

Gaining Concessions from Iran's Mullahs by Attacking the PMOI

A top priority for Iran's mullahs since coming to power has been the elimination of the People's Mujahedin, which seeks to replace the repressive theocracy with a secular democratic government.

Inside Iran, more than 120,000 supporters of the PMOI have been executed by the mullahs. The mullahs seek to undermine the PMOI with propaganda, assassinations, and distribution of disinformation by undercover intelligence agents.

The mullahs also orchestrate attacks on the PMOI through the conduct of their foreign policy. Countries that seek assistance from the mullahs, access to Iranian markets, or better relations are regularly required to strike against the PMOI as the price for cooperation, as the following incidents attest:

1985 – Branding the PMOI as Marxist

In July 1985, Richard Murphy, a top official from the US State Department, gave testimony before a House of Representatives subcommittee that alleged the PMOI was “Marxists” and “engaged in anti-U.S. and anti-Western terrorism.”¹

The White House at the time was secretly negotiating with Iran to gain their assistance in freeing seven American hostages held in Lebanon. The mullahs, for their help, required the US to issue an “official announcement” declaring the PMOI as terrorists and Marxists.² Mr. Murphy's testimony was America's response to Iran's demand.

1986 – French Hostage Deal

In 1986, French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac wanted help from Iran's mullahs in freeing French hostages held captive in Lebanon.³ The mullahs agreed if France satisfied the following requirements: 1) repay \$1.3 billion owed to Iran; 2) refrain from selling military equipment to Iraq and; 3) extradite Iranian dissidents – i.e. the PMOI – living in France.

The French government withdrew police protection for the PMOI headquarters outside Paris. Weeks later a bomb exploded near Mr. Rajavi's residence. The PMOI was no longer welcome by the French government and the organization voted to relocate in Iraq, near the Iranian border. Weeks later two French hostages were released.

¹ “Developments in the Middle East, July 1985,” House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, July 24, 1985.

² “The Tower Commission Report,” The New York Times Company, February 1987, p. 360.

³ “Terrorism, Hostage Problems Urgent for Chirac's New Government,” Associated Press, March 21, 1986.

1997 – Goodwill Gesture

After Mohammad Khatami was elected president of Iran in May 1997, the Clinton Administration sought a rapprochement with the mullahs by offering a series of “goodwill gestures.”

The US signaled its willingness to improve relations by withdrawing its opposition to the construction of a major oil pipeline through Iran. The mullahs were unimpressed and declared in September 1997 that America’s leaders were “not sincere in their stated desire to talk with us.”⁴

Three weeks later the US State Department designated the PMOI as a Foreign Terrorism Organization (FTO) in October 1997. The following day, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article in which a senior Clinton Administration official stated the decision to place the Mojahedin on the FTO list was “intended as a goodwill gesture to Tehran and its newly elected moderate president, Mohammad Khatami.”⁵

The *Washington Post* reported that the US State Department had “pleased Tehran by including an Iranian opposition group known as the Mujahedin on a list of 30 foreign organizations designated as terrorist groups.”⁶

Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk discussed the incident in his memoir, “Innocent Abroad.” Mr. Indyk said “We hoped it [designating the MeK] would be perceived in Tehran as a goodwill gesture.”⁷

Mr. Indyk noted that an Iranian news agency described the event as a “little victory for Iran.”⁸ Former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, however, viewed the concession as insufficient and complained the Mojahedin was still allowed to lobby Congress and raise funds in the U.S.⁹

1999 – FTO Listing

In October 1999, the State Department relisted the PMOI as a FTO. A week later, on October 14, Assistant Secretary Indyk publicly stated that the Clinton Administration had renewed its

⁴ “Iran Sees no Change in US attitude Since Khatami’s Election,” Agence France Presse, September 15, 1997.

⁵ “U.S. Designates 30 Groups as Terrorists.” *Los Angeles Times*. October 9, 1997.

⁶ “More Signs of Thaw in Icy US-Iran Relations,” *Washington Post*, March 27, 1998.

⁷ “Innocent Abroad; An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East.” Martin Indyk. Simon & Schuster. 2009.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ “U.S. Designates 30 Groups as Terrorists.” *Los Angeles Times*. October 9, 1997.

⁹ “Innocent Abroad; An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East.” Martin Indyk. Simon & Schuster. 2009.

“offer of unconditional dialogue with the Iranian government.”¹⁰ As evidence of America’s good faith effort, he said the State Department had “redesignated the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization.”¹¹

He said the Department had also “for the first time, listed the National Council of Resistance (NCR) as an alias of the MEK.” Asked why the Department had added the NCRI to the FTO list, Mr. Indyk replied, “The Iranian government had brought this to our attention.”¹²

According to President Khatami, getting tough on the NCRI had been one of Iran’s long-standing demands.

Although US policy toward Iran, as spelled out by Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk on Thursday, remains largely unchanged, Washington has made a goodwill gesture to Tehran by confirming that it was cracking down on the National Council of Resistance (NCR), the civilian front for the main Iranian armed opposition group, says Iranian analyst Ali Nouri-Zadeh. This has been a long-standing demand of the government of President Mohammad Khatami, he told *The Mideast Mirror* on Friday.¹³

2003 - Bombing the PMOI

In 2003, the MeK was thrust into the center of U.S.-Iranian relations in the months leading up to the Iraq War. In January 2003, two senior Bush Administration officials – Zalmay Khalilzad from the White House and Ryan C. Crocker from the State Department – met with high-ranking Iranians about the pending conflict. As a bargaining chip to entice Iran to stay out of the war, the U.S. offered to bomb MeK camps in Iraq.¹⁴

“A more concrete commitment to attack the [MeK] camps was later relayed to Tehran through British officials,” the *Washington Post* reported.¹⁵

In late March and early April 2003, multinational forces repeatedly bombarded MeK camps in northern Iraq, killing about 50 people.¹⁶

Prior to the initiation of hostilities, the MeK had declared its neutrality – the same as it had during the first Persian Gulf War – and had consolidated its forces into several camps, hoping to

¹⁰ “Text of Remarks Given by Martin S. Indyk, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs.” Federal News Service. October 14, 1999.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “US Goodwill Gesture to Iran,” *The Mideast Mirror*, October 15, 1999.

¹⁴ “One Step Forward, Direction Uncertain.” *Washington Post*. April 18, 2003.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Law: Britain May Lift Ban on Iran’s Opposition.” *Telegraph*. September 27, 2007.

avoid any involvement in the conflict. Following is a description of the U.S. deal struck with Iran to bomb the camps as reported by the *Wall Street Journal*:

In a move to persuade Iran not to meddle in Iraq, U.S. forces have bombed the camps of Iranian opposition fighters on the Iraqi side of the border and have reached a surrender agreement with the group's remaining fighters, U.S. officials said.

The dismantling of the Iranian opposition force in Iraq, known as the Mujahedin-e Khalq, or MeK, fulfills a private U.S. assurance conveyed to Iranian officials before the start of hostilities that the group would be targeted by British and American forces if Iran stayed out of the fight, according to U.S. officials. The effort was part of the border strategy aimed at reassuring Tehran that the war in neighboring Iraq held out the prospect of benefits, the officials said.

Eliminating the MeK's Iraqi base of operations, from which the group has mounted hit-and-run operations along the border and violent terrorist attacks in Tehran for decades, has long been a major Iranian goal.¹⁷

2003 – NCRI Closure

The MeK was again thrown to the wolves when the office of the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI) in Washington, D.C. was shut down by the U.S. State, Treasury, and Justice Departments, which alleged the office was a political arm of the MeK. State Department acting spokesman Tom Casey claimed the decision to shutter the NCRI had no connection with U.S. policy toward Iran.

But weeks earlier, the news media reported the U.S. was in negotiations with Iran for the extradition of al Qaeda prisoners captured during the war. Before Iran would act, it sought a “gesture” from the U.S. Following is a description of events by *USA Today*:

The Iranian official, who has direct knowledge of the negotiations between Iran and the United States, suggested that Iran might be willing to comply with U.S. requests to extradite the prisoners to their home countries, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia ... But for now, the Iranian government is refusing to do that because it says the Bush administration has failed to rein in a violent exile group called the Mujahedin el-Khalq (MEK).¹⁸

¹⁷ “U.S. Bombs Iranian Fighters on Iraqi Side of the Border.” *Wall Street Journal*. April 15, 2003.

¹⁸ “Iran Might Swap Terrorists from Help from U.S.” *USA Today*. August 4, 2003.

The Iranian official added that the government of Iran might be willing to change its position. “We will reciprocate,” he offered, “any gesture on the part of the United States.”¹⁹ On August 14, 2003, the NCRI office was closed down and on the following day Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi praised the action of the United States, stating it was “a positive step that conforms to its international responsibilities.”²⁰

NCRI Headquarters in Paris

On June 17, 2003, more than 1200 French police raided the headquarters offices of the NCRI in Paris and the homes of its leadership. The raid was ordered by Judge Jean-Louis Bruguiere, who claimed the PMOI was “intent to prepare acts of terrorism and financing of a terrorist enterprise.”²¹

An appeals court later ruled there was no evidence to support the claims of the French government. The attack on the PMOI, it turns out, was perpetrated to gain favor with Iran’s mullahs regarding pending commercial contracts, according to a highly placed source in French intelligence.²²

At the time, France was hoping to sign contracts with Iran to build power stations, develop gas fields, construct an ethylene plant, and sign a joint venture between Renault and Iran to build a car.

The raid was planned more than two and a half years earlier by the French internal secret service (DST), according to a confidential report by Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS).²³ After the raid on the NCRI facilities, Iran completed the joint venture with Renault and signed a contract to develop a gas field and LNG facility.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Iran Praises U.S. Closure of Dissident Group’s Offices as Positive Step.” Associated Press. August 16, 2003.

²¹ “France Frees Iranian Opposition Leader,” International Herald Tribune, July 3, 2003.

²² “Iran: Foreign Policy Challenges and Choices,” DLA Piper, 2006.

²³ “Secret Deals Between French Government and Mullahs Against Resistance,” NCRI, June 25, 2006.

²⁴ “Iran Signs Pars LNG Deal with TotalFinaElf, Petronas,” OPEC News Agency, December 8, 2004.