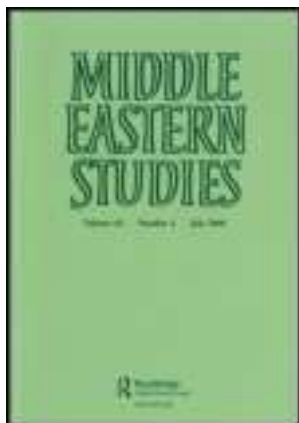


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Publisher: Routledge

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Middle Eastern Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fmes20>

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Published online: 27 Nov 2013.

To cite this article: Ronen A. Cohen (2013) The Triple Exclusion of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization – Their Activities for Human Rights in Iran as a Voice in the Wilderness , Middle Eastern Studies, 49:6, 941-957, DOI: [10.1080/00263206.2013.836494](https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2013.836494)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2013.836494>

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The Triple Exclusion of the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization – Their Activities for Human Rights in Iran as a Voice in the Wilderness

RONEN A. COHEN*

The Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) is an Iranian Islamist semi-Marxist organization. The MKO was founded in 1965 at Tehran University, by students from the middle-class strata, who formed themselves into a group in order to fight the Shah and his ‘White Revolution’.¹ The ultimate goal of the MKO was to topple the monarchy by any means. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the MKO concentrated on submitting its new ideological views directed towards the social and religious life. Furthermore, the MKO had no need to build its new ideology on human rights issues, as other groups would later, since the most urgent and populist issue was the regime’s social and religious abuse. The Iranian people’s awareness of human rights would evolve mainly during the 1970s when the Shah’s SAVAK (the secret police) very frequently violated human rights.

A new human rights trend was adopted by the opposition groups in the second half of the 1970s, when President Carter was in office. Carter’s agenda concerning human rights was known even before the presidential elections and gained full attention once he entered office. Carter was not too tolerant towards the situation in Iran and chained the Shah’s hands when the latter fought the opposition groups fiercely. The opposition groups were aware of this and used the new situation to maximize their achievements. The consequences were that the MKO, among other groups, chanted the common human rights slogans without anchoring these in their political ideas. Moreover, they were not required to deal with these factors in their manifesto, since they had never promised to implement them when, and if, they governed Iran.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was led by Ayatollah Khomeini and his disciples, who used the opposition groups for their ultimate aim – toppling the shah and his monarchy. After 18 months of looking for their opportunity in the new political sphere, the MKO understood that Khomeini and his Revolutionary Council would not let it (or any other opposition groups) participate in the leadership or in the

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political game of the new regime. The MKO was not alone in this and, together with other groups, they were expelled from the political sphere. The MKO could reach only one conclusion: if it could not join the new leadership or take part in the new political sphere, it could only use the same tool that had brought the Shah down – armed opposition to the new regime.²

One of the propaganda tools the MKO used against the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) was the human rights issue, specifically the executions that took part mainly in the late 1980s. The MKO left Iran for France in 1981 as the IRI systematically persecuted the organization's members and supporters, and organization began organizing international protests against the persecution and against the violation of Iranian citizens' human rights. The emphasis on that issue became stronger when the organization left France in 1986 and moved to Iraq. The organization's struggle drew a consistent and harsh reaction from the IRI, which began executing the MKO's members.

During the summer of 1986, the MKO settled along the Iraqi–Iranian border and took part in the Iraqi fighting against Iranian military forces. This move to Iraq and taking part in the fighting against its own nation led to a denunciation and denial from the Iranian people who saw this move as a 'betrayal' and as helping their most cruel and persistent enemy – Saddam Hussein. The organization lost credibility among the Iranian people, and was referred to with hatred and disgust.

Along with fighting Iraq, the Islamic Republic's inner struggle was directed against anyone who opposed the *Velayat-e Faqih* (rule of the jurisprudent) ideal. In 1986 Massoud Rajavi (the MKO's leader) claimed that the Republic had already killed 50,000 oppositionists and that it used 53 different types of torture techniques against prisoners held in jail and against those who were executed. Those who were executed were accused of 'corrupting the land' and of 'fighting Allah'. Rajavi claimed that 90 per cent of the executed were MKO members and supporters. He complained that the Republic held 140,000 political prisoners in its jailhouses and governed the country by intimidating and terrorizing the people. In that phase of the struggle against the Republic, the MKO's Iranian cells carried out military activities against the Republic's 'executions and the torture agents'. The MKO began killing them in order to frighten them and revenge their own friends' deaths.³

The violation of human rights had always been an almost integral part of the modern history of Iran, whether it was under the Qajar monarchy or the Pahlavis, and of course under the IRI. This article cannot give a comparative look of these periods though it could be done by historians who have managed to present the Iranian society's developments in politics, gender, social life, religion and so on. Rather, this article will focus mainly on the MKO's motivation to gather international support for its own cause by dealing with the human rights issue in Iran, aggressively and determinedly. The MKO's willpower would finally lead to a twist in the historical plot. The main period that the article focuses on is between 1988, just after the ceasefire agreement between Iran and Iraq, and 1994.

The MKO was in a special position in the case of using the human rights issue for its propaganda. The article's aim is to show that even a veteran and well-known organization such as the MKO that uses the human rights issues could come under the Triple Exclusion notion. Most of the opposition groups, within or

outside Iran and from other countries suffer especially from 'one exclusion' – from the regime itself. This article aims to show that the MKO, while navigating its own way in the international sphere and associating itself with the Iraqi tyrant Saddam Hussein, caused two more exclusions on the basis of the human rights issue.

Another aim of this article is to take a brief look at the MKO's point of view regarding the human rights issue in Iran. It is claimed that since the organization had lost its credibility inside Iran, it began to build it up again while preaching to the world and to the Iranian government about the human rights issue inside Iran. One of the questions that we will discuss is whether the MKO used this issue as propaganda against the IRI for its own benefit (saving mainly MKO members and supporters that were jailed) or whether it really intended to save the Iranian people from the regime's brutality. Moreover, even regarding it merely as propaganda, did the MKO accounts give the world a true picture of the situation in Iran or were some of the facts exaggerated, perhaps even falsified? If such was the case, the main question to be asked should be: for whose human rights did the MKO struggle and who exactly did this organization represent when doing so? What is more, how did the 'one exclusion' become a 'triple exclusion'?

While dealing with the human rights in Iran and especially with the MKO, we must bear in mind that this sensitive issue could not come under the debate on Islamic orientation approaches to the human rights issue. This debate was rather remote from the issues that the MKO tried to deal with. For the MKO, the real debate was not between two (or more) Islamic groups that were trying to interpret or reinterpret the Islamic sources for their own benefit. Rather, the main debate that took place between the MKO and the IRI was a silent dialogue, in which the MKO pretended to present a western approach to human rights while the IRI presented (with no pretence) its Islamic approach and understanding of the human rights issue.

It is very interesting to see the Islamic approaches that Ann E. Mayer discusses in her book *Islam and Human Rights*, and to understand that this debate could be accurate in inter-Islamic discourse but not between an organization with western orientation and an Islamic regime that had built itself basically on fundamental Islamic values. However, we can use Mayer's discussion on the Iranian issue to understand the basic situation that the MKO had to cope with.

After toppling the Shah, the new revolutionary forces tried to rebuild the new state under Khomeini's *Velayat-e Faqih* guidelines. One of the leading figures of those times was Mehdi Bazargan, member of the Iranian Constitution Committee, and the first prime minister in post-revolution Iran, under Bani-Sadr presidency, who sought to build the new regime based on a moderate Islamic approach that would give the people the opposite of what the shah represented. For Mehdi Bazargan, the wish to create an egalitarian, open, moderate and tolerant Islamic society was the main focus when drafting the constitution and when in office as premier. Unfortunately, he was pushed aside to the opposition benches by the ayatollahs, who preferred the traditional interpretations. Bazargan's efforts (not to mention his president's approach) were like tilting at windmills. At this specific point of time it could even be seen as a naïve approach, particularly when considering the fact that Khomeini wished to destroy any sign of the West inside Iran, physically and spiritually. His promises to build an Islamic society under the guidelines of the Quran,

Shari'a and the Jafari School could not be hindered or delayed by any domestic or foreign forces. Khomeini did not want to miss the momentum to apply his *Velayat-e Faqih* theory.

However, according to Mayer, Bazargan's efforts (among those of others) could metaphorically be seen as planting the seeds for the rise of a vibrant reform movement, opposing the conservatives in Iran, mainly, if not most, regarding the human rights issue, especially with a moderate Islamic approach.⁴ Mayer gives a challenging assumption that the Shari'a edicts and precepts in general and those that deal with human rights issues in particular, rest mainly on traditional Islamic interpretations.

Fred Halliday, in his article 'Relativism and Universalism in Human Rights: the Case of the Islamic Middle East', claims that the MKO falls under the category of a group which 'are the victims of regimes speaking in the name of a legitimating "Islam", be this in Iran, Saudi Arabia or the Sudan, have often invoked universalistic precisely because they contest the very legitimacy of the regimes that are repressing them'.⁵ In a sideline comment, Halliday argues that the MKO used Quranic quotations and transformed them into secular terms.⁶ This argument is partly true, since the MKO has produced innumerable books, booklets and pamphlets dealing with Quranic phrases, messages and Shi'i interpretations of these phrases (and on human rights too). These books were mainly in Persian and were aimed at Iranian people inside Iran. The 'secular' terms would come later on the basis of Quranic quotations, and would aim rather at a western audience including the Iranian Diaspora.

Moreover, Halliday gives another point of view while dealing with and mapping the human rights issue in the Islamic world. He argues for five distinct features that can help us understand the 'the debate on human rights in the Islamic context'. Some of it could help us understand the MKO's motivations and struggle for human rights in Iran. The first of Halliday's features is 'the development of international debate, arising with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and leading on to subsequent, more specific codes, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s'. The second is 'the Islamic debate ... partly influenced by the UN-centred debates, a broader set of political questions ... and the treatment of Muslims in Western European society being cases in point'. The third feature that Halliday offers is in the case that 'particular use made of human rights as an issue for criticizing abuses by governments, be this on ... Amnesty, or, as with the Carter and subsequent US administrations, and with the UN Human Rights Commission'.⁷ The other two features are not relevant to our discussion. Nevertheless, we shall see that the MKO and its political branch – the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)⁸ – would come under these features. These points of departure can help us understand the following events and their implications for the motivators of the issue of human rights.

In 1987, Massoud Rajavi (the MKO's leader) brought up the issues of the Iran–Iraq War and human rights before the European Union and the European Parliament (EP). The EP pointed out that the human rights situation was already known in the UN (the General Assembly had discussed it in the 40th and 41st sessions) and that the parliament appreciated the sincere efforts the NCRI and its leader and their wish to overthrow the Islamic Republic in order to put an end to the war and establish a democratic system in Iran that would guarantee human rights and liberties by applying a programme presented to the European Parliament.⁹ However, beyond an EP

condemnation of Iran and a pledge of support for the NCRI, the EP (similar to the UN General Assembly's Human Rights Committee) did not accept any recommendation or practical decision of the other European members against the IRI to stop the oppression of the people and those opposed to the Islamic Republic.¹⁰

On 10 September 1987, Rajavi sent a telegram to the UN Secretary Javier Perez De-Cuellar including a list of 2,000 MKO supporters who had been executed. Rajavi asked the UN Secretary to employ all international tools to stop the oppression and torture of the Iranian people, especially of the MKO members and supporters.¹¹ On 18 November 1987, in the UN General Assembly session, the special UN human rights representative to Iran, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, referred to the list that Rajavi had sent two months earlier. He pointed out that he was aware of the human rights violations that were going on in Iran and that it was quite difficult to know what the exact situation at that moment, because Iran had refused to let UN representatives enter the country in order to investigate the situation.¹²

On 25 November 1987, the MKO held a press conference in the UN building in order to present the Islamic Republic's 'crimes' regarding human rights. The session was chaired by Kazem Rajavi.¹³ Dr Rajavi presented the facts referring to the executions and to the systematic persecutions that the Iranian government employed against its political opponents. Rajavi brought to the press conference Vali Ashqi, a prisoner who had managed to escape from Iran and who testified regarding the human rights issue and executions of political prisoners. Dr Rajavi asked at least 90 countries that were UN members to act in favour of the human rights issue in Iran and introduce oil and weapons embargos in order to put an end to the government of the Islamic Republic.¹⁴

On 7 December 1987, at the 42nd session of the UN General Assembly, the UN condemned the Islamic Republic for the human rights situation in Iran as well as for the executions. It was the third year that the UN General Assembly condemned Iran on that issue. The NCRI saw condemnation as its own success in raising the human rights issue and the true colours of the Islamic Republic in front of the whole world. Thus, Dr Rajavi joined in by introducing documentation and evidence concerning the issue to all members of the UN in general and to the Human Rights Committee in particular.¹⁵

At the beginning of 1988, the MKO pointed out that at least a quarter of its thousands of activists in Iran had been executed, including women, some of whom were pregnant when executed.¹⁶ However, the activities of the Liberation Army¹⁷ and of the MKO's cells in Iran only caused an increase in the number of executions of MKO members and supporters, particularly in the western part of the country where the Liberation Army was active.¹⁸ In August 1988, while the ceasefire agreement (Resolution 598) was being signed, the number of executed MKO members and supporters only increased. Trying to combat these executions, Rajavi sent an urgent wire to the UN Secretary General De-Cuellar requiring the UN's immediate intervention so that the executions would stop. In his wire to the UN General Secretary Rajavi referred to the following. First, the UN's former condemnations regarding the issue of human rights in Iran (hinting that nothing had been done regarding these condemnations). Second, the Islamic Republic was responsible for the execution of about 70,000 people and for using 73 different methods of torture. Third, the Islamic Republic violated the international declaration regarding human rights as well as the

UN treaty regarding that issue. Fourth, he referred to the increase in the number of executions at that time (August 1988). Fifth, he demanded that the Islamic Republic's actions be denounced and international tools be employed to stop the human rights violations in Iran.¹⁹

On 2 September 1988, Amnesty International (AI) published a call for 'immediate action' against the mass executions carried out in Iran. AI called upon all human rights organizations around the world to bring to an immediate stop all those executions and to protest against the Islamic Republic's activities. Thousands of MKO and NCRI members all over the world joined that call and went out protesting against the Islamic Republic. On 5 September 1988, at least 1,000 demonstrators protested in Stockholm, Sweden. On 9 September 1988, 1,500 Iranians demonstrated in New York, Bonn, Germany and 12 other cities around the world.²⁰ These protests were targeted mainly to show the distribution of NCRI and MKO in the West and to put pressure on international human rights associations to speed up their help to the Iranian citizens. The image that the MKO wished to present was that it was not only acting for a private cause of saving its members' lives inside Iran, but that at stake was rather a national issue, according to which the organization wanted to topple the cruel regime in order to save the Iranian people's human rights.

The MKO's spokesperson in London pointed out that the mass executions began once the ceasefire agreement was applied in August 1988 (Resolution 598) despite the fact that there had been executions of MKO members and supporters as well as of political prisoners even before that.²¹ The Iranian diplomatic reaction all over the world was to deride the MKO's accusations. Those diplomats claimed that they knew only about the execution of eight MKO members,²² while the AI claimed that their sources were limited regarding the MKO's accusations of Iran and that it was getting its information from Iranian Radio and press reports about executions of the 'Islamic Republic oppositionists'. AI expressed concern regarding the information arriving from Iran and from the MKO and for their inability, as well as the inability of other international players, to know exactly what was going on in Iran, since Iran refused to let westerners enter its country to investigate the state of human rights.²³

The European Parliament session taking place between 10 and 14 October 1988 adopted a decision to condemn the violation of human rights in Iran following Amnesty's last report. Later, on 2 November 1988, in the UN's 43rd session, the UN representative on the human rights status in Iran, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl, presented his first report regarding human rights in the country. Galindo expressed in the report his concern about the violation of human rights. The report was also based on the testimony of nine MKO members who had managed to escape Iran. Reynaldo expressed his concern that the number of IRI oppositionists and political prisoners that were executed was increasing especially since Iran accepted Resolution 598. The Iranian representative to the UN, Mohammad Jafar Mehelati, criticized the UN Human Rights Committee's report and even suggested that the UN and the IRI would cooperate so that the 'truth would emerge'. Mehelati attacked the MKO members' testimonies in the report and claimed that they were 'traitors' and that their accusations against Iran were suspect.²⁴

On 21 November 1988, the MKO held another press conference in the UN building in New York regarding human rights in Iran and the most recent executions.

That press conference, too, took place while the UN Human Rights Committee was having a session of its own. At the press conference the MKO again accused the IRI government of a new wave of executions of government opponents. The organization claimed that since the ceasefire agreement about 12,000 political prisoners had been executed on Ayatollah Khomeini's direct order.²⁵ On 9 December 1988, the UN General Assembly condemned Iran for the fourth time for its violations of human rights and for the executions carried out in the country. On 13 December 1988, AI published information that during the last third of the year (1988) the number of executions was the highest ever.²⁶

As a result of the international outcry by human rights organizations and the facts the MKO, the NCRI, AI and others provided regarding human rights and mass executions carried out in August 1988, on 14 November 1988 the EP held a special discussion on the issue of human rights in Iran. The parliament brought the facts about the thousands of people who had been executed in Iran since 1979 and mentioned that anyone who was suspected of belonging to an opposition organization was held arbitrarily in custody. The parliament even pointed out the systematic torture and punishments against those opposed to the IRI that were applied in the state's prisons. The parliament also referred to the AI report regarding human rights in Iran and called upon the Islamic Republic: (1) to immediately release all political prisoners; (2) to allot a limited time for a person in prison to be deprived of their rights and to allow them to meet a lawyer and their family and to receive medical care; (3) to guarantee a fair trial according to the international law, including the right to a defence attorney and the right to appeal; (4) to investigate all reports about torture, bringing to trial those responsible and compensating victims and their families; (5) to set up security measures to guarantee prisoners' safety, to close custody centres, to inform family members of the whereabouts of the arrested family member; (6) to ratify international law that forbids torture; (7) to stop the execution of prisoners, to stop torturing and maiming prisoners; (8) to legislate an international human rights treaty; (9) to allow international human rights organizations access to the country in order to investigate the issue.²⁷

On 16 January 1989, in continuance to the EP's demands of the Iranian government, it also expressed its shock at the scope of executions of political prisoners and various government opposition members. The EU called again and again upon Iran to stop the executions and the torture in general and those taking place inside prisons in particular. The EU asked the UN to carry on with its activities concerning the status of human rights in the country. The EU also called upon the IRI to approve the international organization's entry so that they could learn at first-hand what was happening in Iran.²⁸

While the EP was having its meeting, Massoud Rajavi sent the UN Secretary General De-Cuellar another list of 1,107 MKO members and supporters who had been executed. He described to the secretary general the atrocities that the IRI perpetrated on its citizens and compared Khomeini's reign to that of Hitler, using characteristics such as cruelty and genocide, for example, using gas to kill people, mass graves, public hangings and burying victims while still alive.²⁹ The MKO pointed out that Khomeini ordered all the Republic's courthouses to severely punish criminals who had been accused of 'severe crimes'. The Iranian justice minister, Abdul Karim Moussavi Ardebili, said that Ayatollah Khomeini's order referred to criminals, rapists, robbers

and drug dealers. The MKO claimed that Ardebili's statement was meant to conceal Khomeini's main goal, which was terminating the IRI's opponents, especially since the statement was published after the Liberation Army's actions in Ilam and Gilan and in west Iran.³⁰

The MKO published other IRI leaders' statements as well as those of Iranian officials regarding the issue of executing the Republic's opponents. Among others, they published President Khamenei's statement from 6 December 1988: 'we enforce the death penalty in the Islamic Republic ... We execute convicts ... Do you think we should give candy to inmates who have ties with the Mojahedin from inside the prison?' There was also a quote from Moussavi, the prime minister: 'The Mojahedin want to attack Tehran ... we fought them. What were we supposed to do? We have no apologies in this regard. Our government must defend itself.' The Iranian press pointed out that the MKO's claims regarding the executions were false. It claimed that 12,000 MKO members were killed in battles and were not systematically executed by the IRI. The Iranian vice president, Alireza Moayeri, expressed himself clearly on the issue: 'What should a country do if not defend itself? ... Those arrested were condemned to death. Regardless of the world's whining and clamour, we won't stop such executions. This has nothing to do with human rights'.³¹ The Iranian interior minister, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said that '[in order] to settle this matter once and for all, all those who have been arrested and those who joined them have been executed. They ... announced war on the people ... any group which uses weapons to kill people deserves to be executed. It is natural for those who committed these crimes to be executed'.³²

On 30 January 1989, AI turned to the international community so that the latter would put pressure upon the Iranian government for it to stop violating human rights and executing people. That call came just before the 45th session of the UN regarding human rights. On 4 February 1989, the MKO and the NCRI sent another list of 1,500 people who had been executed to the UN Secretary General, De-Cuellar. The MKO claimed that the list was only partial and that thousands of other people were being executed. On that list, the MKO divided the people who had been executed into various categories: school and university students, doctors, clergymen, military officers, labourers, teachers, etc.³³ As the issue of executions became clearer, western governments began condemning Iran. In January 1989, the State Department issued its annual report regarding international human rights and Iran had a dubious place in that report. On 11 February 1989, the German government published an official protest against the human rights violations and executions carried out in Iran.³⁴

On 3 February 1989, Galindo Pohl published his second report regarding the issue of human rights in Iran and the mass executions that took place during the months of July–December 1988. The report also included details about international protests against the IRI activities. On 27 February, the MKO provided the UN General Assembly and the international human right organizations a third list of 1,634 people who had been executed in Iran.³⁵

On 20 March 1989, the EU held another meeting regarding human rights in Iran. The EU again expressed its concern about the excessive use of the death sentence as a punishment. The EU called upon the Iranian government to grant general pardon to all political prisoners prior to celebrating the IRI's 10th anniversary and appealed

to it to replace the death penalties with other forms of punishment. Furthermore, the EU called upon all democratic countries to 'save their dignity' and join the international protest against the IRI and against the executions of its opponents inside as well as outside Iran.³⁶

On 24 May 1989, the EP adopted a declaration calling for a weapons and oil embargo against Iran for continuously violating human rights and for executing people. On 19 March 1990, in a European foreign ministers' discussion it was pointed out that none of the 12 members of the Union had applied the declaration. The Union's foreign ministers' reaction was that the EP recommendations were still valid and that applying them projected power. Indeed, once Iran agreed to take upon itself the visit of the UN representative for human rights issue, the assumption was that Iran was willing to abide by international norms and that step would be examined according to international stipulations.³⁷

On 21 January 1990, Reynaldo Galindo Pohl arrived in Iran to investigate the status of human rights in the country. That was his first visit to the country since the issue of human rights and executions came up following the IRI's refusal to let foreign protagonists into the country, especially concerning this sensitive issue. On 10 January 1990, before Reynaldo Galindo Pohl left for Iran, he was met by MKO representatives who presented him with lists of thousands of political prisoners who were still locked up, 30 mass graves and the names of 2,000 Iranians who had been executed because they were accused of 'anti-government' activity.³⁸ Outside the UN offices in Tehran there were people awaiting him claiming that they were relatives of people who had been murdered by MKO activists.³⁹

After Galindo published his report regarding the state of human rights in Iran for the year 1990, the NCRI published an enraged reaction to the report. Until that stage, the MKO had influenced Reynaldo by handing him documents and evidence and had seen him as an influential factor who would expose to the world (in the UN) findings that were supposed to be compatible with the MKO's allegations and accusations of the IRI.⁴⁰

In his reaction Rajavi claimed that 90 per cent of those executed in Iran had been political prisoners out of which the majority were MKO members and supporters. Moreover, during the last nine years (1981–90) the MKO and the NCRI provided the UN and its institutions dealing with the issue of human rights updated materials as well as testimonies of torture victims and of those who had managed to escape from Iran. Rajavi claimed that because of those testimonies and because of the resolution(s) that the UN General Assembly arrived at following them, the UN General Secretariat convinced the Iranian government to allow the UN special committee and Galindo to enter Iran in order to investigate the status of human rights.

The NCRI and the MKO were not pleased with the essence of the report and claimed that it was 'anti-Mojahedin' and an 'anti-resistance movement'. Rajavi claimed that Galindo Pohl curried favours with the Iranian government instead of remaining objective when facing the facts presented to him and what he himself had witnessed in Iran. Rajavi claimed that the report encouraged terror towards MKO members and the continuation of human rights violations in Iran. The MKO claimed that Galindo himself was the representative of a fascist (El-Salvador) regime that violated human rights and it was ridiculous to send a representative to investigate

human rights in Iran while he himself comes from a country that violates those same rights (this fact was known but could not stand for itself in the other documented accusations).

The MKO's claims against Galindo Pohl were that they were not only protesting at the report's content but also against other international human rights organizations. Moreover, the MKO protested against the 'satisfaction' that the report brought to the IRI's leaders. The organization claimed that the Iranian state declared prior to the arrival of the UN representative and while he was staying there that he would need to be committed to the Iranian law and even sent slight innuendos that if the representative did not behave appropriately they would not allow him to carry out future investigations into human rights in Iran.

After the report was published, the Republic's leaders hurried to say that all the accusations that were directed at them by the MKO, the NCRI and international human rights organizations were nothing but unsuccessful propaganda since the report itself showed otherwise. The Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, pointed out that the report stated that part of the allegations against the Republic derived from anti-Iranian propaganda. The Iranian radio and TV director-general, the Iranian industry minister and others said that the western media was busy with its anti-Iranian propaganda while the UN representative's report proved that none of the allegations were true and that Iran respected its people's human rights.

The *Jomhuri-e Islam* newspaper of 19 January 1990 best expressed the Iranian's satisfaction with the report saying that:

The publication of the UN Special Committee's representative regarding human rights in Iran and regarding its judicial system pointed explicitly at the humanitarian and moral standards that were respected eye-to-eye regarding human rights in Iran. That report was another disgrace to those international supporters of the government oppositionists. For years, the Iranian oppositionists outside Iran had distributed provocations and un-based rumors regarding human rights in Iran and had been supported by the international circle. Moreover, Galindo Pohl had arrived at Iran on January 21, 1990 and had succeeded to present a few details regarding the justice of the Islamic Republic's judicial system in the UNCHR's long report.

Moreover, the paper declared that Galindo was more convinced than his friends that there was a need to establish a healthy communication system with the IRI. Despite all that, the president of the Iranian Supreme Court was not completely satisfied with the report's content and said that despite the fact that Galindo Pohl's account was not completely compatible with the existing reality, it at least proved one point: that the allegations against Iran regarding the violation of human rights were totally false and far from reality.

In defiance of Galindo Pohl's account, the MKO produced one of its own which included citations from the Iranian media regarding the report and in addition also cited an AP reporter who referred to Galindo Pohl's report. From the AP's article it could be understood that Iran was spreading threats and hints to make sure that Galindo Pohl's report would come out 'clean'. The article cited the MKO's claims, according to which Iran was planning kidnappings and intended to put international

pressure on Galindo Pohl in order to stop the international storm of condemnation targeted towards Iran regarding the human rights issue. The MKO even pointed out the coincidence between putting off the report's publication and the declaration that appeared in Iran and in Lebanon regarding 18 kidnapped people who were held at the time that Iran expressed its idea for assisting to find a solution to the crisis.⁴¹

On 24 April 1990, Dr Kazem Rajavi was murdered in a town near Geneva, Switzerland by two assassins. After the murder, the EP Council condemned the IRI and accused it of oppression and persecution of its opponents inside and outside of Iran. The EP Council presented Rajavi as 'a person who fights for human rights in Iran' as well as highlighting his efforts to bring democracy to Iran. The Council's decisive reaction expressed much doubt regarding Galindo Pohl's last report; the Council believed that the controversial report of the UN special representative that was welcomed by Iran encouraged the Iranian government to continue its violations of human rights in Iran and to increase the assassinations of its political opponents outside Iran.⁴²

On 28 January 1991, the EP renewed its condemnation of Iran after it had been proven to the Council by international human rights organizations headed by AI that Iran continued to assassinate and persecute its opponents inside and outside the country and did not abide by international treaties that promised to protect human rights. Thus, the parliament called upon the European community to increase influential measures so that the IRI would stop the violence and the violations of human rights and adapt itself by appropriate legislation to the international treaties regarding human rights. The parliament suggested that any wish of European countries to broaden their diplomatic and economic relationships with Iran would have to stipulate that such relationships would depend upon Iran's concession of the International human rights treaty. On 20 March 1991, the EP again renewed its condemnation of Iran and criticized the UN Human Rights Committee for not reaching a resolution to sanction Iran despite the conclusions of Galindo's report (AI and the NCRI doubted those conclusions), in face of AI's reports and the fact that Iran continued to violate human rights and continued to execute people.⁴³

From a different angle, on 29 January 1992 Rajavi protested against the UN for appointing the Iranian representative to the UN, Sirus Naseri, as the Human Rights Council's deputy chairperson during the Council's 42nd session in Geneva. In letters that Rajavi had sent the Council's members (53 countries) he asked for that appointment to be reconsidered and even that the representative be sent back to Iran. His claim was that appointing to such an important and sensitive position a person who serves a regime that 'is no different from the regimes that ruled during the middle ages' is an impossibility.⁴⁴

The MKO and the Liberation Army's activities did not stop even when Iran executed more of the organization's members and supporters. The executions were carried out even after the people's uprising and demonstrations in April, May and June of 1992 in cities such as Shiraz, Arak and Boqan. The IRI tried to suppress any revolutionary ideas such as that of an uprising or demonstrations that expressed freedom of thought.⁴⁵

The EP's condemnations of Iran continued also in 1992 and focused mainly upon the violations of human rights, the executions, the persecutions of ethnic and religious minorities, the oppression of women and the persecution of government opponents inside and outside Iran, as well as the attempts to assassinate MKO and NCRI leaders. The EP again asked the UN to implement more practical actions in order to minimize the oppression of human rights in Iran. During that year the EP put much emphasis on women's oppression in Iran. The EP supported Maryam Rajavi's (Masoud Rajavi's third wife) messages that demanded the international community act especially in favour of women's rights. The EP even welcomed the 1,500 world parliaments' support in the NCRI and its goals.⁴⁶

On 21 January 1993, Mohammad Mohaddessin, the NCRI Foreign Affairs Committee chairperson, spoke at a press conference in Washington. He concluded by referring to the previous year (1992) and the connection to human rights violations, the increase of fundamentalism in Iran and Iran's attempt to spread fundamentalism outside Iran. Senator John McCain also spoke on the same day in the Senate about the same issues. Both reached similar conclusions: (1) Iran did not allow any form of legitimate political resistance in the country; (2) the IRI made use of the 'Islamic Law' to justify its policy; (3) Iran encouraged radical and political confrontations in Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, Lebanon and in Algeria.⁴⁷

Moreover, in 1993 the EP condemned several times the situation regarding human rights in Iran. The EP referred to the persecution of religious minorities in the country, to women's oppression, to the persecution of government opponents, and to the fact that the human rights condition in Iran had not improved and was not compatible with what was written in Galindo's report from 28 January 1993. The EP claimed that Iran did nothing to improve human rights in the country and thus violated the international human rights treaty. The EP called again to tighten relationships with Iran until it would agree to abide by the international human rights treaties and even called upon the democratic European countries to unite against Iran in order to prevent political terror against IRI's opponents.⁴⁸

Similar condemnations had been repeated in the years 1994–95. In 1994, for the first time, the EP turned to the UN Security Council asking that it would take practical measures against Iran and force upon the country a serious investigation regarding the human rights issue, an investigation that would be comprehensive and free and that would be carried out by international human rights organizations such as AI.⁴⁹

As has been mentioned, the MKO and the NCRI never ceased to accuse the IRI of violating human rights. They managed to raise the issue in the UN, in the EU, in the EP, in the American Congress and Senate, and of course among other western governments. They also managed to introduce the issue to international human rights organizations in general and to AI in particular. The documentation of human rights in the IRI had always been introduced in contrast to the NCRI and the MKO's vision regarding human rights, women's freedom and minorities' freedom.

Even when the MKO did not score international success in turning the increased number of condemnations into formal support of the organization and its goals, it did not cease to act in that field. Even when its arguments did not win, in reports such as the 1990 Reynaldo Galindo Pohl account and the October 1994 State

Department report, and even when it had been included in the list of international terrorist organizations in October 1997, it never tired and never ceased to continue its arguments.

The propaganda referring to human rights was very successful since it related to the dictatorial character of the IRI and the application of the *Velayat-e Faqih* as a tool of local oppression inside Iran and a tool used to spread its ideas outside the country. That success probably derived from the fact that the West abhorred dictatorial regimes that violated human rights.⁵⁰ It is obvious that the MKO used this issue of human rights as a tool in order to gain political support for its aims to topple and replace the IRI regime. Halliday's distinct elements could be shown as: firstly, the MKO relies on the international debate of the human rights issue; secondly, the human rights argument between the MKO and the IRI is based mainly from the MKO side on western influences and approach, if not to say even the same terminology; and thirdly, using the human rights issue as a tool to criticize the Iranian government and to reveal its cruelty to the world. Moreover, it could be seen as a tool to put pressure from one side on the IRI to reduce if not to stop completely the human rights violations, and, from the other side, to put pressure on the international bodies to launch diplomatic and economic sanctions on Iran.

The luck of the MKO and NCRI in this case has completely ended, when from having one exclusion, they tripled their exclusions. To this position we will split the 'triple exclusion' into its three parts. The first component concerns the way the MKO saw itself, excluded from Iran physically. Connected with the physical exclusion was the way the regime saw the MKO, mainly as an illegitimate opposition that should be excluded and uprooted by any means. This double view had one result – exclusion from the country, either by the MKO's own will or as a result of the regime's suppression. The second component of the triple exclusion was an exclusion by the Iranian people who saw the MKO as 'traitors' and as a 'fifth column', especially when the MKO settled on the Iraqi–Iranian border and fought side by side with the Iraqis against Iran. The Iranians could tolerate the IRI's attitude toward several sensitive and controversial issues, but they had never been tolerant towards traitors and unpatriotic oppositionists. In this particular case, we do not have any reliable documentation that could reveal Iranian public opinion about the MKO's adherence to the Iraqi regime (especially at that time). We should, however, credit the Iranian people's intelligence and common sense that allow us to predict this specific attitude towards the MKO. Nevertheless, the MKO's inability to gather support inside Iran was not only because the regime banned it, but mainly because the people felt unrelated to and disgusted with the MKO. The MKO could be counted as a preferred opposition movement as long as it was in Iran and maybe in France, but not once it sided with Iraq.

The third component of exclusion was implemented by the western organizations such as the EU, EP, the US government and, following that, the European governments, who were persuaded by the MKO and NCRI stories. The MKO and the NCRI probably exaggerated and inflated numbers, but we can be sure that the IRI for its part was far from innocent. The West did not accuse (as yet) the MKO or the NCRI of inflating numbers or of not presenting the truth, but its inability to raise a louder voice and to inflict sanctions upon the IRI, and, no less important, to send to Iran a special representative who returned practically empty-handed and silent,

pulled the rug out from under the MKO and the NCRI, and presented them as pathetic, if not as liars.

In contradiction to the two first exclusions that could be understood and accepted, this exclusion of the MKO and its political branch, the NCRI, could be considered as lip service to the IRI. For the MKO, this exclusion could be considered as the collapse of a house of cards that marks the beginning of the end for its political and diplomatic efforts among the western governments and policy makers. The MKO loss in this 'game' did not improve Iranian human rights, or its position among the western governments. This loss revealed the weakness of the western governments (EU, EP and the US administration) and their inability to reach the truth about the human rights situation in Iran (and probably in similar countries) or to force any practical economic and diplomatic sanctions on Iran. The small consolation that the MKO could be satisfied with was that this important issue of human rights inside Iran could not be raised without the determined will and stubborn fight against the IRI, but, no less important, against the western organizations and institutes that did too little, too late for the human rights in Iran – an issue that was supposed to have been the western flagship of democracy.

Notes

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3. Amnesty International, Amnesty International's written statement to the 42nd session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on the situation of Human Rights in Iran (5 Feb. 1986); Amnesty International News Release, 13 May 1987: 'Amnesty International calls for Iran to abandon pattern of cruelty and inhumanity abide by international Human Rights treaties'; News Bulletin of the Peoples of Iran, *Iran Liberation*, 6 Feb. 1987, p.1; *Iran Liberation*, No.3, 21 July 1986, p.1; A. Jafarzadeh, "'Character Assassination" of the Iranian People', *Washington Post*, 30 May 1987; I. al-Husni, 'Rajavi: Mudakhirat Iran min aldhahab ma'arudhat lilbi'a fi swisira' [Rajavi: Iran's gold is display for selling in Switzerland], *Aldustur*, 17 Feb. 1986, p.12.
4. For further discussion about human rights in the Islamic states, see the exceptional book by A.E. Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
5. F. Halliday, 'Relativism and Universalism in Human Rights: The Case of the Islamic Middle East', *Political Studies*, Vol.XLIII (1995), p.156.
6. Ibid., note 10.
7. Ibid., p.154.
8. NCRI – a council of the Iranian opposition groups in exile led mainly by the MKO.
9. European Union, 'Resolution on the Human Rights situation in Iran', OJ C7, 12 Jan. 1987, p.138.
10. European Union, 'Written Question', No.704/86, OJ C60, 9 March 1987: 11; No.2293/86, OJ C91, 6 April 1987, p. 28; No.2701/87, OJ C207, 8 Aug. 1988, p.21; *Iran Liberation*, 27 March 1987, p.2; A. Jafarzadeh, 'Unfounded and Malicious Accusations against the Mojahedin', *Washington Post*, 18 April 1987, p.A31.
11. *Iran Liberation*, No.53, 18 Sept. 1987, p.2.
12. *Iran Liberation*, No.63, 27 Nov. 1987, p.6; 'Protection of Individual Human Rights ... Must Remain a Top Priority of the United Nations', *American Foreign Policy*, Doc.100, 1987, p.207.
13. Kazem Rajavi was Massoud Rajavi's brother and the NCRI representative to the UN.
14. *Iran Liberation*, No.64, 4 Dec. 1987, p.4.
15. *Iran Liberation*, No.65, 14 Dec. 1987, pp.1–12.
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