prisoners, sweeping clampdown, suppression of dissent, and alienation of the religious masses, whose historic symbols were openly scorned. Throughout those years, the United States reinforced its image as the shah's protector and staunch supporter, sowing the seeds of the anti-Americanism that later manifested itself in the revolution against the monarchy. In this historical context, the forces that would build Iran's future - the younger generation - began to search for a solution to the country's problems.

The 1960s also saw a rise in resistance movements throughout the third world, most heavily influenced by Marxism. This applied to some extent to European societies as well, where dissident movements also began to emerge. Major student movements were formed in France and Germany. In Iran, frustration with the failures of the traditional secular opposition propelled the intelligentsia towards Marxism as a possible solution. They saw no hope in the Islam espoused by traditional religious leaders, such as Khomeini. Meanwhile, with every step, the shah heightened the repression, only increasing the potential for social revolution.

The Founding

The *Sazeman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran*, or People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, was founded in 1965 by Mohammad Hanifnejad and two other young intellectuals, Sa'id Mohsen and Ali-Asghar Badi'zadegan. The three wanted to establish a Muslim, revolutionary, nationalist and democratic organization. All university graduates, they had been politically active in the nationalist movement for democracy since the Mossadeq era and later became members of Mehdi Bazargan's Freedom Movement. Both Hanifnejad and Mohsen had been temporarily detained by the shah's secret police for their political activities.

The founders' ultimate goal was to pave the way for a democratic government to replace the shah's regime. In contrast to most of their contemporaries, they believed that a new, democratically inclined

interpretation of Islam was the means to this end. They set about establishing a political organization that could survive the shah's repression and respond to the needs of ordinary citizens. This was no easy task.

They began by refuting the reactionary interpretation of Islam, marking the Mojahedin's first confrontation with the traditional clergy, who considered themselves the sole guardians of the faith. They and the organization's new members painstakingly studied the various schools of thought, as well as Iranian history and those of other countries, enabling them to analyze other philosophies and theories with considerable knowledge and to present their own ideology, based on Islam, as the answer to Iran's problems.⁷

The Mojahedin's early activities were of necessity kept secret, and no one knew of the organization's existence. In years to come, however, the Mojahedin's message found its place among Muslim and revolutionary intellectuals and the religious sector. More importantly, because of their propinquity to Iranian society and culture, the Mojahedin attracted vast support among the people.

After reviewing the overall situation in Iran, the organization concluded that in light of the shah's iron-fisted rule and suppression of all opposition, the only viable route to democratic rule was the ouster of his regime. Given the shah's police-state, attaining this objective through a non-violent political campaign was, by definition, impossible.⁸ Consequently, the Mojahedin began to prepare for armed resistance. They were also critical of U.S. policy on Iran, and called for an end to the United States' unflinching support for the shah.

In 1971, before the Mojahedin undertook any military action, SAVAK arrested and imprisoned all of their leaders and many of their members. In May 1972, on the eve of the visit to Iran by then U.S. President, Richard Nixon, the three Mojahedin founders and two Central Committee members were executed.

The events of 1971 had dire consequences. In the aftermath of the arrests, the organization was shattered when several individuals took advantage of the ensuing vacuum to infiltrate the organization and carry out a bloody coup from within. To consolidate their control of the organizational apparatus, they planned and carried out the murders of several of the remaining leading members.⁹ They also removed the traditional Quranic verse from the Mojahedin emblem, declaring that there had been an ideological "advance" to Marxism.

They continued, however, to misappropriate the Mojahedin name and reputation.¹⁰

These actions had far-reaching repercussions, going beyond the shattering of the Mojahedin. Until then, the Mojahedin, espousing a democratic interpretation of Islam, had assumed the leadership of the anti-shah movement, pushing the backward mullahs to the fringes. Many of the present regime's leaders, including Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Khamenei, claimed to be Mojahedin supporters to bolster their public images. Although opposed to the young Mojahedin, even Khomeini could not publicly take a stand against them. Under public pressure to express support, which he never did, Khomeini succumbed to the point of issuing a fatwa that one-third of the religious tithe be given to the "young Muslims and strugglers," an obvious reference to the Mojahedin at the time. The temporary dissolution of the Mojahedin's organization allowed Khomeini to exploit the vacuum of leadership in the 1979 uprising and popular disillusionment from the internal *coup* to usurp the helm and turn a popular revolution, yearning for freedom and independence, into a tragic episode of genocide in Iranian history. The internal *coup* hence became a decisive factor in the advance of fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.¹¹

The Mojahedin, meanwhile, came under attack from three sides: Using the *coup* to divide and weaken the ranks of the opposition, the shah's regime labeled them Islamic-Marxists and began a concerted campaign to wipe out the true Mojahedin. From another angle, the reactionary mullahs, previously held at bay by the Mojahedin's popularity and social roots, sprang to the attack, preaching that their Islam was the only Islam. Several imprisoned clerics decreed the Muslim Mojahedin to be non-Muslim after 1975. On the third front were opportunist Marxists, who exploited the setbacks suffered by the Mojahedin to portray them as proponents of a petite-bourgeoisie ideology whose time had passed.

From 1975 to 1979, while incarcerated in different prisons, Massoud Rajavi led the Mojahedin's resistance against all three fronts, for which reason he was taken to the Tehran Komiteh's torture center and tortured to the brink of death.¹² He stressed the need to continue the struggle against the shah's dictatorship. At the same time, he characterized religious fanaticism as the primary internal threat to the popular opposition, and warned against the emergence

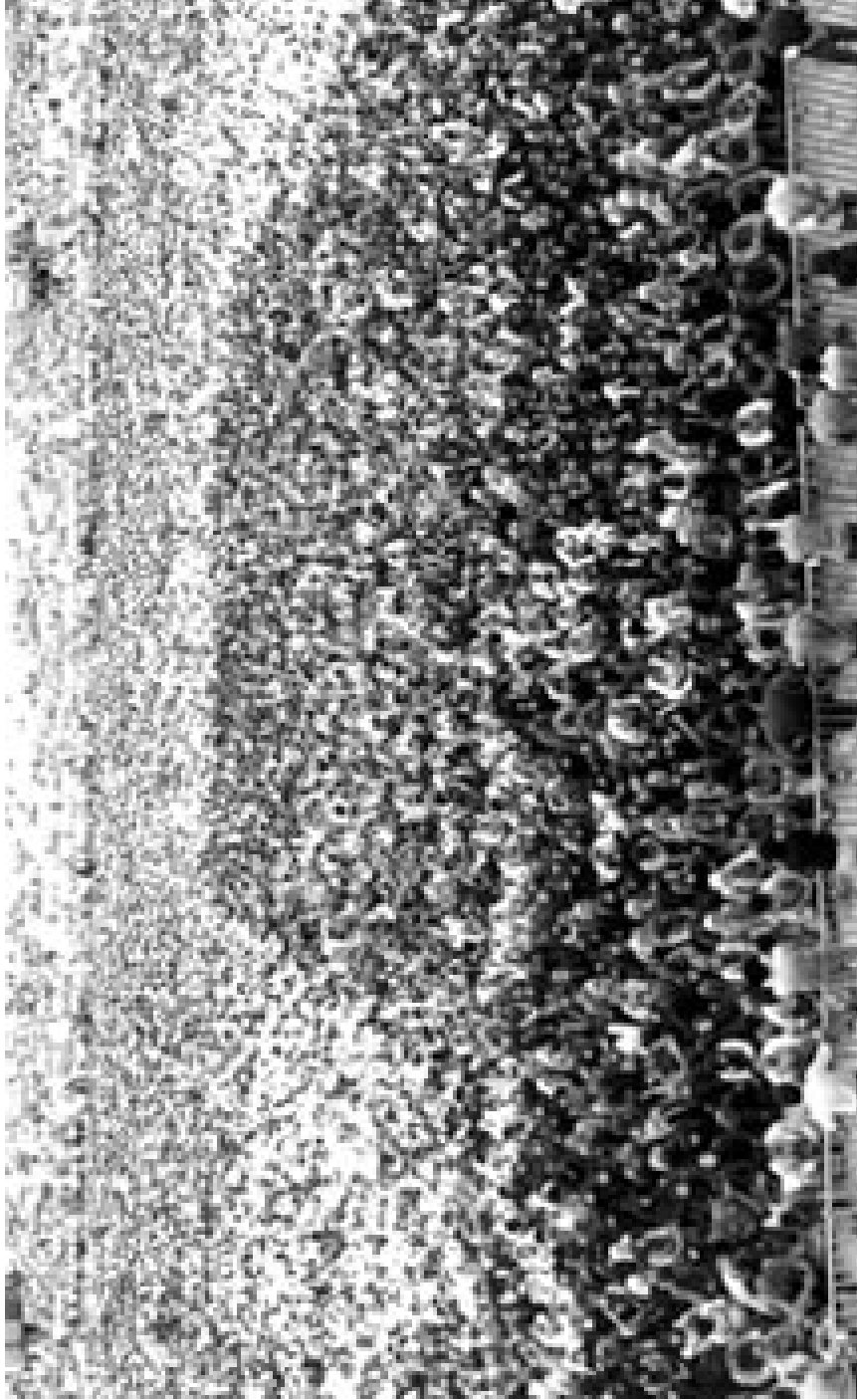
and growth of religious backwardness and despotism symbolized by Khomeini.¹³ These positions remained the Mojahedin's manifesto until the overthrow of the shah's regime. In internal discourses, Rajavi argued that Khomeini represented the reactionary sector of society and preached religious fascism. Later, in the early days after the 1979 revolution, the mullahs, specifically Rafsanjani, pointed to these statements in inciting the *hezbollahi* club-wielders to attack the Mojahedin.

New Challenge

In the late 1970s, the shah, under international pressure, began to free some of the political prisoners. Among the last were the Mojahedin leaders, set free thanks to the public uprising.¹⁴ Their release, one week after the shah fled and 12 days before Khomeini returned to Iran on January 21, 1979, coincided with a new phase in the Iranian revolution, when crowds filled the streets shouting anti-shah and anti-American slogans.

Despite the destruction of their organizational apparatus as the result of the *coup*, the Mojahedin still wielded significant weight and popular support. They soon reorganized their membership and waded into the fray.¹⁵ Massoud Rajavi's first public speech, on January 24, 1979, inspired little support for the Mojahedin in the political climate of the time. Instead of unconditionally endorsing Khomeini, *comme il faut*, Rajavi insisted on safeguards for democratic freedoms, as the most important achievement of the revolution.¹⁶ He refused to call the anti-monarchic revolution an "Islamic revolution" and called for a democratic revolution.

The Mojahedin also called for public participation in the establishment of a nationalist, democratic government. This demand formed the basis of their political strategy and was reiterated in their "Minimum Expectations" program in early 1979,¹⁷ and later in Mr. Rajavi's platform during the presidential elections. The Mojahedin slate of candidates for the first Assembly of Experts (which Khomeini had substituted for the Constituent Assembly) and then for the parliamentary elections was a coalition slate of all democratic forces.¹⁸ Well aware of the reactionary nature of the regime to come, the Mojahedin strategy emphasized a political campaign that increasingly highlighted the need for democratic freedoms and exposed the turbaned rulers. Although they had refused from the outset to



150,000 turn out at Tehran's Amjadieh stadium on June 12, 1980 listening to Massoud Rajavi stressing upon the need to safeguard freedoms.

Democracy Betrayed



500,000 Mojahedin sympathizers demonstrate on June 20, 1981 in Tehran to protest the emerging dictatorship.

collaborate with the mullahs, the Mojahedin wanted to avoid any sort of confrontation. Shortly after the new government took power, however, they again came under attack. Their offices, meetings and supporters were assaulted by the *hezbollah*.¹⁹ But, the hostility only served to bolster their popularity. They had become known for standing firm against religious fanaticism and the mullahs' bid at monopolizing the religion.²⁰ In a short period, the movement became Iran's largest organized political force. The circulation of *Mojahed* newspaper reached 500,000, surpassing those of official newspapers.

The Mojahedin grew in popularity and political strength, despite the many restrictions imposed on their activities by the new regime, and continuing arrests of and attacks on their supporters and members.²¹ In 1980, they nominated Massoud Rajavi for President of the republic. Less than a year after the shah's fall, all opposition political groups supported Rajavi's candidacy. In his book, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, Ervand Abrahamian writes:

Rajavi's candidacy was not only endorsed by the Mojahedin-affiliated organizations... ; but also by an impressive array of independent organizations including the Feda'iyan, the National Democratic Front, the Kurdish Democratic Party, the Kurdish Toilers Revolutionary Party (Komula), the Society of Iranian Socialists, the Society for the Cultural and Political Rights of the Turkomans, the Society of Young Assyrians, and the Joint Group of Armenian, Zoroastrian and Jewish Minorities. Rajavi also received the support of a large number of prominent figures: Taleqani's widow; Shaykh Ezeddin Hosayni, the spiritual leader of the Sunni Kurds in Mahabad; Hojjat al-Islam Jalal Ganjehi... ; fifty well-known members of the Iranian Writers' Association, including the economist Naser Pakdaman, the essayist Manuchehr Hezarkhani and the secular historians Feraydun Adamiyyat and Homa Nateq; and, of course, many of the families of the early Mojahedin martyrs, notably the Hanif-nezhads, Rezais, Mohsens, Badizadegans, Asgarizadehs, Sadeqs, Meshkinfams, and Mihandusts. The Mojahedin had become the vanguards of the secular opposition to the Islamic Republic.²²

Khomeini took the threat seriously, issuing a fatwa declaring Rajavi ineligible as a candidate because he had not voted for the velayat-e faqih and the constitution based on it. A few months later, similar decrees and electoral fraud prevented even one Mojahedin member from being elected to parliament. Mr. Rajavi, a parliamentary candidate from Tehran, received over 530,000 votes (25 percent of the total cast)²³. Despite widespread rigging, the Mojahedin

candidates came in second in every case.

Turning Point

Finally, in June 1981, Khomeini decided that the only solution to curb the Mojahedin's rising popularity was their total suppression. On the afternoon of June 20, 1981, some 500,000 demonstrators turned out in Tehran in support of the Mojahedin, who had only hours to organize the protest via their own network of supporters, and marched toward the parliament. Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards opened fire on the peaceful demonstration, killing or wounding hundreds.²⁴ Thousands of demonstrators were arrested and hundreds summarily executed that same night.²⁵ (For a detailed review of the political struggle between the Mojahedin and the regime, see chapter VII.)

This event marked the beginning of an era of widespread suppression, arrests, torture, and mass executions. It also marked the beginning of the Iranian people's nationwide resistance movement. To unite all opposition political forces against the Khomeini regime, the Mojahedin proposed that a coalition be formed. In July 1981, Massoud Rajavi officially announced in Tehran the formation of the National Council of Resistance, and invited all democratic forces opposed to religious despotism to join.²⁶

At the time, Khomeini had deposed Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr as the president. Hunted by the government, Bani-Sadr sought refuge with the Mojahedin, who gave him haven in Rajavi's residence. The two agreed on a covenant, which they published, whereby Bani-Sadr recognized Rajavi as prime minister, responsible for forming the National Council of Resistance.²⁷ From then on, the Mojahedin's strategy was two-pronged: nationwide resistance and all-out confrontation against the regime's suppression in Iran, and formation of a democratic alternative to the Khomeini regime.

Rajavi, accompanied by Bani-Sadr, left Tehran for Paris at the end of July 1981 from Tehran's 1st fighter base, aboard an Iranian Air Force jet piloted by Colonel Behzad Mo'ezzi (the shah's former pilot), who had joined the Mojahedin after the anti-monarchic revolution. In Paris, the National Council of Resistance announced its program and more independent political parties and dignitaries joined its ranks.²⁸ The Council soon emerged as the only viable alternative to Khomeini's fundamentalist regime. As resistance inside

Iran continued, the Council and the Mojahedin established offices in Europe and North America and began a worldwide campaign to expose the clerics' atrocities and introduce the NCR as the democratic alternative. Many parliamentarians the world over declared their support.

Simultaneously, the Council launched a campaign to end the Iran-Iraq war. The NCR's feasible plan for peace was widely welcomed in Iran and endorsed by 5,000 parliamentarians and political dignitaries throughout the world.²⁹ In 1986, after the French struck a deal with Tehran, Mr. Rajavi left Paris and went to the Iran-Iraq frontier, where he formed the National Liberation Army of Iran in 1987.³⁰ In a series of military operations, the NLA struck hard at Khomeini's forces, becoming a major threat to the mullahs' regime.³¹ The all-volunteer NLA's fighters are of diverse political and religious preferences, and include members of the Mojahedin.

The Iranian Resistance has, in recent years, organized anti-government protests and demonstrations through its internal network of resistance activists.³² It has also waged an extensive publicity campaign to prepare the ground for the regime's overthrow and a change for democracy in Iran.³³ The NCR has expanded over the years, to represent a wider range of the Iranian people.³⁴

The State Department report distorts the Mojahedin's history. The Mojahedin's ideology is described as "eclectic" and based on "Shi'a Islamic theology and Marxist tenets."³⁵ They are accused of having: "assassinated at least six American citizens" in the 1970s; "collaborated with Ayatollah Khomeini;" "supported the takeover of the U.S. Embassy;" engaged in violence and terrorism in resisting the Khomeini regime; and being dependent on Iraq.³⁶ Regrettably, the authors of the report followed political guidelines that precluded an impartial study in favor of an account that distorts the simplest facts. (We will consider the subject of relations with Iraq and terrorism in detail in chapters VII and VIII. The issue of the Mojahedin's popular base is discussed in chapter XI.)

Collaborating with Khomeini?

The charge of collaborating with Khomeini is a classic example of the authors' rather shallow understanding of events in Iran. Khomeini took power with the backing of the majority of the Iranian people. He continued to enjoy vast popular support during the early

post-revolutionary era. In accordance with democratic principles and norms, the Mojahedin recognized the regime's initial political legitimacy in deference to the popular will, despite their opposition to many of the policies of the new rulers. The organization continued to recognize the regime as legitimate as long as the people continued to support it, and as long as it allowed peaceful dissent. The Mojahedin, however, were almost immediately recognized as the regime's opposition, because they refused to collaborate with Khomeini. In a dramatic expression of dissent, they boycotted the new regime's constitutional referendum in late 1979.

Abrahamian's *Iranian Mojahedin*, upon which the report draws so heavily, is quite definitive about the Mojahedin's opposition to the Khomeini regime:

By late 1980, the Mojahedin was brazenly accusing Khomeini's entourage, especially the IRP, of "monopolizing power", "hijacking" the revolution, trampling over "democratic rights", and plotting to set up a "fascistic" one-party dictatorship. By early 1981, the authorities had closed down Mojahedin offices, outlawed their newspapers, banned their demonstrations, and issued arrest warrants for some of their leaders; in short they had forced the organization underground...

In the economic sphere, they denounced the regime for having failed not only to raise the standard of living, but also to tackle the unemployment problem; to control the spiraling inflation, especially in rents and food prices; to diminish the dependence on the West, particularly in the vital arena of agriculture imports; to diversify the exports and lessen the reliance on the oil industry; to distribute land to the landless; to build homes for the homeless; to deal with the ever-increasing growth of urban slums; and, even more sensitive, to stamp out corruption in high places. These complaints read much like those previously leveled at the Pahlavi state. In raising the question of corruption, the Mojahedin published internal documents from the Mostazafin Foundation showing that it was subsidizing clerical newspapers, providing jobs for amiable functionaries, and at ridiculously low prices quietly selling off expropriated royalist properties to IRP friends in the bazaar. The Mostazafin Foundation, they charged, was as corrupt as its predecessor - the Pahlavi Foundation.

In the social sphere, the Mojahedin argued that the regime had failed to solve any of the country's major problems: illiteracy, ill health, malnutrition, prostitution, gambling, drug addiction and, of course, inadequate educational facilities. Moreover, they argued that the "medieval-minded" regime had resorted to primitive remedies to deal with the problem of urban crime. The macabre Law of Retribution, they stressed, violated human rights, insulted true Islam, ignored the social causes of crime,

unthinkingly revived the tribal customs of seventh-century Arabia and, being based on "feudal principles", institutionalized inequality - especially between rich and poor, between believers and non believers, and between men and women. Furthermore, they argued that the regime, being wedded to the traditional notion that the two sexes should have separate spheres, had drastically worsened the general condition of women. It had purged women from many professions, lowered the marriage age, closed down coeducational schools, eliminated safeguards against willful divorce and polygamy and, most detrimental of all, perpetuated the "medieval" myth that women were empty vessels created by God to bear children, obey their husbands, and carry out household chores. True Islam, the Mojahedin argued, viewed men and women as social, political and intellectual equals, and thus advocated absolute equality in all spheres of life: in the workplace, at home, and before the law... The concept of sexual equality, which had been implicit in their earlier works, was now explicit.

In the political sphere, the Mojahedin attacked the regime for disrupting rallies and meetings; banning newspapers and burning down bookstores; rigging elections and closing down universities; kidnapping, imprisoning, and torturing political activists; favoring clerics who had collaborated with the previous regime, even those who had participated in Mosaddeq's overthrow; venerating the arch-reactionary Shaykh Fazlollah Nuri who had fought against the 1905-9 constitutional revolution; grossly distorting Shariati's teachings; covering up the fact that courtiers had helped Beheshti gain control of the mosque in Hamburg; making a mockery of the promise to create grass-root councils; violating the rights of the national minorities, especially the Kurds; reviving SAVAK and using the tribunals to terrorize their opponents.³⁷

Hence, the charge of "collaboration with Khomeini" is outlandish, only revealing the extent to which the Department's report has distorted the historical record.

Islamic-Marxists

The label "Islamic-Marxist" has been borrowed from the shah's SAVAK and later Khomeini's regime, both of which used it in a futile attempt to undermine the Mojahedin's social base. On many occasions, the Department has described the Mojahedin ideology as a blend of Marxism, Leninism, and Shi'ism. Obviously, Islam and Marxism are philosophically, politically, and economically disparate and cannot in any sense be mixed. In the years prior to the revolution, when most of the Mojahedin were imprisoned by the SAVAK, they were much admired by the people precisely for their Islamic beliefs, despite having suffered a major organizational setback. Faced with the same

problem, the Khomeini regime coined the term *Monafeq*, meaning "hypocrite" in Arabic, to imply that the Mojahedin falsely claimed to be Muslim. The report also contains this allegation.

The truth is that every ideology ultimately manifests itself in the practices and policies of its followers. We suggest an objective, as opposed to distorted and self-serving, review of the Mojahedin's activities and positions, coupled with a close look at the alignment of political forces in Iran during the last 15 years, as the best criteria for judgment. Remember that Khomeini was able to eliminate every other opponent from the political arena under the banner of Islam. Only the Mojahedin and their current allies in the National Council of Resistance survived, despite the brutal repression, because of their well known beliefs or respect for Islam, the religion of most Iranians.

In his book *The Center of the Universe, The Geopolitics of Iran*, Graham E. Fuller notes that the Mojahedin's Islamic orientation was a major impediment to the Soviets' effort to influence them:

The Soviets in the past have also been interested in other leftist movements such as the Mojahedin Khalq ("The People's Holy Warriors") but had almost no success in establishing any influence over it because of that group's own suspicions of Moscow and its nominal commitment to Islam.

Death of Americans

In referring to the assassinations of American citizens in Iran, the State Department has again distorted the historical record to serve its end. These charges have been dealt with in detail in chapter I. As previously stated in *Appeasing Tehran's Mullahs*, the Mojahedin are not responsible for actions undertaken by others in their name. We refer to specific individuals who eliminated the Quranic verse from the Mojahedin's emblem and murdered Mojahedin officials who had not been arrested (including Majid Sharif Vaghefi and Mohammad Yaqini). It is common knowledge that from the outset, Mr. Rajavi, still in prison, condemned this Marxist group's use of the name "Mojahedin." Emphasizing the Islamic ideology, he clearly demarcated the differences between the Mojahedin and this group, which in 1977 finally changed its name to *Peykar* (Organization of Struggle in the Path of Emancipation of the Working Class).³⁸

The Embassy Takeover

One of the most controversial events of the reign of the mullahs was the U.S. embassy takeover and the holding of American citizens as hostages. In its report, and on previous occasions, the State Department has accused the Mojahedin of supporting the hostage-taking in 1979-81. Interestingly, although the Mojahedin are at worst accused of "supporting" the hostage-taking, the State Department apparently has no qualms about inviting the former hostage-takers themselves, now "diplomats" of the regime's foreign ministry, to engage in dialogue and negotiations with the United States. These same hostage-takers later masterminded, encouraged and supported the murder of hundreds of American and French nationals in successive bombings in Lebanon, and the kidnapping of scores of foreign nationals.³⁹ This extraordinarily unbalanced attitude only makes sense as part of a policy of courting the mullahs.

The Mojahedin have always maintained that the hostage crisis was the single best pretext under which the Khomeini regime could isolate Iran's democratic forces and drive them from the political arena. Hence, they were victims, and probably a primary target, of the hostage-taking. As *Mojahed* newspaper wrote at the time:

For the ruling monopolists, the hostages were nothing but a pretext, to be used in the power struggle to consolidate all key government positions. This is why this faction's slogans about the hostages were always fervid, never calling for anything less than their trial and even execution. The hostage issue had become a tool in the hands of the ruling reactionary faction to outmaneuver and push aside all political rivals and forces... It was only for internal consumption, because it could not have any significant effect or positive impact outside Iran or on foreign policy. The affair was prolonged for internal consumption, namely the power-hungry profiteering of the monopolists.⁴⁰

Six years later, on the takeover's anniversary, Abdol Karim Moussavi-Ardebili, then the regime's Chief Justice, elaborated on the mullahs' motives: "[The embassy takeover] brought about the fall of the Provisional Government, the isolation of the liberals and the confusion of left-wing groups and the Monafeqin and exposed their real faces. As Imam Khomeini said, this revolutionary move was greater than the first revolution."⁴¹ Abbas Soroush, the Director General for Political Affairs in the regime's Foreign Ministry, was

one of the leaders of the "Student Followers of the Imam's Line" and a hostage-taker. He acknowledges that "political groups, especially the Mojahedin, played no role whatsoever in the occupation of the embassy. But once they realized that they had fallen behind us in the political struggle, they brought their people in front of the embassy." Mullah Mohammad Moussavi-Khoiniha, the mastermind of the hostage-taking and Khomeini's personal representative in the affair, has stressed that in their first statement, the Mojahedin described the occupation of the embassy as reactionary and unpopular, but displayed superficial tolerance so that the titanic waves would not sweep them aside.

Immediately after it was occupied, the U.S. embassy in Tehran became a staging ground for attacks on the Mojahedin. Everyday, after the public prayer, the regime's hooligans paraded in front of the embassy, where they were exhorted by officials to prepare for attacks on the "second nest of spies" (a reference to the Mojahedin's offices. The mullahs called the American embassy the first "nest of spies.")

Unfortunately, longtime U.S. support for the shah had sown the seeds of anti-Americanism among the public, which Khomeini used to his advantage. Under the circumstances, any public opposition to the hostage-taking by the Mojahedin would have given Khomeini a *carte blanche* to suppress them as "U.S. lackeys." They had to walk a political tightrope. While exposing Khomeini's real motives, the Mojahedin had to deny the mullahs the chance to exploit the public sentiment against the democratic opposition.⁴² The spirit of all Mojahedin positions and publications in this period was to unveil Khomeini's political deceit and intrigue. If given half a chance, Khomeini would have eliminated the Mojahedin, as he did others.⁴³

Abrahamian says the Mojahedin's criticisms included:

Engineering the American hostage crisis to impose on the nation the "medieval" concept of the *velayat-e faqih*. To support the last accusation they published articles revealing how the student hostage-takers were linked to the IRP; how the *pasdars* had facilitated the break-in; how those who had refused to toe the IRP line had been forced out of the compound; how Ayatollah Beheshti had used the whole incident to sweep aside the Bazargan government; and how Hojjat al-Islam Khoiniha, the man appointed by Khomeini to advise the students, had carefully removed from the embassy all documents with references to U.S. officials meeting clerical leaders during the 1979 revolution...⁴⁴

Abrahamian adds, "Meanwhile, the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line, the occupiers of the U.S. embassy, denounced the Mojahedin as secret Marxists in cahoots with the "pro-American liberals."⁴⁵

From day one of Khomeini's rule, the Mojahedin had tried to prevent the mullahs from manipulating the people's anti-American sentiments to suppress dissent. History records that Khomeini was notorious for using anti-imperialist slogans to justify the internal repression and export of terrorism and instability to countries of the region. The alignment of forces in Iran in 1979 attested to this reality. Two political fronts, with opposing programs, were arrayed face to face. On one front were Khomeini and his allies, including the pro-Moscow Tudeh Party and the Fedayeen (a pro-Moscow Marxist organization), who contended that the primary issue for Iran was the struggle against the United States and that the main internal threat was "liberalism." On the opposing front were the Mojahedin, Ayatollah Taleqani,⁴⁶ and their current allies in the NCR, who dissented from the mainstream politics of post-revolutionary Iran by insisting that the vital issue was political freedoms inside Iran. The Mojahedin and their allies continuously warned that the foreboding shadow of religious dictatorship was the primary threat.⁴⁷

This alignment had taken shape in the early months of Khomeini's reign. In August 1979, three months prior to the embassy takeover, the Revolutionary Guards formally occupied the Mojahedin's central offices in Mossadeq Avenue in Tehran.⁴⁸ From that point on the organization became a semi-clandestine movement, and Massoud Rajavi warned of the return of dictatorship under the cloak of religion.⁴⁹ In March 1979, less than three weeks after the mullahs seized power, Mojahedin offices in Kashan, Yazd, and Torbat Heydarieh were ransacked and taken over, and many members - men and women - were beaten and detained.⁵⁰ In April 1979, and only two months after the shah's fall, Ayatollah Taleqani closed all his offices and left Tehran in protest to the new despotism.⁵¹ The Mojahedin supported Taleqani's move, announcing that they had put all their forces and facilities at his disposal to confront religious dictatorship.⁵² In July 1979, two Mojahedin supporters in Fars Province, the Asgari brothers, were arrested and executed on orders of the religious judge (also Khomeini's representative) on charges of conducting "pro-

imperialist" activities.

Precisely because of this emphasis on political freedoms, the Tudeh leaders described the Mojahedin as "a bastion of liberalism and imperialism." The communist party paper wrote:

Mr. Rajavi please consider this: Even movements and individuals who have monarchist views and are not democratic, but are struggling in practical terms against imperialism, are revolutionary. Clear enough? Firstly, can democracy, so loved and esteemed by you, exist without independence and struggle against imperialism? Secondly, due to your emphasis on democracy, the struggle against imperialism, today our number one priority, may lose its standing even as a secondary goal.⁵³

In a 1981 commentary in his newspaper, Nooreddin Kianouri, the Secretary General of the Tudeh, posed several politically loaded questions to Massoud Rajavi, among them: "What have you done that unveiled women from uptown, the bourgeoisie and liberals are applauding you?" The Tudeh Party's "plot-meter" described the Mojahedin actions during those years as American conspiracies, and many Mojahedin later executed on Khomeini's orders were wrapped in American flags before burial.

In later years, the religious tyranny, which the Tudeh had helped bolster, unleashed an onslaught against the Mojahedin and executed thousands of their supporters. In the meantime, the pro-Moscow communists carried on their activities and distributed their publications freely and openly. Of course, the price of their freedom was collaboration with the regime in the suppression, arrest, and torture of the Mojahedin and other opposition groups.

If the authors of the State Department report had objectively reviewed their sources and refrained from selective use of them, they would have necessarily concluded that democracy was the major issue for the Mojahedin in post-revolutionary Iran. Abrahamian writes:

In criticizing the regime's political record, the Mojahedin moved the issue of democracy to center stage. They argued that the regime had broken all the democratic promises made during the revolution; that an attack on any group was an attack on all groups; that the issue of democracy was of "fundamental importance;"...⁵⁴

Abrahamian says that in the same years, the communist Tudeh and Majority faction of the Fedayeen "pleaded with the Mojahedin to

join their Anti-Imperialist Democratic Front; to remember that the United States was still Iran's main enemy; to avoid allying with pro-Western liberals," adding that the Minority faction of the Fedayeen (still opposed to the regime) accused the Mojahedin of "flirting with pro-American liberals such as Bazargan." The author admits that "the Mojahedin rebuffed the pleas and criticism."⁵⁵

A Final Say

The State Department's Near East Bureau, seemingly oblivious to the repercussions of 25 years of unconditional U.S. support for the shah's dictatorship, bickers with the Mojahedin about why they did not speak of the United States in friendlier terms in the post-revolutionary era. This is either an excuse for a policy of appeasement, or an indication of the bureau's naiveté regarding post-revolutionary circumstances. The point here is not to defend every single position, word or tactic of the Mojahedin or their affiliated publications in the past. We see no need, in principle, to answer to any authority but to the people of Iran. The Mojahedin take pride in their three decades of unwavering struggle for freedom, independence, and national, popular sovereignty. Neither the Mojahedin nor their allies in the National Council of Resistance will ever deviate from these sacred ideals. Thus, our aim is only to explain a policy which stressed political freedoms, while denying the mullahs the opportunity to use "anti-imperialist" theatrics and schemes to suppress Iran's democratic forces.

At the same time, it is worth pointing out that the State Department which has so meticulously reviewed and criticized Mojahedin deeds and words of 15 years ago, has not been at all conscientious about reviewing its own past policy on Iran. Regrettably, there has been no equivalent effort to examine the negative implications of that policy either, especially because since 1984, the U.S. has again severed all ties with the Iranian people and their resistance in favor of deals with one of the most sinister regimes in the world today. Unfortunately, the minimum demand in any deal with the mullahs has been, is and will remain labeling the Iranian Resistance "terrorist." Even more perplexing is the insistence on pursuing such a policy today, when Khomeini's regime is more unpopular than the shah's ever was, and when dictatorships are giving way to new democracies in the wake of Soviet disintegration.

Democracy Betrayed

It bears reiterating that the Iranian people and Resistance are determined to end religious dictatorship in Iran and bring democracy to their country. This Resistance movement extends its hand in peace, friendship and cooperation to all who respect Iran's freedom, independence and territorial integrity, today and in tomorrow's democratic Iran. It is up to the United States to demonstrate its desire for a policy that deals justly with the Iranian people. Meanwhile, the fact remains that the mullahs are on their last legs, and the State Department's hysteric animosity toward the Mojahedin is reminiscent of U.S. policy under the shah.