”The blood of our martyrs, the suffering of those imprisoned, all come together in you brave Rajavi”

THE IRANIAN MOJAHEDIN’S STRUGGLE FOR LEGITIMACY

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PREFACE

“Iran Iran!” “Rajavi Rajavi!”

Berlin, February 2005. I am standing outside in the pouring rain listening to a vast crowd of Iranian exiles shouting anti-regime and pro-Mojahedin slogans. The previous night I’m on one of three chartered planes on my way to observe a demonstration against the Islamic Republic of Iran, the same Iran I’m leaving for in three months time.

The Islamic Republic of Iran was created in 1979 after an Iranian uprising against the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This uprising is known as the Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini replaced the Shah’s dictatorial rule, and became the supreme leader of the controversial republic. After Khomeini died in 1989, Ayatollah Khamene’i took his place as the leading faqih. The Mojahedin-e Khalq were one of the key actors in the Islamic Revolution. In the post-revolutionary period they became the Khomeini regime’s strongest rivals, which consequently got thousands of them killed and the rest thrown in exile.

During this study I have gotten to know several representatives and sympathizers of the Mojahedin. I know them as dedicated, resourceful, and interesting people. This study, to use Ervand Abrahamian’s exact phrase, is not written to “praise or to damn the Mojahedin”. Although it has been challenging at times to keep an objective opinion, I consider myself to be neither friend nor foe of the Mojahedin.

Paris, July 2006. The crowd of Iranians chanting, waving flags and posters of their leaders, Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, go wild as the latter enters the stage. They are shouting “Maryam, Maryam!” “Iran, Iran!” I can feel the hair on my neck rise as I find myself in the middle of an inferno of extreme emotions, passion, and sympathy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

After they were brutally thrown out of their own country in the mid 80s, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, MEK aka PMOI, MKO[1], have continually fought the Islamic Republic, with military actions supported by Saddam Hussein, up until the violent attacks ceased in 2001. Although quite popular in Iran during and right after the Islamic Revolution they now have seemingly little support among their fellow countrymen, who openly compare them to the contemporary regime, and do not see them as a better alternative. Thus, in spite of fighting an unpopular regime with the aim of destroying it for many years, the Mojahedin lost perhaps the most important thing, namely the people's support. Their violent past finally placed them on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations in 1997 and on EU's list in 2002, making them lose significant support within the international community. Therefore, the need for a change in strategy to rebuild legitimacy has been urgent.

The Mojahedin are faced with an intricate reality. The Iranian regime through propaganda and meddling has successfully managed to isolate the organization politically as well as geographically, and allegations of cult-like activities have contributed to seclusion. Additionally, the Mojahedin have themselves made some severe political and strategic blunders that consequently made them lose legitimacy not only in the eyes of their fellow Iranians, but also in the eyes of the international community. The struggle for rebuilding legitimacy in Iran has especially proven to be a complex issue because of the Mojahedin's lack of legal status. Contrary to other controversial movements such as Hamas in Palestine and Hizbollah in Lebanon, which are officially recognised by their individual states and somehow incorporated into the social and political system, the Mojahedin are denied any legal status by the Iranian government, leaving them no legal legitimacy, and no foothold from which to build political or social power or influence. Unlike opposition movements like for example the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which also lacks legal status, but is authorized to remain in the country, the Mojahedin are forced to struggle abroad, making them isolated from the Iranian people.

[1] PMOI: People's Mojahedin of Iran. MKO: Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization

The struggle to rebuild the legitimacy they once had among Iranians, and until 1997 in the West, has become the ultimate challenge for the Mojahedin. They require to be removed from the terrorist lists, and recognised as the Iranian people's rightful and popular resistance. The Mojahedin do not seek to regain their legal status and legitimacy in the eyes of the Iranian regime; their aim is to overthrow it. They have no intention of collaborating with the Islamic Republic, as they do not legitimise or recognize any factor of it. To be able to challenge such a regime, they need legitimacy. Without it, they will continue to be politically isolated, and continue to be labelled a terrorist organization and a religious cult.

Social Movements' need for Legitimacy

The structural difference between a regime and a social movement is that a regime has control over the state's resources, and has established power and authority to govern on behalf of its people. Although a governmental system is in need of people's support to be perceived as legitimate, it is not dependant on such support to have authority or power. A social movement, on the other hand, is either dependant on the state's resources, or has no access to them. Therefore, a social movement is dependant on being perceived as legitimate in order to have political power and influence. For the Mojahedin, to be perceived as legitimate means being perceived as a rightful and just representative for the Iranian people's resistance. They require to be recognised as this, both in the eyes of Iranians and the international community. Thus, they are struggling for legitimacy on two different levels, making the challenge they face even more intricate.

As an opposition movement without access to state resources, the Mojahedin are dependant on voluntary and/or foreign state-sponsored economic backing. Labelled as terrorists, they do not, however, receive the financial support an organization considered legitimate would. International support in forms of funding would most certainly increase their abilities and resources to be heard in the political debate and arena, which would in turn affect the level of international support and possibility to recruit, and reach out to new members. After the U.S. led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the fall of Saddam Hussein (who was the Mojahedin's primary sponsor), the organization has been more or less fully reliant on private donations. Furthermore, being recognized as legitimate would give the Mojahedin a personal and symbolic victory over the Islamic Republic in the battle of de-legitimising the enemy. With

legitimacy the Mojahedin would get recognition for their struggle to overthrow the Islamic Republic, and thus, their armed resistance would be supported and not characterised as acts of terrorism. With legitimacy they could continue their fight to overthrow the regime. Instead, they are at present time spending most of their efforts convincing the international community to release them from the restraining grip of the terrorist list.

So, social movements like regimes, or states, or governmental systems, are in need of legitimacy. The problem is to decide what sources to apply when studying them. In Hesham Al-Awadi's (2004) study of the Muslim Brotherhood's struggle for legitimacy in Egypt, he applies modes of legitimacy originally used when discussing regimes or governmental systems to the study of a social movement. According to Al-Awadi, discussions on legitimacy have been preoccupied with the legitimacy of political regimes, and are therefore state-centric (Al-Awadi: 17). He argues that with adaptations, "charismatic, traditional, rational, and social eudaemonic modes of legitimacy become suited to discussions on the legitimacy of social movements, including Islamic movements that pose as "legitimate" alternatives to political authorities" (ibid). Al-Awadi points out that the problem with such an approach is that one might end up applying similar modes of legitimacy to analyse two different levels of power, one pertaining to the state, and the other to society. "A ruling authority with control and distribution resources cannot be compared with a social power that is either dependant on state resources or has no access to them" (ibid). However, the fact that a social movement searches for legitimacy on a different level than a state or regime does not make it futile to apply the same modes of legitimacy when discussing the Mojahedin. The Mojahedin have established political institutions; a parliament in exile and a president-elect are ready to replace the existing republic. Thus, because of their ambition and aspiration to overthrow the Islamic Republic, and replace it with their own alternative, I argue that it is both interesting and relevant to discuss the Mojahedin's search for legitimacy by applying modes of legitimacy used when discussing already established states and regimes.

Studies done on the legitimacy of social movements often show that these movements use social achievements as a source to legitimacy because the providing of welfare to the public has shown to give strong support and recognition. This is what is referred to as eudaemonic legitimacy, which means: "acts of rule that assist the economic system to produce an

increasing flow of goods and services for the consumer" (Al-Awadi: 9). For example, Hilal Khashan, when discussing the legitimacy of Islamists in Lebanon, argues: "the provision of public services plays a decisive role in the extending of political legitimacy by the beneficiaries of the services to the agency providing them (in this case Islamists, as opposed to the national government)" (ibid: 19). Al-Awadi says that in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt "the movements ability to survive in conditions of state denial has been its skill in expanding the organization, (…) creating new alliances and adapting ideas and attitudes concerning such issues as democracy, multi-party systems, and women's rights" (ibid: 17). In other words, a social movement opposed to the government provides the people with a welfare system, which in turn gives them political legitimacy. Like I said, the Brotherhood in Egypt, like the Mojahedin, lacks legal status, but the difference when it comes to their struggle for legitimacy is that the Brotherhood is allowed to operate within Egypt, and is therefore connected to the people. They want their legal legitimacy back, and have no obvious intentions of overthrowing the regime, and therefore to a certain extent accept President Mubarak's authority. The Mojahedin, however, have no intention of neither accepting nor being accepted by the Iranian regime; they wish to overthrow it, and will therefore never be allowed back in Iran. And so, political legitimacy based on social achievements (eudaemonic legitimacy) becomes impossible for them to attain.

Research Problem

The Clinton-administration's decision to place the Mojahedin on the list of terrorist organizations was a major setback for the organization. The Bush-administration in 2001 not only denied the request to remove the organization from the terrorist list, but also added the organization's political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), to the list (the NCRI is not included on EU's list). The Mojahedin's official lack of legitimacy in the West is undisputable and the international challenge has proven to be a difficult one. In Iran, the Mojahedin's violent and controversial past and the Iranian regime's effort to isolate them have made the struggle for rebuilding legitimacy complex.

This study discusses the Iranian Mojahedin's struggle for legitimacy. The questions raised accordingly are: Which strategies do the Mojahedin apply in their search for legitimacy? And, how effective are these strategies for seeking recognition in and out of Iran?

Structure of Study

The study will be divided into six main chapters. Chapter two will give an account for the theory and method used when discussing the Mojahedin's search for legitimacy. Chapter three focuses on the historical background of the Mojahedin from the time the organization was founded until today. This chapter will also explain the background of the extreme delicate and sensitive battle between the Mojahedin and the Islamic Republic. Chapter four discusses de-legitimisation as a strategy used by the Mojahedin to discredit and demonise the Islamic Republic. I discuss the ideological rhetoric of both the Mojahedin and the Iranian regime, with the intention of demonstrating how they try to gain legitimacy by de-legitimising each other. Chapter five focuses on Max Weber's three approaches to legitimacy, *tradition*, *charisma*, and *legality*, and discusses how the Mojahedin apply these modes when seeking recognition. Chapter six discusses how the Mojahedin use ideology to legitimise their political agenda and war against the Islamic Republic. Easton's theory of *ideological legitimacy* will provide the necessary theory in this part of the discussion. Finally, chapter seven will discuss how effective these strategies are for seeking recognition in and out of Iran.

2 THEORY AND METHOD

Theories of Legitimacy

David Easton describes theory as "any kind of generalization or proposition that asserts that two or more things, activities, or events co-vary under specified conditions. A theory or generalization that has been well-confirmed would be called a law; one that awaits confirmation through further testing would be a hypothesis" (Easton 1965: 7). This study uses theories of legitimacy when discussing the Mojahedin's struggle for legitimacy.

Legitimacy, Al-Awadi says, is a difficult term to define partly because the definition varies according to the ideological orientations, and professional biases from which the definition has developed (Al-Awadi: 4). For example, the legal approach to legitimacy sees legitimacy as an "extension of legality, which means that a legitimate regime is that which upholds and respects the rule of law" (ibid). The political approach to legitimacy "tends to perceive legitimacy in connection with concepts such as power and authority" (ibid). To Easton a regime is legitimate when, "the member is convinced that it is right for him to accept and obey the authorities and to abide by the requirements of the regime" (Easton: 278). For the Mojahedin, as discussed earlier, to be perceived as legitimate means being recognized as the Iranian people's rightful and legal resistance.

In the question of the Mojahedin's search for legitimacy Max Weber and David Easton are especially useful to the discussion. Weber because he does not exclusively refer to regimes or states when discussing legitimacy, and his approaches to the term are relatively open for being interpreted in different ways, and can therefore be applied to different objects of study. Weber's approaches to legitimacy lack, however, one essential source that will prove to be useful when discussing the Mojahedin. This is where Easton's classification system becomes necessary and relevant to add to the discussion. Although all three modes of both Weber and Easton will be introduced, it is especially Weber's traditional, charismatic, and legal approach to legitimacy, and Easton's ideological approach that will be used when discussing the Mojahedin in the following study.

Max Weber's sources to legitimacy

Max Weber has been an influential contributor to the definition of political legitimacy, and spoke of three different sources, namely traditional, charismatic, and legal legitimacy (Weber 1946). In traditional legitimacy the people's acceptance for the leader or government is simply founded on tradition and the fact that the ruler or governmental system has been around for so long, for example such as elders, tribes, customs and religions. The traditional authority rests upon a belief in the "rightness" of established customs and traditions (Haralambos 1991: 118). Weber said that traditional authority is based on "the eternal authority from the past" (ibid). It is grounded on the idea that what has always been is legitimate; "prescription" decides the issue of whether a political authority is considered legitimate, not substantive principles of some kind, such as the "rights of man" (Mommsen 1989: 47). Those in authority command obedience on the basis of their traditional status, which usually is inherited. Their subordinates are controlled by feelings and loyalty and obligation to long-established positions of power (Haralambos: 118).

Charismatic legitimacy characterises a leader or a ruler who the people see as having "extraordinary qualities"; someone who is almost from another world and who immediately gets consent from the masses (Weber 1971: 5). Charisma is connected to a quality of an individual personality, which makes him stand out from others in a society. This quality may be supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional compared to lesser mortals (Haralambos: 118). Charismatic leaders are able to sway and control their followers by direct emotional appeals, which excite devotion and strong loyalties. Historical examples that come close to charismatic authority are provided by Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Fidel Castro, and the Islamic Republic's own Ayatollah Khomeini. More ordinary people, such as teachers or managers, may also use charisma to exercise power (ibid). Weber said that: "Where charisma is genuine…[its] basis lies…in the conception that it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority to recognize its authenticity…Psychologically, this recognition is matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality" (Weber 1946: 278). Charismatic authority is irrational in this sense of being foreign to all rules. Weber argued that the irrational effects of charismatic legitimacy couldn't be sustained indefinitely. Eventually it must be "routinized" in permanent institutions and doctrines (ibid).

Weber's third type of authority is legal legitimacy. Legal legitimacy is "authority based on legality, the principle of legal laws' validity, and rational competence built on rational rules" (Weber 1971: 5). This source to legitimacy is based on the principle that everything that has been ratified in accordance with established procedures may be considered legitimate (Mommsen: 47). Those who possess legal authority are able to issue commands and have them obeyed because others accept the legal framework, which support their authority. This is the case for most popular elected democracies consisting of established political and authoritative institutions chosen to rule on behalf of the people who elect them. Weber saw legal legitimacy as the most grounded one, as tradition and charisma often had to be routinized into legal norms.

Weber stressed that his three categories are "ideal types", each of which defines a "pure" form of authority. Therefore, it is possible to find examples of authority that approximate to one of these types, but it is unlikely that a perfect example of any could be found (Haralambos: 118).

David Easton's classification system

Easton has also provided a threefold classification system when explaining the sources of legitimacy, which he divides into *personal*, *ideological*, and *structural* (Easton: 289). His system resembles in many ways Weber's approaches, but is more focused on states and regimes, and covers a broader spectrum than Weber. Easton argues that a strong leader with the right skills may have the qualities to generate legitimacy for a regime or an entire system. Furthermore, a regime or opposition movement that manages to identify with a highly salient ideological program may win positive support. And those leaders who "successfully associate themselves with the fulfilment of abstract, but highly valued goals pertaining to sacred obligations, corporate identity, or deeply valued principles are likely to last longer and perform better than those who can persuade obedience only on the basis of fear or expediency" (Hudson 1977: 50).

Easton suggests that "whether or not the authorities in a system will be considered right and proper may depend not on their conformity to an accepted regime, but upon the extent to which the members see the occupants of authority roles as personally, in their behavior and symbolism, worthy of moral approval" (Easton: 303). He goes on to suggest that the leader

enjoying high personal legitimacy "may violate the norms and prescribed procedures of the regime and (…) ignore its regular structural arrangements" (ibid). Moreover, "all political leadership, and not the charismatic type alone, if it is effective in winning support at all, carries with it this legitimising potential" (ibid: 304). Thus, the concept of personal legitimacy covers a broader range of leadership phenomena than charisma, in Weber's original sense, and includes the latter.

"Ideology can be seen as a set of beliefs and values which express the interests of a particular social group" (Haralambos: 21). According to Jan Blommaert, ideology is a combination between discourse and power (Blommaert 2005: 158). Blommaert says that no idea is in itself "ideological", but it may become ideological as soon as it is picked up by power-regulated institutions and inserted into the ideological reproduction system they organise (ibid: 163). To David Easton, ideologies are, "articulated sets of ideals, ends, and purposes, which help the members of the system to interpret the past, explain the present, and offer a vision for the future…From a manipulative or instrumental point of view, we may see them as ideals capable of rousing and inspiring men to action thought to be related to their achievement" (Easton: 290).

Easton's third category is the structure of the political system, such as the institutions and offices that made the political system functional. These institutions are seen as the "frameworks where accepted norms and procedures are performed in a manner that bestow legal legitimacy upon the system" (Al-Awadi: 5).

Research Method

The issue of the Mojahedin is complicated to study because of the almost non-existent status they have in Iran. Officially and publicly they are rarely commented on. However, when confronted about the group people and government strongly and openly detest them. Support and sympathy for the Mojahedin is considered a treacherous crime that will not go unpunished. In my view they are so controversial and dangerous to discuss in Iran that if sympathetic to the organization, people would never risk revealing this, especially not to a foreign researcher. However, I find it reasonable to argue that the Mojahedin lack significant

support inside Iran due to their violent and controversial past and the Iranian regime's effective propaganda campaign against them. When studying the Mojahedin outside of Iran, I found that representatives of the organization were both easy to find and talk to, and they provided me with significant texts, speeches, and literature. However, regarding the strong ideological and rhetorical war between the Mojahedin and the Islamic Republic, talks with members and sympathizers of the Mojahedin sometimes turned into propaganda speeches in favour of the organization. Likewise, conversations in Iran often turned into heavy accusations against the organization, and were presented with few or no objective arguments. These interviews and conversations helped me understand how sensitive the discussion is, and therefore provided necessary information to my study. Considering the sensitivity and controversy surrounding this theme I rely primarily on qualitative method through Critical Discourse Analysis.

Qualitative Research

"By the term qualitative research we mean any kind of research that produces findings not arrived by means of statistical procedures or means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 17). Qualitative research is research about people's lives, their stories, and behaviours, but it is also about organizational functioning, social movements, and interactional relationships (ibid). The purpose with qualitative method is for the researcher to create a picture of the awareness, intentions, norms, and values that lay the foundation of people's actions and statements (Sivesind 1996: 243). When doing qualitative research the researcher has to step back and critically analyse the situation in order to recognize and avoid bias, obtain valid and reliable data, and think abstractly (Strauss and Corbin: 18).

When studying the Mojahedin, I had to rely on several methods of qualitative research. Over a period of one year I followed the organization close; I observed their demonstrations and analysed texts and speeches. I also lived six months in Iran. It was essential for me to live in the country and experience the Iranian regime for myself. Being a foreigner I was treated differently and had more freedom than ordinary Iranians, but I experienced how the laws and regulations and traditions of an Islamic Republic affected me as a woman. *I* had to wear the veil, and *I* was the one who wasn't allowed to play pool with my husband. However, I also experienced how different Iran was from what I originally expected. Except for the "suicidal"

traffic, Iran was a lot less problematic and dangerous. I got to know Iranians as exceptionally warm, outgoing, courageous and kind. My experiences from Iran were extremely valuable when studying the Mojahedin.

The issue of the Mojahedin is difficult, and as an outsider I will never be able to fully grasp the complexity of an organization I am not a part of. However, as an outsider I have the ability to see things from different angles. Necessarily, my impression will differ from those closely related to the organization. This doesn't mean that I am right and they are wrong, or vice versa; it is simply different ways of perceiving reality based on different experiences and relations. Although the Mojahedin will disagree with a lot of what is written in this study, I should hope they find it useful, as it presents a critical opinion from the outside on how they are perceived.

Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Gillian Brown and George Yule discourse analysis is "the analysis of language in use" (Brown and Yule 1983: 1). Furthermore, "while some linguists may concentrate on determining the formal properties of a language, the discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what that language is used for" (ibid). In other words, discourse is language in action and the analyst must pay attention to both language and action. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse, which views "language as a form of social practice" (Fairclough 1989: 20). CDA states that discourse is an instrument of power that is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned, and of increasingly importance in contemporary societies (Blommaert: 25).

The purpose of CDA is to analyse "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (ibid). According to Blommaert, CDA focuses its critique on the connection between language/discourse/speech and social structure. CDA analyses in what ways social structure relates to discourse patterns, in form of power relations, ideological effects etc., and treats these relations as problematic. "These dimensions are the object of moral and political evaluation, and analysing them should

have effect in society: empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilising people to remedy social wrongs" (ibid).

In a critical analysis of discourse, power is central. As Blommaert says, discourse is an instrument of power, and by combining the two, discourse and power; we get ideology (Blommaert: 158). In the Mojahedin's discourse, ideology is frequently used. After they were forced to disarm in 2003, their only "weapon" against the Islamic Republic, really, has been attacking the regime through active use of ideology. This is clearly present in the leadership's speeches and statements. For example, they never refer to the Islamic Republic by its name, but rather a religious dictatorship, bloodthirsty theocracy, misogynist mullahs etc. These characteristics are loaded with negative associations, and propaganda. Concurrently, they refer to themselves as freedom-seeking and democratic - characteristics loaded with exact opposite connotations. This is their instrument of power. The following study will present a vast sample of Maryam Rajavi's speeches and statements. By critically analysing them, I aim to answer my research problem, namely how the Mojahedin struggle for legitimacy.

Data Collection

Social scientists generate their data mainly through field observation, interviewing, videotapes and taping proceedings of meetings, and so on. However, there are other sources of data one can use, such as published and private documents (Haralambos: 26). My study is mainly based on text research of the official speeches and statements made by the Mojahedin and NCRI. However, interviews and conversations in Iran and with representatives of the organization, and observations during demonstrations and protests were decisive for my understanding of the Mojahedin, and therefore essential for this study. I use this data as additional information.

Literature

I experienced some difficulties in the process of selecting valid and academically recognized literature about the Mojahedin. Most of what I found was either written with the intention of de-legitimising the group or as an attempt to demonise their opponents. It was very important to me to study the organization without prejudice and favouritism. I wanted my study to

reflect on the issue without taking sides. This proved to be difficult at times, as both friend and foe of the Mojahedin expected me to some extent to share their views and opinions, though I experienced it to be more controversial to be supportive of the Mojahedin than to be critical of them. When studying the history of the Mojahedin, I use primarily Ervand Abrahamian's book *"Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin"*. Abrahamian's book dates back to 1989 and is the only historic study done by an author not related to the Mojahedin. I acknowledge the disadvantage by only referring to one book when I present the historical background of the Mojahedin, especially since the Mojahedin don't recognize all parts of the book as valid (however, they do themselves refer to it on occasions). In this study I had to consider the academic recognition Abrahamian's book has received and the fact that it is considered valid by the academic international community. Recent and additional history of the Mojahedin is presented using books published by the NCRI, information from the Internet, and from conversations with Pervez Khaza'i, leader of NCRI in Scandinavia.

In my analysis I use speeches and statements made by Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, leader and president-elect of respectively the Mojahedin and NCRI. The speeches I study are mainly from Maryam Rajavi since Massoud is still in "hiding" and has not made any public statements since 2003. I found the speeches and statements on the Mojahedin –and NCRI's website or they were given to me from representatives of the organization. Since Maryam Rajavi has made several public appearances lately, I have had a significant amount of material to work with.

Observation and interviews

During six months of fieldwork in Esfahan, Iran (June-December 2005), in addition to two weeks in May 2006, I talked to Iranians about the Mojahedin. All together I talked to twenty-three people, where six of them were Iranians living in exile, three living in Iran, but studying abroad, and fourteen in Iran. My aim was to get information and understanding about how the Mojahedin are perceived in Iran, and to what extent they are considered a legitimate opposition group. Because of the sensitivity concerning my theme, I chose to speak with people privately whom I felt comfortable with and knew well. This was something I decided upon after a conversation with an Iranian man at a teahouse where I asked if he wanted to share his opinions about the Mojahedin. He warned me about discussing this theme in public,

for my sake and especially for the people I talked to. Also, for reasons of validity, I decided to speak with people in private settings. The conversations gave me an insight of how difficult this theme is to study, and how touchy and sensitive it is to talk about. It surprised me that I got the exact same answers from every single person I talked to. This showed me that the regime has done an excellent job when it comes to isolating the organization. Whether they were telling me the truth or not, the alternative of revealing their sympathy for the Mojahedin was either impossible, or they really hated the organization as much as they said.

During this study, I have interviewed the NCRI president-elect Maryam Rajavi in person (Oslo, November 2006). I have also had one conversation and one interview with head of the NCRI in Scandinavia, Pervez Khaza'i in Norway, and observed two Mojahedin demonstrations, one in Berlin (2005), and one in Paris (2006). I have also attended Maryam Rajavi's hearing before the Norwegian parliament, a women's conference, and a reception, all which took place in Oslo November of 2006. Throughout my research study I have had close and continuous contact with members of the Mojahedin and NCRI.

3 HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

February 11th, 1979 stands as the most important day in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is the day when the Shah's regime was overthrown by the Iranian people's uprising, later known as the Islamic Revolution, and the establishment of the Islamic Republic was a reality (Abrahamian 1989). One of the key actors in ending the Shah's internationally supported regime were the Mojahedin. Their active participation during the Islamic Revolution made them into national heroes among vast parts of the Iranian people, and the organization's charismatic leader, Massoud Rajavi, was a popular candidate for the presidency in the post-revolutionary period. Although fighting on the same side during the revolution, Massoud Rajavi, prior to the first presidential election in 1980, openly went against Khomeini and the ground principles he had laid out for the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Consequently he was not allowed to participate in the election. In the time that followed, Massoud's escalating conflict with Khomeini and his men turned more and more vicious. Khomeini's increasing grip of power pushed Massoud and the Mojahedin out in the deep cold and finally forced them into exile (ibid). Fighting the powerful Islamic Republic from abroad, Massoud chose to take a drastic turn of strategy that in many Iranian eyes was the end of the original Mojahedin and the beginning of what the Iranian regime came to call the *Monafeghin* (hypocrites).

Before the Islamic Revolution

The Beginning

The roots of the Mojahedin go back to the early 1960's formation of the Liberal Movement of Iran, a nationalistic, liberal party formed by supporters of then Prime Minister Mohammad Mossaddeq. The student uprising against the Shah in 1963, which ended in a bloodbath, made the organization split, and three younger members formed a small, secret discussion group searching for new ways to fight the regime. This discussion group would two years later form the Mojahedin. At first, the Mojahedin consisted of the three founding members Mohammad Hanifnezhad, Said Mohsen and Ali-Asghar Badizadegan and some of their twenty close friends. The group's main focus was to study religion, history and revolutionary theory

(Abrahamian: 88). After three years of intense study, the group set up a Central Committee to work out a revolutionary strategy and an Ideological Team to provide the organization with its own theoretical handbooks. The Central Committee included besides the three founding members mentioned above nine others and among them, the current leader of the Mojahedin Massoud Rajavi (ibid: 89). After the Mojahedin decided to take up arms against the Shah, they started to attract new members, students originally coming from other organizations, to join their struggle. As one of the early members of the Mojahedin described; the Shah's "barbaric regime" of mowing down thousands of defenceless citizens forced many younger members to seek new ways of fighting the regime. "The question", he believed "was no longer whether but when and how one should take up arms" (ibid: 85).

The Mojahedinian ideology

According to Ervand Abrahamian, the Mojahedinian ideology can best be described as a combination of Muslim themes; "Shii notions of martyrdom; classical Marxist theories of class struggle and historical determinism; and neo-Marxist concepts of armed struggle, guerrilla warfare and revolutionary heroism" (Abrahamian: 100). Although the Marxist ideology influenced the Mojahedin they strongly denied being Marxists. They accepted Marxist sociology, but categorically rejected Marxist philosophy. They considered both historical determinism and the concept of class struggle to be an integral part of Islam; however, they strongly rejected economic determinism and the denial of God (ibid). As Massoud Rajavi has admitted earlier the organization avoided the socialist label because in people's minds the term was identified with images of atheism, materialism and Westernism. Most certainly for the exact same reason were both the Shah and Khomeini eager to pin the Mojahedin to the label Islamic-Marxists and Marxist-Muslims (ibid: 101). Furthermore, the Mojahedin believed that the "true essence" of the Quran was absolute equality: "equality between masters and slaves; between men and women; between whites and blacks" (ibid: 96). Crucial to the Mojahedinian ideology was the concept of *nezame tawhidi* (classless society).

"Having set in motion the law of historical determinism, God – according to the Mojahedin – periodically sent down prophets to help the masses in their striving to reach their final destination. Thus the Prophet Mohammad had come to establish not just a new religion, but a new *ummat* – a dynamic society in constant motion towards progress, social justice, and eventual perfection. And the message he preached was not just one of *mazhab-e*

tawhidi (monotheistic religion), but of *nezame tawhidi* – a classless society free of poverty, corruption, war, injustice, inequality and oppression" (Abrahamian: 93)

The early writings of the Mojahedin represent the first attempt in Iran to develop a radical interpretation of Shii Islam. However, it is not so much through the Mojahedin as through the works of Ali Shariati (1933-77), an Iranian sociologist recognized as the main ideologue behind the Islamic Revolution, that the world came to know radical Shi'ism (ibid: 103). Because the Mojahedin were an underground movement, that kept their existence secret until 1972, they could not risk publishing their handbooks to the public. Shariati, on the other hand, gave open lectures that also circulated as both pamphlets and cassettes. Although the Mojahedin developed their ideas independent of Shariati, the founding members intentionally decided in early 1970s to propagate radical Islam more through Shariati's works (which differed from their own on minor points) than through their own, which were banned (ibid).

Like the Mojahedin, Shariati was strongly influenced by Marxism, and in particular neo-Marxism. However, he denounced Marxism in general and communist parties in particular (Abrahamian: 114). Abrahamian writes:

"While Shariati openly criticized Marx the philosopher and Marx the politician, he freely – but quietly – borrowed from Marx the social scientist. He saw history as a dialectical process leading eventually to the establishment of a classless society. His *nezam-e tawhidi* was strikingly like Marx's advanced communism" (Abrahamian: 117)

Shariati proclaimed that true Shi'ism was a revolutionary religion and should not be controlled by the ruling class. He further accused the clergy of betraying Islam by selling out to the ruling class and institutionalising the revolutionary cause into a state religion (ibid: 118).

"Even more serious, Shariati charged the clergy were trying to gain "monopolistic control" over the interpretation of Islam in order to set up a "clerical despotism" [...]; this would be, in his words, "the worst and most oppressive form of despotism possible in human history"" (Abrahamian: 119).

Shariati called for an Islamic Renaissance and Reformation, and he declared that the only rule that would be acceptable after a revolution would be that of the intelligentsia (ibid: 113). "Only the intelligentsia, he insisted, were capable of undertaking the dramatic reconstruction needed to bring about a free, just and classless society" (ibid: 114). By intelligentsia he didn't necessarily refer to intellectuals, but to what he called "enlightened souls".

"An enlightened soul is a person who is self-conscious about his "human condition" in his time and historical and social setting, and whose awareness inevitably and necessarily gives him a sense of social responsibility" (Ali Shariati, iranchamber.com 2007).

"Similar to the prophets, enlightened souls [does not] belong to the community or scientists nor to the camp of unaware and stagnant masses. They are aware and responsible individuals whose most important objective and responsibility is to bestow the great God-given gift of "self-awareness" (khod-agahi) to the general public. Only self-awareness transforms static and corrupt masses into a dynamic and creative cantor, which fosters great genius and gives rise to great leaps, which in turn become the springboard for the emergence of civilization, cultures and great heroes" (ibid).

Thus Shariati and the Mojahedin had many things in common, even, as Abrahamian points out, in building their ideological constructs on similar basic flaws. "Shariati, like the Mojahedin, failed to realize that it was highly difficult, if not impossible, to have a revolution under the banner of religion and yet keep the leadership of that revolution out of the hands of the religious authorities. An Islamic revolution had the built-in danger of becoming a clerical revolution" (Abrahamian: 123).

Two Mojahedins

Over the years prior to the revolution, the Mojahedin worked on developing their ideology and extending their activities. They established contact with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) where they sent a number of members to be trained in the PLO camps. Continuing with their anti-Shah activities they now developed a more guerrilla-like approach in dealing with the Shah (Abrahamian: 127-128). The Shah responded harshly to the more aggressive attacks from the Mojahedin, resulting in the mass trials of 1972 where many of the Mojahedin members were sentenced to either death or life imprisonment. Of those sentenced to death were the three founding members and Massoud Rajavi. Rajavi, however, got his

sentence commuted to life imprisonment when his brother, living in Switzerland, rallied an international campaign on his behalf (ibid: 135 and Pervez Khaza'i 2006 [interview]). The mass arrests and executions consequently weakening the organization greatly, but did not succeed in destroying it completely. The surviving members quickly restructured the organization, published new pamphlets and actively recruited and mobilized new and old members inside the prisons. Outside the prisons, the Mojahedin carried out a long series of daring attacks, which consequently resulted in severe losses both in battle, and through the regime sentencing more members to death (Abrahamian: 136-142).

By mid-1975 the Mojahedin had won the people's sympathy, and become an idol of anti-Shah opposition. It was at this point that the Mojahedin quite surprisingly and without warning shook the whole opposition by publishing an anti-Islamic tract that declared the organization was hereafter forsaking Islam in favour of Marxism-Leninism (ibid: 145). Abrahamian writes: "From this point on there were two rival Mojahedin organizations; one Muslim Mojahedin who refused to renounce the original name and accused its opponents of gaining control through a bloody *coup d'ètat*; and one Marxist Mojahedin" (ibid). Eventually in 1975 the two Mojahedins went separate ways. Although most of the Mojahedin's members turned Marxist, the Muslim Mojahedin survived mainly because of the activities inside the prisons. They were especially strong in Qasr Prison where Massoud Rajavi headed their commune until they were brought back to prominence in the dramatic events of the Islamic Revolution in 1977-9 (ibid: 170).

After the split

Prior to the breakout of the revolution, the Shah, who was pressured by the international community, released hundreds of political prisoners, many of which were Mojahedin sympathizers. Back on the streets, they immediately continued the armed struggle against the Shah and his regime. The revived Mojahedin were now under firm control of Massoud Rajavi and his handpicked ensemble from Qasr Prison. Inside the organization Massoud was given a pre-eminent role both because of his past role as leader of the commune in Qasr Prison, and because he was looked upon as a leading survivor of the early heroic days (Abrahamian 172-174). According to Abrahamian, the Mojahedin never took advantage of the new freedom by transforming from a secret underground organization to an open political party. In the years to

come they never held elections for the top positions. Instead they continued to have a structure more suited for guerrilla warfare than for electoral politics (ibid: 183).

The new leadership developed the ideology considerably in the period prior to and after the Islamic Revolution. They stuck to the old principal teachings of the early Mojahedin such as those about "historical materialism, the class struggle, the relationship between base and superstructure, the transformation from feudalism to capitalism, and the inevitable coming of the classless *tawhidi* society. Also views on Western imperialism, the importance of the 1963 uprising, and the need to reveal the revolutionary essence of true Islam were similar to the early teachings of the original Mojahedin" (ibid: 184). There were, however, some differences between the new lectures and the older works. According to Abrahamian, these differences were on a larger scale more related to tactical issues than fundamental beliefs (ibid). For example, the Mojahedin had said little in the past about terms like democracy and political pluralism. With the threat of the religious clergy's increasing power they eagerly adopted these terms as if they were their own (ibid). By mid-1980, after the revolution, Massoud Rajavi was openly declaring that political freedom and true Islam were inseparable, and that the fundamental difference between humans and animals was that animals could live without freedom but the former could not (ibid). The early Mojahedin had viewed the bazaar as an integral part of the opposition fighting the Shah and Western imperialism whereas the new Mojahedin saw the same bazaar as reactionaries forming the very backbone of the rival Islamic Republican Party[2]. In addition, the early Mojahedin had paid little attention to the religious and cultural minorities. Now they openly defended the rights of Jews, Christians, and Sunni Kurds and even began to speak of the Kurds as a national minority. Finally, the early texts of the Mojahedin had included modern assumptions about women. The new Mojahedin took this further by making it more explicit and began to fight for women's rights, including their right to have the exact same legal standings as men (ibid: 184).

[2] Islamic Republican Party (IRP): Ayatollah Khomeini's party

After the Islamic Revolution

Biggest secular opposition

At first, in the period after the revolution, the Mojahedin tried in vain to cooperate with the rising clergy led by Ayatollah Khomeini. By referring to Khomeini, on more than one occasion, as their "dear father", they were willing to stretch to get a piece of the pie. In the end, however, they didn't even get crumbles. Prior to the presidential election in 1980, the Mojahedin for the first time openly defied Khomeini by refusing to participate in the referendum to ratify the Constitution drafted by the Assembly of Experts, even when Khomeini had called upon every good Muslim to vote "yes" (Abrahamian: 197). Khomeini answered with excluding Massoud Rajavi from the presidential election on the grounds that he didn't support the revolution. The Mojahedin's more modern ideology and political approach, however, reached out to a broader audience and after issuing a fourteen-point program entitled "our minimal expectations", they were resolute to start a mass-movement. As a result the Mojahedin became the biggest secular opposition to the Islamic Republic, which by the summer of 1981 was strong enough to challenge the newly established religious regime (ibid: 184).

Although Massoud Rajavi was barred from the presidential election, the Mojahedin were allowed to participate in the election for parliament. In this election the Mojahedin got many votes, but were not given any seats by Khomeini. Consequently, the conflict between the Mojahedin and Khomeini and his supporters escalated. By mid 1980, clerics close to Khomeini were labelling the Mojahedin as *Monafeghin* (hypocrites), *kafer* (unbeliever) and *elteqatigari* (eclectic). They insinuated that the Mojahedin were paid agents not only of the USA and the USSR, but also of the "international Jewish-communist conspiracy". The Mojahedin accused Khomeini's supporters, especially the IRP, of "hijacking" the revolution, "monopolizing power", trampling over "democratic rights", and plotting to set up a "fascistic" one-party dictatorship (ibid: 206). The regime started shutting down the Mojahedin's newspapers, banning their demonstrations and arresting their members. The president of the Islamic Republic, president Abol-Hassan Banisadr, who at that time had become a close ally to the Mojahedin, answered with denouncing the IRP as a "threat to Islamic Democracy" and

reminded his fellow countrymen about the duty to resist tyrants. Although the Mojahedin had Banisadr's support they were more or less forced to go underground (ibid).

On June 19th, 1981, the Mojahedin and Banisadr called upon the whole nation to take over the streets to express their opposition to the IRP "monopolists" who they claimed had carried out a secret *coup d'etat*. The next day huge crowds appeared in many cities, but the regime reacted quickly and decisively, and extremely harsh. Warnings against demonstrations were constantly broadcasted over radio-television network. People were advised to stay at home and prominent clerics declared that demonstrators, irrespective of their age, would be treated as "enemies of God" and would be executed on the spot (Abrahamian: 219). Fifty were killed, 200 injured and 1000 arrested in the surrounding area of Tehran University alone. This exceeded most of the street clashes of the Islamic Revolution. The warden of Evin Prison announced with much fanfare that firing squads had executed twenty-three demonstrators, including a number of teenage girls. This was only the beginning of the reign of terror yet to come (ibid). According to the Mojahedin themselves, they refrained from reciprocating the killings in order to ensure a peaceful environment. They say they only sought recourse in legal actions and tried to expose the regime's inhuman practices (Rajavi, Maryam 2003: 23).

The Iran-Iraq war

Ayatollah Khomeini's pledge to spread the Islamic Revolution to the Middle East region resulted in an internationally supported invasion from Iraq in 1980. At first, the Mojahedin say, they "strongly condemned the Iraqi regime's invasion of Iran, and their forces rushed to the front to defend the Iranian people in the face of foreign invasion" (Mohaddessin 2004: 109).

"Thousands of Mojahedin members and supporters went to the war fronts immediately. The principled policy against a foreign army entering the country was adopted despite the fact that the clerical regime's provocations and meddling in Iraq's internal affairs in the name of "export of the Islamic revolution" had played an important role in igniting the flames of war" (Mohaddessin: 109).

Many Mojahedin members and supporters were killed in the war and others taken prisoner by the Iraqi army. According to Mohammad Mohaddessin (2004), (Chairman of the Foreign

Affairs Committee of the National Council of Resistance of Iran) some of these prisoners were freed ten years later and rejoined the ranks of the Mojahedin (ibid). Khomeini, on his side, saw the chance of destroying his strongest rivals and while fighting the Iraqi army at the front; members of the Mojahedin were, according to Mohaddessin, shot from behind or arrested and tortured by Revolutionary Guards (ibid).

In exile

Because the June 1981 uprising had failed, Massoud Rajavi decided to continue his armed struggle from abroad. Together with Banisadr he left Iran, and after receiving political asylum in France he announced that he would soon come back to Iran and replace the Islamic Republic with a "Democratic Islamic Republic" (Abrahamian: 243). In France the two allies published a manifesto called The Covenant and formed the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). The Covenant was meant to work as a program for the National Council and for the Provisional Government until the exact structure of the Democratic Islamic Republic was clear (ibid). The Covenant denounced the Khomeini regime as "medieval", "reactionary" and "dictatorial" and promised to replace it with a democratic, patriotic, and law-abiding government. It further promised Iran democracy in the shape of free speech, free press, free religion, free judiciary, free political parties, and free elections (ibid).

The Mojahedin in exile were able to resettle themselves in Europe and mainly France where Rajavi and Banisadr kept house. By establishing new branches around Europe, setting up a radio station to circle information and publishing newsletters the organization once again reinforced. They also organized demonstrations and hunger strikes in the main cities of Europe to embarrass the Iranian embassies (Abrahamian: 244). On the military side, the Mojahedin set up bases on the Iraqi border and managed to maintain much of the underground network throughout the country. Although the Mojahedin suffered major losses before they were forced out of Iran, they could in 1983 still mount assassination attacks, guerrilla ambushes, and leaflet blitzes in many different parts of the country. Diplomatically, the Mojahedin and especially Massoud Rajavi held well-publicized meetings and gained the support of many prominent politicians, leaders, and organizations (ibid: 245). In dialogue with Western leaders Rajavi toned down the issues of imperialism, foreign policy, social revolution and the crucial term *nezam-e tawhidi* (classless society), and focused on the themes

of democracy, political liberties and pluralism, human rights, respect for "personal property", the plight of political prisoners, and the need to end the bloody war with Iraq. He also stressed that the National Council was the only alternative to the ruling regime (ibid).

Thus, in the years after the revolution the Mojahedin grew strong in exile and their struggle became attractive to other exile opposition groups that eventually joined the National Council. The Mojahedin managed to make the National Council into a broad coalition, but the success, however, was somewhat short-lived. In the following years the Mojahedin and the National Council witnessed a series of resignations. First came the separation with Banisadr and his supporters. Massoud Rajavi who strategically had married Banisadr's daughter, got divorced and what followed was the withdrawal of several key groups such as the Kurdish Democratic Party, many leftists groups, and most of the prominent intellectuals (ibid: 247).

The transformation

More or less abandoned by their former allies and faced with the fact that another revolution was not at hand, the Mojahedin began to prepare for a prolonged armed struggle that consequently made the organization more militant (Abrahamian: 249). This meant that the organization became more reliant on members' loyalty and, according to Abrahamian, the leadership squeezed out the ones that couldn't prove to be loyal. The members that did stay became more or less dependent on the organization. Being given false passports and new identities the members were totally reliant on the organization in their dealings with the host immigration authorities (ibid: 250). The members were placed in communal households where each member had a "supervisor" that they had to report their everyday activities to. The organization also decided what the members could and could not read, permitted who they could and could not marry and stressed the importance of obedience, discipline and hierarchy (ibid). According to Abrahamian, the Mojahedin had at this point more or less "transformed and developed from a mass movement into an inward-looking sect in many ways similar to religious cults found the world over" (ibid: 251).

The Mojahedin strongly deny the accusations of sectarian behaviour and claim they are based on Iranian propaganda and efforts to destroy the organization. However, these accusations only escalated in 1985 when Massoud Rajavi staged the ideological revolution. This

revolution essentially entailed Mehdi Abrishamchi, the right hand man of Massoud, to divorce his wife, the former Maryam Ghajr-Ozdanlou, who subsequently married Rajavi. Prior to marrying Maryam, Massoud had made her co-equal leader with the explanation that this would give women equal say within the organization. The Mojahedin therefore asked Massoud and Maryam to marry each other both to "deepen this great ideological revolution, and avoid the insoluble contradictions that would appear when an unmarried pair worked together closely" (ibid). The revolutionary marriage between Maryam and Massoud obviously caused strong reactions and was perceived as un-Islamic and bizarre. Massoud's seemingly more cult-like organization forced several Mojahedin activists to leave the group and also frightened off many former allies. Most of the Mojahedin's members did, however, stay mostly because of their belief in the organization's ideology, their unshaken expectation of a second revolution, Massoud Rajavi's charismatic personality, their burning hatred for the Khomeini regime, and the fact that a life outside the Mojahedin was difficult to imagine (ibid: 256).

Politically isolated

Meanwhile the Khomeini regime did everything it could to put the former quite popular opposition out in the cold through a relentless campaign by labelling them as Marxist hypocrites and Western-contaminated "eclectics", and as "counter-revolutionary terrorists" collaborating with the Iraqi Ba`thists and the imperialists (Abrahamian: 256). As if this wasn't enough, the Islamic Republic accused the Mojahedin of a host of horrendous crimes such as bombing mosques, schools, hospitals, libraries, cinemas, and city buses; cynical use of children in violent demonstrations, and assassinations not only of *pasdars*, government officials, and "revolutionary heroes", but also of thousands of ordinary citizens who had dared to express their support for the government (ibid: 257). The isolation was almost complete when the Islamic Republic managed in 1986 to persuade the French government to close down the Mojahedin and NCRI headquarters in Paris in order to improve the relationship between the two countries (ibid: 258). According to Gawdat Bahgat, Tehran had influence over Lebanese groups holding French hostages. An expelling of Massoud Rajavi consequently led to the release of these hostages (Bahgat 2004). Politically and now also geographically isolated, the Mojahedin saw no choice but to seek refuge in Iran's neighbouring country Iraq, on the grounds that they needed to be closer to their people and the armed struggle in Iran (Abrahamian: 258).

According to Mohaddessin, Massoud Rajavi decided to move to Iraq only when he was assured of the Mojahedin's independence in Iraq and that the Iraqi government would not interfere in their affairs. In return, they would not intervene in Iraq's internal affairs under any circumstances (Mohaddessin: 115). On their first meeting on the 15th of June 1986, Massoud Rajavi told the former Iraqi president:

"It is no secret that a few years ago, the Mojahedin fought against Iraqi forces, but after Iraq proved to Iranians and to the world its readiness for peace, we should all focus our attention on the mullahs' regime, for it is the only party which wants to continue the war. Today, the Iranian people are longing for peace, and the world public opinion is also in favour of peace in this war" (Mohaddessin: 115).

For his part, the Iraqi president, whose remarks were made public by the Iraqi press, said:

"The Iraqi leadership respects the Iranian Resistance and its political and ideological independence and its freedom of action in its work and its movements to achieve its goals. The relations between Iraq and the Iranian Resistance are based on peace, respect for each other's national sovereignty and respect for ideological and political choice of both nations" (ibid: 115).

The National Liberation Army

In June 1987, Massoud Rajavi formed the National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA), which makes out the Mojahedin's military wing. According to Mohaddessin, the army became a magnet for "disaffected youths who did not want to serve in the clerical regime's war machine" (Mohaddessin: 117). The Mojahedin claim they carried out more than 100 operations against the Iranian regime's armed forces until the cease-fire with Iraq in 1988. They also claim to be the decisive factor for the final peace agreement. Mohaddessin writes:

"After Khomeini's death in 1989 several senior officials divulged the fact that the clerical leadership finally agreed to the UN Security Council Resolution because it was fearful of the Mojahedin and the NLA being part of a wider conspiracy to topple the religious regime in Tehran. Finally, the Iranian Resistance's peace strategy had prevailed and defeated the clerical regime's war-mongering policy and expansionist goals" (Mohaddessin: 117).

Days after the Iranian regime's acceptance of UN Resolution 598, the NLA launched the biggest operation to date, codenamed the *Eternal Light*. According to Mohaddessin, 55,000 Guards were killed or wounded, while 1,263 NLA fighters were slain or captured (ibid: 118). For the Mojahedin the Operation Eternal Light was considered far more than a large battle. "Songs and films were made and books written to commemorate NLA men and women who sacrificed their lives on the fertile plains of Kermanshah, encouraging many youths in Iran to join the Resistance" (ibid).

Setting up bases in Iran's enemy number one Iraq, gave the Islamic Republic if necessary one more, effective, reason to turn the Iranian people against the organization. The Mojahedin's logic, however, was that, "if the war was illegitimate and benefited only the mullahs' regime, and if it was against the best interests of the Iranian people, the clerics propaganda would be thwarted in time and truth would immediately prevail" (Mohaddessin: 118). However, at the end of the 1980's most of the Mojahedin's members and sympathizers were either fleeing the country or imprisoned or killed by Khomeini and his men, and the sympathy they once had among their fellow Iranians was history. The Mojahedin blame the international community for being "forced" to set up bases in Iraq. In an interview with Maryam Rajavi, she said: "No country in Europe was willing to give refuge to Massoud Rajavi, not even France where Massoud lived at the time. The Mojahedin felt that if they were to be of any effect to Iranians, they had to stay close to the Iranian border next to their own people" (Rajavi 2006 [interview]).

Terrorist organization

In 1997, the Mojahedin were for the first time placed on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations by the Clinton-administration. It is a general opinion that this was done in an effort to improve relations between the U.S. and Iran after the more moderate Mohammad Khatami was elected president of the Islamic Republic in 1997. The U.S., however, claims that the collaboration with Saddam Hussein, the participation in the hostage taking of the American Embassy in 1980, and the killings of American officers is the reason for the terrorist label (Hamilton 1992). The Mojahedin's request to be removed from the list has been denied three times (1999, 2001, and 2003) and in 2001 the NCRI was added to the U.S. list with the explanation that it works as the Mojahedin's front organization. In 2003 NCRI's main office

in Washington was closed. Europe followed the U.S. in 2002 and placed the Mojahedin on its terrorist list. On June 17th, 2003, the French authorities launched a raid towards Iranian dissidents and Mojahedin sympathizers charging the Iranian opposition with trying to set up their base in France with the intention of ending the Iranian regime. Among those arrested was Maryam Rajavi. Massoud Rajavi managed to escape the raid and his exact whereabouts are now uncertain. He is said to be last seen going into a helicopter in Baghdad in 2003. Some claim he is imprisoned by the Americans in Iraq, others claim he is dead. The Mojahedin say he's neither, but will not say anything else than that he is alive and well. Today, the Mojahedin and the NCRI's priority number one is to get their name removed from the terrorist list so that they can continue what they claim is a legitimate struggle to bring down an illegitimate regime. So far the United States and Europe have rejected their request for removal and claim there is still evidence that justifies the terrorist label.

After the U.S. led invasion of Iraq in 2003, coalition forces bombed the Mojahedin camps in what was assumed to be part of a quid pro quo with Tehran. Eventually the Mojahedin agreed on a ceasefire and handed over their weapons to the U.S. military. The remaining camp, Ashraf City, is now under U.S. control, and after a research report concluded that the allegations of terrorism were invalid, the Mojahedin are characterized as "protected people" under the fourth Geneva Convention (Khaza'i 2006 [interview]). In spite of this, the Mojahedin and NCRI remain on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations.

Major incidents linked to the Mojahedin include:

- the series of mortar attacks and hit-and-run raids during 2000 and 2001 against Iranian government buildings; one of these killed Iran's chief of staff;
- the 2000 mortar attack on President Mohammad Khatami's palace in Tehran;
- the February 2000 "Operation Great Bahman," during which MEK launched twelve attacks against Iran;
- the 1999 assassination of the deputy chief of Iran's armed forces general staff, Ali Sayyad Shirazi;

- the 1998 assassination of the director of Iran's prison system, Asadollah Lajevardi;
- the 1992 near-simultaneous attacks on Iranian embassies and institutions in 13 countries;
- assistance to Saddam Hussein's suppression of the 1991 Iraqi Shiite and Kurdish uprisings;
- the 1981 bombing of the offices of the Islamic Republic Party and of Premier Mohammad-Javad Bahonar, which killed some seventy high-ranking Iranian officials, including President Mohammad-Ali Rajaei and Bahonar;
- support for the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by Iranian revolutionaries;
- the 1970s killings of U.S. military personnel and civilians working on defense projects in Tehran.

While the Mojahedin say they have never intentionally targeted civilians, they are accused of risking civilan casulties. It is unclear how many attacks the Mojahedin have carried out; according to experts, their claim of responsibility for attacks in Iran are often exaggerated, and sometimes they are blamed by the Iranian government for attacks they didn't stage (Council of Foreign Relations, cfr.org 2005).

The Mojahedin and the NCRI

According to the organization there is a structural difference between the Mojahedin and the NCRI.

"The NCRI is a coalition of organizations, groups and personalities with different ideologies and outlooks who have voluntarily joined forces for a limited period of time on the basis of a specific program to which they are all committed. Their relationships are based on pluralistic democracy. The Mojahedin, on the other hand, is a political organization with a specific ideology and strategy, and a defined political and organizational methodology. People join it voluntarily on the basis of their ideals and objectives. It is, therefore, very different from a broad political coalition" (iran-e-azad.org 2006).

It is not problematic to recognize that the Mojahedin and the NCRI have different responsibilities and structures. The NCRI is purely political, while the Mojahedin are primarily militant. Mojahedin members are required to sign a contract where they must give up everything for the struggle to conquer the enemy. According to Masoud Banisadr, former member of the Mojahedin, this means that they have to completely distance themselves from their partners and personal life, ideologically and emotionally (Banisadr 2004). A member of the Mojahedin will do whatever the organization decides and will work where the organization has use for him or her. Mojahedin sympathizers, on the other hand, are not members of the Mojahedin, but support their struggle to overthrow the regime. However, they are not willing or able to give up everything for the sake of this cause. Members of the NCRI are not necessarily members of the Mojahedin the way a true "member" is defined by the Mojahedin. However, they clearly support the Mojahedin's ideological program as they speak their cause in the international political arena. It is therefore difficult *not* to see the NCRI as a cover organization for the Mojahedin. The Mojahedin is the largest organization in the NCRI. Other groups and personalities that are part of this "coalition", which according to the NCRI is four, amount to very few representatives and are completely dependant on the Mojahedin. Therefore, in this thesis the Mojahedin are considered the "mother organization" where the NCRI makes out their political wing and fronts their ideology and struggle through political channels. I argue that Massoud Rajavi established the NCRI to institutionalise the armed struggle. When speaking of the organization as a whole the Mojahedin refer to the "Iranian Resistance". This does not only include the NCRI, the Mojahedin, and the other groups connected to the coalition, but also the Iranian people. I argue that this coalition is not representative for the majority of the Iranian people and that the Resistance is the Mojahedin. It is important to realise that Massoud Rajavi, ideological leader of the Mojahedin, established the NCRI and is now the NCRI's president. Maryam Rajavi, wife of Massoud, earlier co-leader of the Mojahedin, was in 1993 chosen president-elect for the transitional period and is now officially committed to the NCRI. After a possible overthrow, Maryam will sit as president until the new republic organizes a presidential election. Massoud will become prime minister and sit for six years (Khaza'i 2006 [personal correspondence]).

4 LEGITIMACY BY DE-LEGITIMISATION

After the Mojahedin renounced from political violence against the Islamic Republic in 2001, they have spent most of their effort on the rhetorical war with the Iranian regime. With full focus on accusing the Islamic Republic for the worst of crimes, their intention is obviously to de-legitimise the current regime in order to gain legitimacy for their own struggle and aim to overthrow it. As discussed earlier, the legitimacy of a state or regime derives from enjoying people's support and recognition. De-legitimisation, thus, is to question a governmental system's claim to legitimacy and people's support and votes. In this context, when speaking of de-legitimisation, I discuss the Mojahedin's struggle to demonise and discredit the Islamic Republic with the intention of stripping it of recognition as a legitimate state and regime for the Iranian people. At the same time, I argue that the Mojahedin use the accusations against the Islamic Republic to seek recognition as the Iranian people's organized resistance and legitimate alternative to the contemporary regime. A serious problem for the Mojahedin, however, is that the Iranian regime has spent, and continues to spend a lot of effort isolating and de-legitimising them. So far, the Iranian regime seems to have succeeded in its anti-Mojahedin campaign, as they continue to be labelled a terrorist group, and accused of cult-like activities. However, it is not only the Islamic Republic's propaganda campaign that can take the credit for the Mojahedin's lack of legitimacy; they have themselves contributed to their own de-legitimisation. In this chapter I aim to show how the Mojahedin rhetoric seeks to de-legitimise the Islamic Republic by looking at the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, democratic principles and international human rights, and the threat of Iran's nuclear program and export of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism.

As mentioned in chapter three, the rhetorical and verbal war between the Islamic Republic and the Mojahedin started right after the Islamic Revolution. After trying in vain to cooperate with Khomeini and his men, Massoud Rajavi openly defied the principles of the Islamic Republic and the hateful and ongoing fight between the two rivals, soon to be enemies, was a fact. Although Khomeini died eighteen years ago, he still seems to haunt the Mojahedin with his symbolic presence, and the war between the remains of the "Khomeini regime" and the Mojahedin has turned more and more personal over the years. The characteristics used to describe the other are calculated to do as much damage as possible.

Dictatorship in the name of Islam

Velayat-e Faqih: "the pillar of suppression"

The principle of *velayat-e faqih* means literally "the rule of the jurist", and was introduced by Khomeini after the overthrow of the Shah and establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 (Brumberg 2001: 81). In his book "Velayat-e Faqih", Khomeini propounded the view that there should be no distinction between religion and government in an Islamic state. Khomeini believed that modern government should closely resemble the theocratic Muslim community of the early years of Islam in which the only legitimate rulers are the clergy, who have assumed the mantle of leadership directly from the prophet Mohammad through the Imams (ibid). In other words the faqih works as God's vicegerent on earth until the return of the Twelfth Imam. This principle is the ground principle of the Islamic Republic, and from it the Iranian regime legitimises its rule and right to govern. The Mojahedin strongly deny Khomeini's interpretation of Islam and especially the principle of *velayat-e faqih*. According to them, this principle is founded on Islamic fundamentalism and is the main obstacle to development and change in a democratic direction.

"The regime ruling Iran is a medieval theocracy that lacks the capacity to reform. The principle of velayat-e faqih is the pillar of the Iranian regime's constitution and cannot be changed even through referendum" (Maryam Rajavi, Lion and Sun 2005)

The controversial principle of *velayat-e faqih* has been the main reason for the deadly battle between the Iranian regime and the Mojahedin. According to the Mojahedin, this principle makes it possible for the contemporary regime to suppress Iranians and thereby remain in power. When the Mojahedin attack this principle, it is not through constructive criticism, but by literally destroying and demonising it. Accordingly, they claim that the Islamic Republic's interpretation of Islam is founded on Islamic fundamentalism and based on a lie. They strongly reject the Iranian regime's claim on religion.

"…Islamic fundamentalism […] has nothing to do with true Islam and Prophet Mohammad's religion of mercy and tolerance. The fundamentalist mullahs' claim that they are carrying out the religious precepts in accordance with the Tradition of the Prophet is a blatant lie" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 26).

The mullahs, the Mojahedin say, do not represent Islam or Muslims, but are, on the contrary, a threat to Islam and the Prophet Mohammad's fundamental principles. They, however, claim to advocate the "true" Islam, free of rust and reactionary distortions, and through Massoud Rajavi's secular interpretation of Islam, as I will discuss in Chapter six, they seek to be perceived as the Islamic Republic's exact opposite.

"With a democratic and tolerant vision of Islam, the PMOI is the antithesis to fundamentalism. It has exposed and isolated the violent and backward interpretation of Islam by the fundamentalists. The PMOI message is that the Iran's mullahs do not represent Islam. They are Islam's enemy" (Maryam Rajavi, Lion and Sun 2005).

The Islamic Republic is characterized as an aggressive violator, which not only suppresses the people, but by doing so in the name of Islam it is also accused of violating the very religion it claims legitimacy from. The principle of *velayat-e faqih*, the Mojahedin say, is the foundation for bloodshed, hostility, and terrorism. It is the "pillar of suppression".

"These demagogues commit their crimes in the name of Islam, a despicable and horrendous act, and itself one of their most heinous crimes. As a Muslim woman, let me proclaim that the peddlers of religion who rule Iran in the name of Islam, but shed blood, suppress the people and advocate export of fundamentalism and terrorism, are themselves the worst enemy of Islam and Muslims. The day will come when they will be forced to let go of the name of Islam" (Maryam Rajavi, ncr-iran.org 2005).

With these words the Mojahedin seek to strip the Islamic Republic of its legitimacy. The principle of *velayat-e faqih* is discredited and demonised and considered to be the evil power that upholds the continuous suppression of the Iranian people. The beholders of power in Tehran are accused of being criminals, terrorists, and enemies of religion not worthy of support or power. Thus, they do not have the right to refer to themselves by the name of Islam. *Velayat-e faqih* is as mentioned earlier what the Islamic Republic builds its legitimacy on, and it is the Islamic Revolution's ground principle. If it falls, the idea of an Islamic Republic, as God's state, also falls. By demonising the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, the Mojahedin attack the Islamic Republic's very existence. In Addition, they present their interpretation of Islam as Islam's salvation from the fundamentalist's destruction. So, while de-legitimising the Iranian regime for violating Islam and Muslims, the Mojahedin claim legitimacy for teaching and obeying the right and true Islam. The problem with this approach

is that it doesn't present a constructive debate. The principle of *velayat-e faqih* is controversial and also the issue of internal strivings within the Islamic Republic. The rhetoric presented by the Mojahedin, however, does not give any room for a productive and open discussion about the regime's interpretation of Islam, as they already present the answer. This is especially problematic because of the very fact that it is the religious clergy that today beholds power in Iran. Totally excluding them from the discussion about Islam seems problematic and unwise. If the Mojahedin were to overthrow the regime they would *have* to deal with the different interpretations of Islam, and especially Khomeini's principle of *velayat-e faqih,* in order to establish democracy. Anything else would undermine their credibility and their promise to unite the Iranian nation.

Suppression of women and violation of human rights

"[The fundamentalist mullahs] derive their vigor and inspiration from their discrimination against and suppression of women; it is their life's blood. Beyond the whip, in a literal sense, the fundamentalist form of oppression is the worst because it is compounded by a cultural persecution which takes advantage of the name of Islam" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 4).

The Mojahedin have managed to make the issue of women into a keystone in their resistance and continuous struggle. They claim that the suppression of women is what makes the Iranian regime stay in power. The principle of *velayat-e faqih*, the Mojahedin argue, is the main obstacle for women's rights and the main reason for the regime's authoritative power. It derives its justification and theoretical basis from *fiqh* (jurisprudence), which encompasses all aspects of individual and social life (ibid 2003: 3). To the Mojahedin, this mindset "demonstrates that the pillar of this backward school of thought is gender distinction and discrimination. In other words, it is a gender-based ideology" (ibid). The fundamentalist mind, the Mojahedin say, uses gender-based differences to justify sexual discrimination. This, they argue, will inevitably lead to enmity towards women. In truth, they claim, "the fundamentalists do not believe women are human. The ultimate message of the mullahs' value system, laws and practices is that women are "weak" and properties of men who are superior to them as God is to mankind" (ibid: 4). Fundamentalism, they argue, "conceives of woman as sinister and satanic, and as the embodiment of sin and seduction" (ibid: 7).

"She must not step beyond her house, lest her presence in society breed sin. She must stay at home, serving her husband's carnal desires; if she fails to comply, she is compelling her man to commit sin outside the home" (Rajavi, Maryam 2003: 7)

According to the Mojahedin, the clergy - or fundamentalists as they are referred to - look at the world and the hereafter through distorted "sex-tinted" glasses. They claim that the "fundamentalists" fabricate their own fantasies and moral lessons and attribute them to the Prophet Mohammad's ascension of Heaven that the Mojahedin say are nowhere to be found in the Quran. "Predictably, the fabricated stories focus on the gravity of sexual sins and the severity of punishment meted out when such sins are committed. Here is one reactionary theorist's fantasy shamelessly attributed to the Prophet Mohammad" (ibid):

"I saw a woman hanging from her hair whose brain was boiling because she had not covered her hair. I saw a woman who had been hanged from her tongue and Hell's boiling water was being poured into her throat, because she had irritated her husband. I saw a woman in a furnace of fire, hanging from her feet because she had left home without her husband's permission …" (Rajavi, Maryam 2003: 7).

The Mojahedin argue that the Iranian regime's violation of the Prophet's teachings is only done in order to "maintain monopoly on Islam and seat themselves upon the throne of religion" (ibid: 8). The mullahs, they say, use gender distinction and highlight sexual misconduct to justify their "misogynous outlook" and apply it to all spheres of man-women relationships in society. In this way, they keep control (ibid).

"Theoretically, Islamic fundamentalism establishes its thesis on the differences between the sexes and the conclusion that the male is superior and hence the female is a slave at his service. A parliamentary deputy in Iran is on record as saying, "Women must accept the reality of men dominating them and the world must recognize the fact that men are superior" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 8)

The Mojahedin have taken on the role as protectors of human and especially women's rights. They strongly accuse the Islamic Republic of violating the rights of human kind set by the international community. This misogynist regime, as they call it, cannot and must not be considered legitimate as it suppresses approximately half of the people for being women,

together with the vast crowd of political activists openly defying it. The Mojahedin, on the other side, present themselves as an organization supporting, defending, and following the international human rights. They base their support on accepting and respecting both genders and humans in general. They should therefore be recognized as legitimate. Ironically, the Mojahedin leadership have themselves been accused of violating human rights within the organization. The report "No Exit" from Human Rights Watch in 2005 claims that torture and maltreatment occurred inside the organization's military camp in Iraq. According to this report, human rights abuses were carried out by Mojahedin leaders against dissident members and ranged from "prolonged incommunicado and solitary confinement to beatings, verbal and psychological abuse, coerced confessions, threats of execution, and torture that in two cases led to death" (hrw.org 2005). This report was later criticized and rejected for being invalid in another report made by an inter-parliament group called "Friends of a Free Iran". This report accuses Human Rights Watch for interviewing dissidents they say "had already been exposed as having ties to Iran's Ministry of Intelligence" (paulocasaca.net 2005). HRW, on the other hand, rejected all accusations directed against the report for being invalid due to poor methodology. Nonetheless, true or not true, reports like "No Exit" will necessarily contribute to undermine the sincerity and legitimacy of the Mojahedin, as doubt seldom works in favour for the accused.

Dictatorship vs. people's support

"One of the mullahs' biggest demagogic ploys has been to equate the current backwardness in Iran, the issue of impoverishment, prostitution, addiction, and all these social ills with the Iranian culture. This is absolutely not the case. These are all the phenomenon that came into existence in Iran after the mullahs took over. None of this was there before the mullahs came to power. If you had a democratic popular government after the Shah and not the mullahs' regime, Iran would have probably been one of the most advanced countries in the world and you can see that by looking at the Iranian resistance and its capabilities" (Rajavi 2006 [interview]).

The Islamic Republic of Iran is unique in its form and can best be described as a combination of religious and political institutions (Esposito and Voll 1996: 64). The faqih or supreme leader has the ultimate authority and absolute power and is above the constitution, yet the system in addition incorporates an elective mechanism (ibid). The Mojahedin characterise the whole system as a dictatorship that is not reliant on the people's support, having no aspiration or ability to either reform or develop in any democratic direction.

"Backwardness and deadlock are intrinsic to the Khomeini regime, whose reactionary, anti-human nature is incompatible with the requirements of today's world. No solution is possible with this regime or any person, trend or policy which tries to keep this regime in power. So long as the mullahs are in power, not a single step will be taken to reduce plunder and destruction. The only solution is a political solution: the overthrow of this anti-human regime and the installation of the sole democratic, patriotic alternative, the National Council of Resistance of Iran" (Rajavi, Massoud 1999: 12).

The Islamic Republic, they say, bases its power on the suppression of women and political opponents, and religious despotism. It is an anti-human regime that lacks the capacity to reform. It is to blame for all the problems Iranians are faced with today. According to the Mojahedin, there is no other way to deal with the regime than to destroy it and replace it with their alternative, the National Council of Resistance. They claim to have both the political and social capacity to bring about democratic change in Iran. The Mojahedin's claim to have political capacity lies in their ideological program. This is something I will come back to in Chapter six, but it refers to the strength of the organization both ideologically and militarily. By social capacity, they argue to have considerable support among Iranians both inside and outside Iran.

"We have a vast popular base; a nationwide social network that enjoys widespread support among Iranians abroad. More than 4,000 acts of protest in Iran last year, despite the repressive atmosphere, demonstrated that Iranian society is ripe for change" (Maryam Rajavi, April 10th, 2006).

"[25,000 strong gathering in London], beamed five hours live into Iran, Middle East, Europe and the United States, once again indicated that the absolute majority of Iranians, both inside Iran and abroad, support the President-elect Maryam Rajavi who heads the only democratic alternative for the illegitimate religious, terrorist dictatorship ruling Iran" (Massoud Rajavi, iran-e-azad.org 1996).

The Mojahedin claim to be the Iranian people's organized resistance, which means they believe to be perceived as the Iranian people's legitimate representative. Accordingly, they call for the removal from the terrorist list and call it a legitimate demand from the Iranian people (Maryam Rajavi, April 10th, 2006). This claim and demand they present should automatically give them political legitimacy. However, it is highly uncertain how much support the Mojahedin can claim to have inside Iran. Iranians I have spoken to both in and out

of Iran characterise the Mojahedin as a group that lost most of their sympathy when they collaborated with Saddam Hussein against Iran during the war with Iraq. Furthermore, they say that when it comes to replacing the present regime they do not consider the Mojahedin or the NCRI to be a better alternative. All of my informants accused the Mojahedin of leading a violent struggle inside Iran, which consequently killed civilians together with the intended target. This, however, is something the Mojahedin automatically denounce as propaganda put together by the Iranian regime's agents. They claim that the regime does this in fear of what the Mojahedin soon will accomplish, namely to overthrow it. The Islamic Republic, they say, is detested among a large majority of Iranians and doesn't have any significant support among its own people. With this attack on the regime, they seek to de-legitimise it, seeing that a regime in order to be considered legitimate must have significant support among the people.

"Government surveys show that ninety-four percent of Iranians want an end to this theocracy. Last week, thousands of students staged a demonstration against Khatami's presence at Tehran University on December 6, which marked the Student's Day. They were shouting, Khatami, you are the enemy of the people, enough of lies and where is freedom? Despite brutal crackdown, uprisings have continued to erupt across the nation" (Maryam Rajavi, Lion and Sun 2005).

Studies done on the Iranian regime's popularity and support among its own people show that the majority of both Muslims and non-Muslims want change (Nordengen 2005). They do not, however, agree on what kind of change they want. It is, therefore, problematic when the Mojahedin, with their absolute approach, claim to represent the majority of the Iranian people. Also, the fact that they refuse to recognize the validity of testimonies from people not supporting them, denouncing it as propaganda propagated by the regime, make them appear relatively less open to criticism. This necessarily contributes to de-legitimising them. It is problematic to consider them a legitimate representative for the Iranian people when they claim to have support they in reality don't seem to have, concurrently as they de-legitimise the Islamic Republic for ruling in spite of the fact that it lacks popular vote and support.

Tehran: "The Global Threat"

The threat of Tehran's nuclear ambitions

"From Tehran, the beating heart of theocracy, the octopus of fundamentalism has extended its blood-drenched tentacles into Islamic states and Muslim societies around the world. It has emerged as the primary threat to regional and world peace" (Rajavi, Maryam 1996: 7).

As part of the Iranian global threat, the Mojahedin point to especially two major challenges: the threat of Iran's nuclear program and the threat of Tehran subsidising and supporting acts of terrorism in the name of Islamic fundamentalism. They claim the Islamic Republic has plans and intentions to extend the Islamic Revolution to the rest of the region with the purpose of installing a "despotic empire under the banner of Islam" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

"The theocracy ruling Iran is hostile to the most important global peace initiative in the Middle East. In policy and in action, it nourishes warmongering extremists and fundamentalists, for the very survival of this regime depends on continued crisis and conflict" (Rajavi, Maryam 1996: 7).

According to the Mojahedin, the Iranian regime is secretly hiding its production of enriched uranium used to develop nuclear weapons. In recent meetings of Iranian top officials involved in the nuclear project in the presence of Khamene'i, the Mojahedin claim to behold evidence of discussions about the timetable to obtain WMDs: "Under the cover of its peaceful purposes of activities, one could produce enriched Uranium of higher grades for weapons purposes secretly" (Lion and Sun 2004: 48). The Mojahedin take credit for being the ones who revealed Iran's secret nuclear program and according to them, Iran is only a year or two from being able to make a nuclear bomb. They even claim to have caught Tehran in "the act". They accuse Tehran of secretly developing its nuclear program, and argue that the regime's only intention of dealing with the international community is to buy time. According to the Mojahedin, "the mullahs need a nuclear arsenal to realize their policy of export of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, and guarantee the survival of a regime facing growing discontent and aggravating crisis at home" (ibid: 49).

"The Iranian people oppose the mullahs being armed with nuclear weapons. If the regime obtains nuclear weapons, it would mean the prolongation of the rule of torture and execution in Iran. Just as Khomeini's eight-year war with Iraq was unpatriotic, anti-Iranian and anti-Islamic, the mullahs' nuclear projects are also against the Iranian people's interests and unpatriotic" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

As claimed by the Mojahedin, the Iranian threat is not just a threat towards the Iranian people. On the contrary, it is a threat to all of humanity. A document released by the NCRI, presented as the "Top-Secret Ballistic Missile Project in Iran" reveals: "These missiles, with a range of 2,000 kilometres, (…), which is 1,250 miles, will bring all the capitals in the Middle East and vast territories in Europe and North Africa and the U.S. forces stationed there within the missile range of the Iranian regime. That's why it's so dangerous" (iranwatch.org 2002). Further the document stated, "On September 26, '98 when Shahab-3 was displayed for the first time in a parade by the mullahs, (…) it was written, "U.S. cannot do a damn thing" and "Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth"" (ibid). In her speech four years later, Maryam Rajavi emphasised:

"[The Iranian regime] has acquired long-range missiles that can carry nuclear warheads and can reach Europe. Nuclear weapons in the hands of a violent dictatorship, whose terrorist tentacles have reached many parts of the world, including Buenos Aires, Paris, Berlin, Beirut, Riyadh, Manila, Istanbul and Baghdad and instilled fear and perpetrated atrocities in those countries, is quite dangerous" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

The threat of Iran's nuclear program, say the Mojahedin, can only be handled one way. The solution lies in the "Iranian Resistance". They believe not only that they are the solution for the security and future of Iran, but in fact for the stability of the entire world.

"The Resistance is the solution not only for establishing democracy in Iran but also for peace and security in the entire world. The solution to the nuclear crisis and to thwart the danger of a war is democratic change in Iran. Indeed, by relying on its beloved nation, this Resistance holds the key to the Iranian equation" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

The threat to world peace

Together with the threat of Tehran's nuclear ambitions is the threat of Iran's interference in the Middle East and its support and sponsorship of terrorism in the name of Islamic fundamentalism. The Iranian regime, they claim, is the "epicentre of exporting fundamentalism and the most active state sponsor of terrorism in the world. It is hostile to peace in the Middle East. Its president has called for the destruction of the United States and wiping Israel of the map. It is a regime, which is trying to set up a satellite fundamentalist regime in Iraq" (Maryam Rajavi, April 10th, 2006). The combination of nuclear arms and extremism, the Mojahedin warn, is lethal and tremendously dangerous.

"Thus a lethal mix has emerged, of nuclear arms and fundamentalism. Drawing from my experience with Khomeini, who propelled fundamentalism to power in Iran, and from my reading of the ruling mullahs' regressive value system, I know that they have no limits in perpetrating horrific killings and mass destruction. Recent terrorist assaults have made this plain to everyone. Therefore, at issue is a crisis that is deepening exponentially because of the mullahs' belligerence and hysterical threats and is pushing the region toward the precipice" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006)

The Mojahedin accuse the Iranian regime of both supporting and exporting acts of terrorism. Together with obtaining nuclear arms, this combination, they argue, can be fatal for the international community and its strive for global peace. Especially Tehran's interference in Iraq and its alleged effort to destabilize the situation and increase hostility between Shi'ites and Sunnis through terrorist activities is used as one of the Mojahedin's strongest arguments as to why this regime must be discredited and recognized as illegitimate. The world, they say, cannot defend negotiating with terrorists that are under investigation because of their involvement in crimes and terrorism (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

"The mullahs' maddening insistence to build weapons of mass destruction is part of the ominous strategy it is pursuing, alongside its terrorism and meddling in Iraq. The bombing of the holy Shiite shrines in Samarra by the mullahs' agents, the killing of Iraqi experts, professors, and physicians, setting up numerous torture centers and stealing Iraq's oil are all part of this strategy" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

With the Iranian regime posing as the ultimate threat to global peace and stability, the Mojahedin present themselves as the key that will solve the emerging crisis. The global threat, consisting of Tehran's allegedly secret nuclear program and their desire to spread Islamic fundamentalism through acts of terrorism, is, according to the Mojahedin, dangerously real. Tehran's WMD-capable missiles, the Mojahedin say, have Eastern and Southern Europe within range and can reach Western Europe if not stopped (Lion and Sun 2005: 6). The solution, once again, lies in de-legitimising the Iranian regime and re-legitimising and empowering the Iranian Mojahedin. However, the solution presented by the Mojahedin appears both naïve and unrealistic. The role they give themselves in creating world peace appears extremely grandiose and far from reasonable. To a large extent, it contributes to undermine their claim for legitimacy, as it is difficult to take them seriously. The danger they warn of may to some extent be real. However, it seems clear that their warning is presented with the intention to create insecurity among people and parliamentarians within the international community by deliberately playing on people's possible fear of Iran.

The Iranian Monafeghin

The Islamic Republic, which has successfully managed to isolate the Mojahedin politically, rarely comments on the opposition movement making them almost seem non-existent. Consequently they are not given the honourable status of officially constituting a potential threat to the regime, which symbolically works in favour of the regime. If the Mojahedin were publicly treated and perceived as a potential threat, it would give them some sort of recognition and legitimacy, which would be considered a victory and work as a major motivating factor for the organization. Thus, the effort of marginalizing the Mojahedin by acting indifferent seems to be the official strategy of the Iranian regime. When talked about they are referred to as terrorists, and officially the organization goes by the name *Monafeghin*, meaning hypocrites. In the Quran, hypocrites are described as something worse than being a *kafer*, or unbeliever. It is written that, "Under the guise of their apparent faith, they repel the people from the path of GOD. Miserable indeed is what they do" (Order of Revelation 104, Verses: 11, Sura – 63:2). An unbeliever is better than a hypocrite because an unbeliever you know is your enemy, but a hypocrite can say one thing and than do something else. In other words you can't trust him and cannot know whether he is telling the truth or not. "When you see them, you may be impressed by their looks. And when they speak, you may listen to their

eloquence. They are like standing logs. They think that every call is intended against them. These are the real enemies; beware of them. GOD condemns them: they have deviated" (ibid, Sura – 63:4). By referring to the Mojahedin as terrorists and hypocrites, the Islamic Republic characterises them as a threat to Islam, and as people not to be trusted.

In reality, however, the regime does not have an indifferent attitude towards the Mojahedin. Since the beginning of the 1980's the Islamic Republic has killed and imprisoned thousands of Mojahedin sympathisers. Since the summer of 2003, however, Tehran has been offering amnesty to repentant members who want to return to Iran. This has been perceived as highly controversial inside Iran as supporters of the Islamic Republic are extremely sensitive to the violence inflicted by the organization on their leaders and fellow supporters, particularly in the period 1981-1984 when the Mojahedin's armed struggle was at its peak (Khodabandeh 2005). In spite of this, Iranian officials have pushed ahead with the offer, and since December 2004, the ICRC has voluntarily repatriated 41 individuals who have been de-briefed and than reunited with their families. No prosecutions are planned, but it is understood that repatriated members should not take part in political activity (ibid). However, if not repentant they risk being imprisoned or in the worst case sentenced to death for supporting a terrorist organization hostile to the nation. Maryam Rajavi elaborates on this, claiming that people are killed just stating or thinking that they support the Mojahedin. "Of the 120,000 people the Khomeini regime has killed, some of them were only in their mind sympathetic to the Mojahedin, others only sold magazines for the Mojahedin" (Rajavi 2006 [interview]). Therefore, she says, "Iranians cannot risk admitting that they support us" (ibid). The Iranian regime also censors the Internet, which makes it difficult to find any articles about the Mojahedin besides partial ones. This was something I experienced myself when I was living in Iran; only articles about the Mojahedin related to acts of terrorism and sectarian behaviour were possible to locate.

Furthermore, although no official proof exists, it is a general opinion that the Mojahedin were put on the American list of terrorist organizations as a goodwill gesture to president Khatami in 1997 in order to improve relations with Iran. Tehran continues to pressure the international community to label the Mojahedin as terrorists and politically isolate them. This became obvious in 2005 when the organization was denied to demonstrate in Paris as originally

planned. The Islamic Republic allegedly threatened to end talks with the EU-troika if the French authorities didn't prevent the demonstration from taking place. After reorganising the whole gathering to Berlin just a day before the demonstration was supposed to take place, the German authorities were reportedly forced to come to the same conclusion. After a mini-trial the day of the demonstration, however, a judge decided that there was no legal or judicial ground to deny the demonstration from happening. At this time, though, many of the protesters had gone home, and Tehran succeeded in marginalizing the effect of the protest. Another effort from the Iranian regime to meddle in the Mojahedin's plans revealed itself when the Iranian ambassador to Norway threatened Norwegian interests in Iran if Norway agreed to meet with Maryam Rajavi during her visit in Oslo this autumn of 2006. The Iranian regime, which after the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 has had little confidence within the international community, did not succeed with their intrusion in this visit. On the contrary, it contributed to great media attention for the Mojahedin, attention they would probably not have gotten without the help of Tehran's threats.

The brutal crackdown on people supporting the Mojahedin and the intense meddling indicates that the regime at some level is threatened by what the Mojahedin represent and may accomplish. Either way it is clear that many things are done in order to isolate the Mojahedin below the surface. The fight between the Islamic Republic and the Mojahedin is far from over, and the one part's victory is the other part's fatal loss.

5 TRADITION, CHARISMA, AND LEGALITY

Due to lack of support and recognition the Mojahedin have struggled and continue to struggle for rebuilding their legitimacy. In this fight they employ traditional, charismatic, and legal modes and sources to legitimacy. As Weber explained traditional legitimacy rests upon the belief that what has always been is legitimate (Mommsen 1989: 47). In the case of the Mojahedin, their claim for traditional legitimacy derives from stating to be the longest-running political opposition in Iran's contemporary history. They claim to have deep roots in the Iranian society and are therefore a natural and legitimate representative for the people. Charismatic legitimacy originates in the personality of a leader. The leader's charismatic legitimacy depends entirely on the readiness of the followers to accept the ideals, which the leader represents, and the orders derived from them, as absolutely binding (ibid). Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, leader and president-elect for the Mojahedin and NCRI, are known for their charismatic authority and strong personal skills as leaders. Massoud is also the organization's Islamic ideologue, and thus derives legitimacy from advocating the "true" Islam. His vision of Islam is popular among both Muslims and non-Muslims within the movement. Finally, legal legitimacy depends on the belief that everything that has been enacted in accordance with established procedures may be considered legitimate (ibid). By establishing the NCRI, Massoud Rajavi "routinized" charisma and tradition and instituted a political wing that resembles a democratic parliament. This works as a provisional government ready to replace the existing regime if or when overthrown. This chapter will discuss how the Mojahedin employ tradition, charisma, and legality in their struggle and search for legitimacy.

Longest-Running Resistance

"The National Council of Resistance of Iran is the longest-running political coalition in Iran's contemporary history which has proven its genuineness and steadfastness in the most complicated international and regional circumstances. This perseverance reflects the NCRI's prowess. The Iranian Resistance drives its strength from the sacrifice of 120,000 martyrs and the pain and suffering of hundreds of thousands of political prisoners and the endeavors of the Mojahedin, its combatants and the vast network of its supporters inside and outside Iran for the establishment of freedom and democracy in the country and building a prosperous and independent Iran" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

The Mojahedin proclaim that due to the continuous struggle against suppressors since before the Islamic Revolution, they are the longest-running opposition in Iran's contemporary history. This tradition is important to them, as they have managed to withstand the brutal crackdown from the Shah's regime, and the Khomeini regime, and today they are also struggling to invalidate the allegations against them presented by the international community. Contrary to other Iranian exiled opposition groups, which have more or less dissolved over the years, the Mojahedin have over and over again managed to reinforce making their opposition and resistance either way unique. The Mojahedin have also stayed loyal to the ideological struggle, meaning that the end result has always been the destruction of the Islamic Republic. However, the idea of how to get there has gone through severe changes. Ideas such as democracy, freedom, and human –and women's rights, shown to be popular and gaining of support, have strategically been developed and given significant attention in order to mobilize European and American public opinion against the government in Tehran, and attract influential allies within the international community. The Mojahedin claim that their focus on these values have been the organization's tradition since before the Islamic Revolution, and are not advocated in order to gain international recognition and legitimacy.

"The resistance movement has deep roots in society. At the core of this resistance, the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) has been fighting for freedom against the dictatorships of the Shah and Khomeini for 40 years" (Lion and Sun 2005).

The Mojahedin have an advantage in being the strongest and longest-running exiled opposition to the contemporary regime in Iran. They have after 40 years of continuous resistance shown to be resilient, and have significant experience in leading armed struggle. The combatants in Ashraf City in Iraq are trained for the sole purpose of ending the regime Khomeini established. They have additionally proven to have a strong and durable organizational structure. Their history of participating in the Islamic Revolution, being the key actor in destroying the Shah's repressive regime, together with the fact that they opposed Khomeini's regime when they understood where it was heading, provides them with a strong argument as to why they must be considered a legitimate Iranian opposition group. This history and tradition they claim to have of fighting a despotic and authoritarian regime, should automatically give them both legitimacy and recognition in Iran especially, and in the West.

The fact that they instead are generally perceived as terrorists, national traitors, and bizarre is due to some major strategic, political, and ideological blunders in the past and present.

To begin with, the Mojahedin's decision to set up bases in Saddam Hussein's Iraq and fight against Khomeini from that side of the border turned out to be fatal for their sympathy amongst the Iranian people, who considered this national treason. At that time, being geographically isolated due to pressure from Tehran, it seemed that the Mojahedin didn't have any choice but to accept Saddam's controversial invitation. Thrown out of their main base in France, they recognized the choice between reinforcing in Iraq and deteriorating together with the rest of the Iranian opposition. Thus, the alternative between existence and no existence, together with the obvious fact that leading armed struggle on the Iranian border made their mission geographically easier, left the organization with no doubt about resettling in Iraq. However, this decision consequently made them lose both international and domestic support. The fact that the Mojahedin never try to address the misgivings and grievances against them, and have never taken any self-criticism concerning their relationship with the late dictator, or the armed struggle inside Iran, have contributed to additional unpopularity. "We have fought a legitimate war" (Aftenposten 2006), says leader of NCRI in Scandinavia Pervez Khaza'i. The Mojahedin strongly argue that they have always been independent of Saddam and that they never supported the Iraqi dictator, but fought against *their* tyrant Khomeini. They point to their effort of ending the bloody war by presenting a peace plan in March of 1983, which won support of many governments, political parties, and parliamentarians around the world, but was repudiated by Khomeini (ncr-iran.org 2005). Also, the violent armed struggle inside Iran, they say, never targeted civilians, and in my interview with Maryam Rajavi she elaborated on this: "Anyone who claims that the Mojahedin have targeted civilians, I challenge them to produce evidence or documents on this. It is also important to remember that the mullahs engage in enormous propaganda to give this impression" (Rajavi 2006 [interview]). Nevertheless, the fact that the Mojahedin collaborated with the Iranian people's worst enemy, and subjected the Iranian society to their violent struggle have made them appear as traitors instead of national heroes.

Furthermore, the "ideological revolution" in 1985, which critics claim transformed the organization into a cult-like movement and made it unrecognisable, scared off former allies

and consequently contributed to further seclusion and isolation. This transformation, symbolized by the strange marriage between Massoud and Maryam, separated the Mojahedin from their early "tradition" to the extent that several of their own members chose to distance themselves from the organization. The Mojahedin of today are ideologically completely different from the Mojahedin that fought in the Islamic Revolution. Thus, their claim for traditional legitimacy becomes based on a tradition they no longer are identified with. Moreover, the ideological transformation didn't happen openly, making it appear to be a transition based on authoritarian orders and not something that had naturally evolved collectively over the years. Dissident members tell of strange things happening within the Mojahedin during the ideological revolution, something the Mojahedin themselves denounce, again, as propaganda propagated by the Iranian regime. Nevertheless, the lack of transparency makes the change appear questionable and not at all part of a prolonged tradition or history.

Finally, the Mojahedin's effort to mobilize Iranian opposition under one Iranian resistance movement (NCRI), which is claimed by Maryam Rajavi to be the longest-running political coalition in Iran's contemporary history, has failed. Because of the Mojahedin's history and past, other opposition groups have been reluctant to join the NCRI because they see it as a front organization for the Mojahedin. The NCRI denies this accusation. The problem with the NCRI, however, is that it bases, among other things, its legitimacy on tradition and history. It is presented as a coalition that represents the majority of the Iranian people and nation and has close ties with Iranian society. Yet, the National Council was established in exile and has never actually existed inside Iran. Thus, it cannot be said to have deep roots in Iranian society. In reality, this claim for traditional legitimacy is based on the tradition of the early Mojahedin, which makes it difficult not to assume that the resistance movement agree ideologically with the Mojahedin. This contradicts with the fundamental idea of what the NCRI claims to represent and therefore contributes to undermine its legitimacy.

The Mojahedin have attracted many parliamentarians around Europe and in the U.S. Their tradition and history of armed struggle and opposition show that they have a strong organizational structure that is resilient and able to survive destructive attacks. This, among other things, have given them legitimacy and recognition in some circles. Their critics,

however, argue that this support comes from people wanting to use the Mojahedin to pressure the Iranian regime, and is based on the saying "my enemy's enemy is my friend".

Many things have changed in Iran since the Mojahedin were forced to leave and the people are no longer wishing for a new revolution. They fear the consequence of what a new revolution will bring and subject them to. Therefore, the idea of the return of a great resistance, being the voice of the Iranian people and the symbol of Iranian resilience is not obviously present in Iran. The fact that the Mojahedin have tradition for being the longest-running opposition to the Iranian regime does not seem to give them legitimacy and support among Iranians. On the contrary, the history of collaborating with Saddam Hussein and the tradition of armed struggle seemed to have cost them this support.

Charismatic Authority and Sectarian Behaviour

Both Massoud and Maryam are known to be charismatic leaders. Massoud is the NCRI president and the Mojahedin's historical and ideological leader. According to the NCRI website, Massoud has no longer any executive responsibilities in the Mojahedin. Maryam, chosen president-elect by the NCRI, has become the organization's new charismatic spokesperson after Massoud went underground in 2003. Together they have a mission. Their mission has for the last 30 years been to overthrow the Islamic Republic and replace it with a "Democratic Islamic Republic". Although they have been faced with extreme difficulties and challenges they have managed to escape total destruction many times and survived all the different efforts that have been made in order to destroy them. The leadership has been and still is an important and decisive factor as to why the Mojahedin still exists today, and to a certain extent still poses a threat to the Iranian regime.

Firstly, Massoud and Maryam preach a powerful ideology based on Massoud's interpretation of Islam and their war against Islamic fundamentalism. With their charisma and personal leadership skills they make the members believe in them, their ideology, and their mission. In her speeches Maryam is persuasive and uncompromising, making people believe that their way, and their way alone, can rescue Iran from further destruction and suppression. Secondly, both Maryam and Massoud have managed to strategically adjust when dealing with different

authorities. When interacting with the West they have always had strong focus on international values, giving the audience a cause in which they can identify with and thus justify supporting. This shows that they are strategists with good leadership skills. When delivering their message, they appear believable and sincere. Thirdly, they have managed to transform themselves (at least in their own minds) into living symbols of freedom, hope, and prosperity.

The "symbol" Massoud Rajavi

"Hail to Sattar Khan, the national hero of the Constitutional Revolution, hail to Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq, the leader of Iran's nationalist movement, hail to Massoud Rajavi, the leader of the national resistance against the religious fascism ruling Iran" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

Massoud's role in the Mojahedin is extraordinary and complex. After he disappeared from France in 2003, his role has become more symbolic, traditional, and mystic. The Mojahedin hail him alongside national Iranian heroes such as Sattar Khan and Mohammad Mossadeq. As the only remaining member from the early days, Massoud derives his authority from participating in the Islamic Revolution and his interpretation of Islam. According to the Mojahedin, Massoud has a decisive role in the history of the Mojahedin, which has made him a historical and ideological leader for the Mojahedin and a national leader for the Iranian people (NCRI's President, ncr-iran.org 2005). He has shown to be a resilient leader who radiates charismatic authority and power.

"His role in safeguarding the principles of the Mojahedin as a Muslim, democratic, nationalist and progressive organization in the 1970s, and more importantly against Khomeini's all-out assault to destroy the Mojahedin, has made him a historical and ideological leader for the Mojahedin" (NCRI's President, ncr-iran.org 2005).

Massoud's disappearance was a strategic move by the Mojahedin that ultimately helped preserve his charismatic authority and transform him into a powerful symbol of Iran's liberation. I want to explain this further by turning to Weber. Weber argued that pure charisma couldn't be sustained indefinitely. Eventually it would have to be transformed into permanent institutions and doctrines (Brumberg 2001: 15). For example, there are several factors that contribute to destabilizing charisma. For one, it is the concept of charisma itself.

As Weber explained it, a charismatic leader retains his charismatic authority by proving his power in practice. Thus, he or she must work miracles to be a prophet. Secondly, when a leader is to point out his or her successor, it often leads to charisma losing its magic because of the successor's lack of charismatic quality. This will lead to the third process where the disciples develop a desire to transform charisma "…from a unique, transitory form of grace…into a permanent possession of every day" (ibid: 16). Because this task requires replacing the supernatural authority of the revolutionary leader with a "permanent" institution and legitimacy formula, routinization is almost always completed after the charismatic leader passes away. At this point charisma is reduced to "a mere component of a concrete historical structure", a "dogma, doctrine, theory, regulation, law or petrified tradition" (ibid). Thus, by disappearing, Massoud has transformed himself into a symbol of resistance and freedom for the Mojahedin. By not knowing where he is, if he is alive or not, his charisma has developed into something mystical, which ultimately will contribute to sustaining his charismatic authority and influence. The metaphorical value and effect of Massoud's disappearance is additionally quite interesting. Dead or alive, his "hiding" resembles paradoxically the Shi'ite ideology about the Twelfth Imam that is said to be in hiding or "occultation". Shi'ites argue that the creation of a fully legitimate Islamic state must await his return (ibid: 44). Massoud, on his side, is expected to come out of "hiding" and return to Iran after the overthrow of the present regime.

The extraordinary Maryam Rajavi

The no less charismatic co-leader and president-elect Maryam Rajavi has, especially after she divorced her former husband in order to marry Massoud, gotten a very decisive role within the Mojahedin. As a woman declaring war against a regime internationally condemned for not following international human –and women's rights, she has put herself in the front seat of controversy. By the Mojahedin and NCRI she has been made into the very symbol of freedom and liberty and her strong focus on especially women's rights has attracted sympathizers fighting for the same principles. I had the interesting experience of observing Maryam during a demonstration in Paris 2006, and an even more fascinating interview with her in Norway six months later. Her charismatic aura is very much present when she speaks and her fair presence takes away all doubt one might have had about the sincerity of the Mojahedin, though perhaps only while she is in fact physically present. She appears as a woman with power, with courage, with heart, and her audience instantly stop to listen to what she has to

say; they almost have no choice as her voice steals every sound and her appearance all the light. She is the closest I have come to experiencing a purely charismatic person the way Weber describes it. Her message is no less powerful applying her with the necessary "weapons" for gaining support; a powerful ideological program combined with charismatic authority. This is my experience after seeing her only for the first time; imagine what she must mean to her devotees. As an outsider it is simply impossible to fully understand.

Maryam Rajavi derives her legitimacy from more than charisma and ideology. Her authority includes in many ways Easton's notion of personal legitimacy. She is a talented speaker with a powerful message and she is respected for her leadership skills. Also, the fact that she is a woman makes her seem harmless, but yet even more courageous and invincible. Especially fascinating about Maryam is that she's leading a war against a regime that is considered to be one of the worst ones when it comes to repressing women. She has lost close members of her family to the oppression of the regime, and her words make it obvious that the war she is leading is personal and revengeful. Her powerful and effective rhetoric allows the listener to physically feel her wrath and anger; "The misogynous mullahs slander hundreds of women every day, detain them, flog them or stone them in public" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 26). Officially and publicly, Maryam Rajavi humiliates the regime; demonises it, ridicules it, and threatens it. She does it as a Muslim woman showing the world that she does not accept, recognize, nor legitimise any part of the Islamic Republic. Together with Massoud's ideology and her charismatic presence, Maryam Rajavi becomes eccentric and powerful. She is a symbol, a messenger, unique to her followers, though, at the same time, she is deeply detested by her opponents. She is hailed and worshiped by friends, ridiculed and mocked by foes. Either way, she is the object of extreme feelings on both sides of the battlefield, making her exceptionally fascinating and dubious at the same time.

"Allow me as a woman to tell the wicked and misogynist mullahs: With all of your reactionary and medieval savagery, misogyny and oppression, you have done all you could do to Iranian women, but I warn you to beware of the day when this tremendous historic force is set free...You will see how you and your backwardness will be uprooted by these free women. You mullahs have chosen, with your unspeakable crimes against women, and you cannot avoid being swept away from Iran's history by these same liberated women" (Maryam Rajavi, ncr-iran.org 2005).

Charisma or cult

The leadership's use of symbols is striking and something that has been subject to criticism. The "martyr death" has a central role within the organization, and when giving your life to the cause and struggle, you are awarded with status as a martyr.

"Let us remember that June 20 marks the anniversary of the Iranian Resistance and the Day of Martyrs and Political Prisoners. June 20 also marks the anniversary of the formation of the National Liberation Army of Iran. Let us, therefore, salute the martyrs, the prisoners, and the combatants of freedom" (Maryam Rajavi, June 17th, 2004).

Martyrdom is related to the Islamic concept of Holy Struggle, or *Jihad*. A Mojahed (pl. Mojahedin) is someone performing jihad. The role martyrdom has within the Mojahedin is therefore far from strange and unexpected. However, in international political settings the concept of martyrdom is necessarily looked upon as controversial and incomprehensible, and thus makes the Mojahedin's search for international legitimacy, by identifying themselves with a democratic, freedom-seeking organization, questionable and problematic.

"…Hail to my dearest sisters, Sedigheh Mojaveri and Neda Hassani, who are eternal as long as humanity and freedom reign" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

Sedigheh Mojaveri and Neda Hassani were two out of ten Mojahedin members who turned themselves into human torches during a demonstration in Paris to protest the arrest of Maryam Rajavi in 2003. Both died, while the other eight survived despite horrifying injuries. In addition, there were hunger strikes, and the world got to see pictures of people who had sewn together their eyes and lips (Torskeneæs 2003). Following her arrest, Maryam Rajavi made an explicit plea against self-immolation, but her members showed only praise for this extreme form of protest.

"Those whom we lost, we have not actually lost. They are alive in our hearts. I heard about others who had done it before I chose to do it and I admired them. I thought they were heroes. There's no doubt their actions had an impact on me. (Imani, a former political prisoner in Iran)" (Akbar 2006).

At the Paris demonstration in 2006 big posters of the two deceased members who had become martyrs for the cause were placed next to the stage, and when Maryam appeared, she kissed them and laid down a rose by their side. She also honoured them in her speech. It is acts like these, revealing a dying devotion to the leadership, that make one question the line between opposition and brainwash, support and worship, charisma and sectarian behavior. The members themselves deny that the decision to take such extreme actions was caused by organizational pressure. One of the survivors said:

"I did what I did consciously when I heard our leader had been arrested. I felt I had no other choice. I did not think twice; the regime and its accomplices had gone so far. They were going to sacrifice us all and I had to do something" (Akbar 2006).

In my interview with Maryam Rajavi, she said that the extreme reaction to her arrest is a point of bitterness with her and something that could have been prevented had she been allowed by the French police to meet the masses and calm them. "People didn't know what to do. They were desperate and feared they would be sent back to Iran. They did it as an act of self-defence" (Rajavi 2006 [interview]).

Another aspect of the Mojahedin that has been subject to controversy, criticism, and allegations of sectarian behaviour is the issue of members inside Ashraf City. In the Human Rights Watch report, dissident members claim that Massoud Rajavi ordered compulsory "mass divorces". The report says: "The leadership would ask the members to divorce themselves from all physical and emotional attachments in order to enhance their "capacity for struggle". In the case of married couples, this phase of the "ideological revolution" required them to renounce their emotional ties to their spouses through divorce" (hrw.org 2005). Masoud Banisadr, member of the Mojahedin from 1979-1996, explains in his book (2004):

"The only legitimate discussion was about the revolution and the exchange of relevant experiences. Apart from that nothing was important; there was no outside world...Even poor single people were required to divorce their buffers, having no idea whom that meant; apparently the answer was to divorce all women or men for whom they harboured any feelings of love. Only later did I realize the organization demanded not only a legal divorce

but also an emotional or "ideological" divorce. I would have to divorce Anna [his wife] in my heart. Indeed I would have to learn to hate her as the buffer standing between our leader and myself" (Banisadr 2004: 311).

Militia Javdan, a *bache-ye Mojahed* (child of a Mojahed), has had both her parents and her brother stationed in Ashraf City since she was five, and spent two of her childhood years in one of the Mojahedin's camps in Iraq. She says the demand for families to separate didn't arise over night. It was a result of the prolonged and intensified conflict between the Mojahedin and the Iranian regime and the U.S. and Saddam Hussein. "Family life became impossible because of the violent attacks from the Iranian regime, and the Gulf War. It was not a place for children to be so we were evacuated" (Javdan 2006 [interview]). The Mojahedin strongly reject all allegations against them as propaganda presented by regime-loyalists wanting to harm the organization. In a reply to accusations of sectarian behaviour presented by the U.S. State Department a representative of the NCRI said:

"In dealing with the Mojahedin, the officials of the State Department's Near East Bureau have been behaving more like a sect, ignoring the views of the American people, their congressional representatives, the press, and other countries, and disregarding the will of the Iranian people. The wholesale barrage of accusations and slander against this Resistance itself smacks of fanaticism" (iran-e-azad.org 2006).

Maryam and Massoud Rajavi are charismatic, and controversial. Within the organization they are highly appreciated, respected, and hailed. It appears as if the existence of the Mojahedin is greatly dependent on the leadership. Pervez Khaza'i disagrees and says that the Mojahedin have a strong network of people who are capable of replacing Maryam or Massoud if necessary. He believes the organization has the ability to survive in spite of losing one or both (Khaza'i 2006 [interview]). Javdan says the Mojahedin never will evaporate, and that it is the idea of Maryam and Massoud that is important, not necessarily their physical presence. "In every man there is a "Massoud", and in every woman a "Maryam"" (Javdan 2006 [interview]). There is no doubt or question about the effect the leaders have on the members of their organization, and their charisma, leadership skills, and ideological program are significant factors as to why people choose to remain members and sympathisers of the Mojahedin and the NCRI. When building legitimacy outside the Mojahedin their characters (and especially Maryam's, seeing that she is the "face out") are crucial to gain support. However, the extreme actions taken by some of their members, and accusations towards the

leadership presented by dissident members and human rights organizations have shocked and frightened parts of the outside world and contributed to scepticism and intolerance.

Institutionalising the Armed Struggle

Although it is a social movement, the Mojahedin have established political institutions, namely a parliament (the NCRI) and elected a president ready to take over after a possible overthrow of the regime. By establishing political institutions they have started to routinize charisma. Massoud's authority has been institutionalised through Maryam as president-elect; hence the Mojahedin and their armed struggle have been institutionalised through the NCRI. According to Weber, this transformation may cost them charismatic authority, but at the same time possibly lead to more stable political legitimacy.

According to the NCRI website, the National Council has 550 members where women comprise of 50 percent. The Council also includes representatives of ethnic and religious minorities such as the Kurds, Baluchis, Armenians, Jews and Zoroastrians. Acting as a parliament in exile, the NCRI "aims to establish a democratic, secular coalition government in Iran" (ncr-iran.org 2005). Additionally, the website states that, "five organizations are members of the NCRI, including the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, the largest and most popular resistance group inside Iran" (ibid). The other four are: Association to defend Iran's Independence and Democracy (*Jameiate DAD*), People's Fedayeen, Tohidi Merchant Guild (*Kanoone Touhidi Asnaf*), and Committed Professors of Iran's Universities and Colleges (*Ostadane Motaahede daneshgahhs va amadaresse aali*) (Khaza'i 2006 [personal correspondence]). The Mojahedin make out the majority of the NCRI and new members must be accepted by a majority of votes in the NCRI.

"The National Council of Resistance of Iran, the resistance's parliament, is a coalition of democratic forces that seek a republic based on the separation of Church and State. Half its members are women. With the membership of religious and ethnic minorities as well as different political tendencies, the NCRI represents a majority of the Iranian nation and is the guarantee for Iran's unity after the toppling of the mullahs and the peaceful transfer of power" (Lion and Sun 2005)

The National Council comprises of 25 committees that are meant to form the basis for a provisional coalition government once the Islamic Republic is toppled. Each committee is chaired by a prominent political personality who is an expert in his or her field. Half of the committees' presidents are non-Mojahedin members (Khaza'i 2006 [personal correspondence]). Furthermore, the provisional government will be in power for only six months and its main responsibility is to hold free and fair elections for a National Legislative and Constituent Assembly and to transfer power to the representatives of the people of Iran (ncr-iran.org 2005). By establishing democratic institutions, which are supposed to represent the Iranian nation, the Mojahedin claim to have a democratic structure making them suitable for replacing the Iranian regime. They further argue that the organization's democratic structure is the guarantee for instituting democracy in Iran.

"By forming a pluralistic alternative, a widespread social network and a liberation army, the resistance has sufficient power and potential to bring about change in Iran. It has led the Iranian people's movement for democracy in the most difficult domestic and regional circumstances" (Lion and Sun 2005).

In November 2002, the NCRI additionally adopted a plan to form the "National Solidarity Front to Overthrow Religious Dictatorship in Iran". The Front was designed, according to the NCRI, as a platform to encompass all Iranian republicans who are campaigning for a democratic, independent and secular regime (ncr-iran.org 2005). Maryam Rajavi described the Front as, "a reflection of the most profound democratic yearnings of all the people of Iran, regardless of ideology, belief, religion and ethnicity that transcends all partisan and political interests" (ibid). The thought behind the Front is to create an alternative to the NCRI for those who don't necessarily support the NCRI-plan for a future Iran. However, they must commit to the basic principles as mentioned above.

"There are political forces and groups that wish to cooperate in the struggle (against the clerical regime) but, unlike members or supporters of the NCRI or its member organizations, are not inclined to, or cannot abide, for whatever reason, by NCRI and the Provisional Government's plans or other ratifications. To bring about unity among these forces and groups, the National Council of Resistance of Iran ratified the plan for the creation of National Solidarity Front to Overthrow the Religious Dictatorship and presented it to all freedom- seeking and independent political forces and groups" (Massoud Rajavi, ncr-iran.org 2002).

By establishing new institutions, the Mojahedin seek to expand and possibly mobilize the rest of the Iranian opposition for their cause. However, it is questionable what role this front will have if the Mojahedin ever manage to seize power in Iran. For this reason, it is difficult to understand how other potential political parties and groups that are not supportive of the NCRI-plan for a "new" Iran, have any interest of joining the Front.

By institutionalising the armed struggle the Mojahedin have managed to get access to the European and American parliamentary arena. They have managed this in spite of the fact that they remain on the terrorist list. Through the National Council they invite international parliamentarians to demonstrations, rallies, conferences, and debates. In November of 2006 they were welcomed in Norway, where Maryam Rajavi met with representatives from the Norwegian foreign committee. During her four-day stay, she addressed a women's conference, spoke before the *Storting* twice, and met with several representatives from the Norwegian parliament, introducing them to her mission, vision, and plea for support. Furthermore, through their offices mainly in Europe, the NCRI publishes the organization's magazine "Lion and Sun" together with pamphlets, books, and articles. They also have several extremely well functioning and updated websites, a television broadcast, and they muster Mojahedin support campaigns and anti-regime demonstrations all over Europe and the U.S. Through Maryam Rajavi as president-elect and the NCRI as parliament, the Mojahedin seek to legalize their status by claiming that Maryam and the National Council are elected on behalf of the Iranian people. Through their established political institutions, the Mojahedin speak directly to the West, preaching the laws and values set by the international community and thus presenting themselves as a democratic and freedom-seeking force with a legal framework. The NCRI website states: "The council's foreign policy is based on independence, respect for the United Nations Charter and international conventions and treaties, good neighbourliness, international and regional cooperation and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries" (ncr-iran.org 2005). Further it says that, "The NCRI supports the Middle East peace process and is committed to maintaining and protecting peace and tranquillity in the region and condemns any aggression and expansionism. The council opposes nuclear proliferation and the production of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles" (ibid).

In spite of the fact that the Mojahedin have institutionalised their armed struggle and claim to be both democratic and legitimate, it is difficult to detect an open democratic structure within the organization. According to the NCRI website, Maryam Rajavi was in 1993 unanimously elected president for the transitional period after the toppling of the Iranian regime (ncr-iran.org 2005). Further, it says that all members of the Council have one vote and that all decisions are adopted by a simple majority (ibid). However, the NCRI lacks transparency as well as the fundamental ground necessary for a modern, popular democratic structure. The reason for this is that it's problematic to consider an organization democratic when the two leaders are married and each in charge of respectively the political and military wing.

Furthermore, Maryam and Massoud's roles in the organization lack definition and accuracy. Massoud is the NCRI president, yet Maryam is the president-elect. Massoud is the Mojahedin's ideological and historical leader, Maryam the organization's symbol and messenger. The fact that the roles of president, president-elect, ideological, historical, and national leader, symbol etc. are to such a degree mixed together shows that the leadership has a more significant role than should be necessary in a democratic structure. This undermines the legitimacy of the Mojahedin's political institutions, as it should be the political institutions that are the base of legitimacy and not primarily the leaders filling them. For example, Massoud has no executive responsibilities in the Mojahedin; yet, he still has the "highest" symbolic status. In spite of their claim to be democratic, it is problematic to see how anyone has the ability or a *real* opportunity to rise above or even challenge the authority of Massoud or Maryam. Also, the fact that Maryam and Massoud will fill the two most important and powerful positions in the new establishment after a possible overthrow must undermine every claim for being democratic and to the very least question the democratic structure they allege to have within the organization. The Mojahedin, however, strongly disagree. According to the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the NCRI, Mohammad Mohaddessin, PMOI is profoundly committed to openness and transparency, and despite security risks, and contrary to prevailing practice among organizations involved in a war of liberation, the PMOI has always announced the names of its officials (Mohaddessin: 228). "The Resistance's media outlets provide detailed reports on the activities of the PMOI to the public. It has never engaged in secretive deals, never conducted clandestine diplomacy, and has never had skeletons hidden in its closet" (ibid).

6 IDEOLOGY IN SEARCH FOR LEGITIMACY

Ideology may be explained as articulated sets of ideals, ends, and purposes that help us to interpret, explain, and visualize the reality we live in and the circumstances surrounding us. David Easton says that a regime or opposition movement successful in issuing a strong ideological program may win popular support (Hudson 1977: 50). The Mojahedin ideology is complex and has been subject to much attention and discussion. Critics have described it originally to be a mix between Marxism and Islam, where the concept of *nezame tawhidi*, or classless society, was central. The Mojahedin have always denied the Marxist label and claim it was put upon them unjustly as part of the aggressive propaganda campaign staged by the Iranian regime. They say their ideology is based on a "democratic, progressive interpretation of Islam, to which elections and public suffrage are the sole indicators of political legitimacy" (iran-e-azad.org 2006). Even though the early teachings of the Mojahedin did include modern assumptions about women and the organization of society, they have developed and transformed their ideology significantly in order to gain legitimacy. The crucial change in ideology came in 1985 when Massoud Rajavi issued the so-called ideological revolution. For critics, this transformation revolutionized the organization beyond recognition, and the result has been characterised as a feminisation that ultimately made the Mojahedin more inward looking and cult-like. Nevertheless, through their ideology and ideological program, the Mojahedin offer an interpretation of the past, an explanation to the present, and a vision for the future. Women are given a central and decisive role in the Mojahedin's train of thought on the journey towards the ideal *nezame tawhidi*. This chapter aims at explaining the current ideology of the Mojahedin and how they use it to seek legitimacy.

Democracy in the name of the Mojahedin

Islam: "the pillar of freedom"

"The reason Khomeini so interferes in all the minute details of the people's lives and leaves them no room to breathe is because the world of this demon and his heirs is comprised of vengeance, obsession, and hatred… In contrast, we must go among our people with a spirit of compassion and openness. Let them be free. Let them step forward to vote and elect freely. Let a spirit of mutual understanding, forgiveness, love of construction, and national unity take the place of spite and vengeance. Let the scares left by Khomeini on the body of this nation be healed" (Maryam Rajavi, ncr-iran.org 2005).

Contrary to Khomeini's principle of *velayat-e faqih*, the Mojahedin say their fundamental belief is that "the human right of freedom is the hallmark and guarantor of genuine social progress". Otherwise, "the stage is set for the emergence of dictatorship, which does not necessarily remain independent" (iran-e-azad.org 2006). From the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad as well as those of Imam Ali, the Mojahedin believe to have learned that there must not be any limits to the people's freedom, up to the point of armed rebellion. Freedom, they claim, is not a luxury, but an indispensable necessity (ibid).

"With the victory of our Resistance, we will overcome one of the major obstacles to the success of contemporary revolutions. This same obstacle has been the most important factor in their deviation and failure. It is the concept of invading (under any pretext) the sacred limits of freedom. Our worldview is monotheistic, and the eminence of our species lies precisely in mankind's freedom of choice; hence, the revival of freedom is in essence the revival of mankind and man's vanquished revolutions… we are not anyone's liberator. For a nation to appreciate the value of her freedom, she must free herself. Therefore, we are not anyone's liberator. Everyone, both as individual and as a member of society, can free himself only if he tears asunder the chains of coercion and compulsion on his own" (Massoud Rajavi, iran-e-azad.org 2006).

In the Mojahedin's interpretation of the Quran, and the traditions of the Messenger of Islam and historical leaders of Shi'ism, "freedom, equality of the sexes, equal rights for ethnic and religious minorities, human rights and peace are not mere political commitments, but ideological principles" (ibid).

"The lives and struggles of the great prophets of God, such as Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, are brilliant examples of unrelenting commitment to these principles. They never advocated, either in words or deeds, ruthlessness, war, aggression or oppression. All but one of the chapters in the Quran begin with the phrase, "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"" (iran-e-azad.org 2006).

This God, the Mojahedin say, is the exact opposite of the God Khomeini and his followers preach. Therefore, "tolerance of dissident is part and parcel of the Mojahedin's ideology" (ibid). Contrary to Khomeini's principle of *velayat-e faqih*, the Mojahedin say, Massoud's interpretation of Islam, as the Mojahedin's ideological leader, is based on tolerance, mercy, and freedom.

"Massoud truly is Iran's most qualified, most decent, most selfless leader and Islamic ideologue. He has conveyed and taught the Mohammadan Islam as a religion of mercy and tolerance, freedom and democracy, progress and advancement of science and society to an unrelenting generation of Muslims" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 27).

Genuine Islam, the Mojahedin claim, is so dynamic that it never impedes social progress. Moreover, they argue, "Islam does not oppose science, technology and civilization, but in fact cherishes them" (iran-e-azad.org 2006). The Mojahedin believe the authoritative power in Iran abuse and take advantage of the concept of Ijtehad[3].

"Ijtehad is a guiding principle for all adherents, encouraging public participation in the administration of social affairs. Profoundly committed to democratic freedoms and man's right to choose, Islam calls for social justice, fair distribution of wealth, and, in the long run, a society devoid of oppression, discrimination and exploitation" (iran-e-azad.org 2006).

It is the above-mentioned principles the Mojahedin claim form their ideological bond. According to this ideology, "God alone is perfect, devoid of deficiency and shortcomings. Man influences and is influenced by circumstances" (ibid). For this reason, the Mojahedin say they have never claimed, as individuals or as a political or social movement, to be above reproach or immune to mistakes. "In today's world, no one dares to make such ludicrous, pitiful claims, but the Khomeini regime's *vali-e faqih*" (ibid).

According to the Mojahedin, the most prominent distinction between their interpretation of Islam and Khomeini's is democratic freedoms. Further, they say that it is precisely over this issue that the two sides have been engaged in a full-fledged ideological battle from day one. Since they claim to be committed to the principle that the sole criterion for political legitimacy is the vote, and that resistance is legitimate only against repression and dictatorship, the Mojahedin proposed a "maximum tenure of six months for the provisional government to take power after the mullahs, during which time sovereignty will be transferred to the people" (iran-eazad.org 2006). The NCRI program affirms "complete freedom of

[3] Ijtehad: A distinct Shi'ite principle that requires Islamic scholars and sociologists to develop Islamic methods and rules appropriate to the times (iran-e-azad.org 2006)

thought and speech, and the banning of censorship and inquisition… This freedom is not bound by any principal restriction, up to the point of armed struggle against legitimate and legal system of the country" (ibid). Likewise, it is stated, "achieving national sovereignty through the instrumentality of the provisional government of the Democratic Islamic Republic of Iran is the most valuable product of the just Resistance of the Iranian people" (ibid). The program emphasizes that the Khomeini regime's worst crime was its usurpation of the Iranian people's most vital legitimate right, the right to popular sovereignty. In such circumstances of absolute repression, they say, "political legitimacy has no real indicator other than resistance to restore these trampled rights" (ibid).

The Mojahedin seem to give full attention and focus to the concepts of democracy, freedom, and human rights. The concept of *nezame tawhidi*, which is the Mojahedin's vision of an ideal society, is hardly mentioned at all when dealing with the international community. The controversial ideology of the Mojahedin members, who are required to forsake their body and soul for jihad, is also given zero attention. The reason for this is not that they have distanced themselves from this belief, it is just not focused on or even mentioned in the international arena, as they most likely are aware of the negative effect this would have on how they are perceived. Also interesting is how the Mojahedin refer to the Iranian regime. They never once call it by its official name, and they talk of Khomeini, and the Khomeini regime, as if he was still alive and supreme leader of the republic. It is obvious that they still strongly consider Khomeini to be their main enemy, even from his grave. Thus, to the Mojahedin, the ideological battle is far from over.

Emancipation of women

"Women's participation in leadership is a new perspective and approach that is based on empowering others instead of eliminating and humiliating them. It means accentuating positive attributes and strengths in others rather than highlighting their weakness and negative points. It means loving others instead of resenting them; team work as opposed to individual work. These are all the necessary elements of democracy and a political life based on understanding" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

The marriage between Maryam and Massoud, as part of the ideological revolution in 1985, was supposedly designed to symbolize the "liberation" of women and is characterised as a

revolutionary marriage by the Mojahedin's own members. What followed this revolutionary marriage was the "real" revolution, as Massoud and Maryam feminised the organization, thus making the ideological revolution a feminist assault on the former Khomeini regime (Abedin 2003).

"The female tank commanders encountered by U.S. soldiers encircling the Mojahedin's Ashraf camp in Diyala province early in May (2003) were a direct product of the ideological revolution" (ibid).

Critics claim the ideological revolution changed the organization largely beyond recognition: "The only surviving features of the Mojahedin are Rajavi's leadership and antipathy towards America" (Abedin 2003). The revolution enabled the Mojahedin to elucidate and promote a matriarchal ideology. Thus, with their dedication to emancipate and liberate women the Mojahedin became the very antithesis of what they characterised as the "misogynist Khomeini regime" (ibid). "The reason was that we were facing an Islamic fundamentalist regime that rests on misogyny. Thus, the force that could defeat it had to be devoid of misogyny" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006). From the onset of this change, Maryam Rajavi says, "We came across several crucial junctures. Each time we had to make a definitive choice: either let go of the ideal of freedom and democracy and liberation of the Iranian people, or sacrifice even more and take up the challenge before us more vigorously to preserve the movement and advance its goals" (ibid).

"In the struggle to bring down the ruling theocracy […] our movement recognized that it had to elevate its ideals, and thinking. Thus, it found the role of women in leadership as an imperative to democratic change in Iran. This became the source of a major cultural change in the ranks of our Resistance. If I were to offer a brief report on this process, it would simply be a recounting of the history of women's progress and their accepting key positions of responsibility. Indeed, this marked an escalation in our struggle with the religious dictatorship and the fundamentalists ruling Iran" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

The ideological revolution demanded that all members of the Mojahedin separate from their personal lives. As explained in previous chapters, members had to divorce their partners and families and go through a personal revolution. According to Masoud Banisadr, the way to experience this revolution was through identifying the buffer standing between the members and their ideological leader, Massoud Rajavi. When they recognized this buffer and separated

themselves from it, they could become a real Mojahed. Thus, they had to ideologically and emotionally separate from those they loved or harboured any feelings for (Banisadr: 309).

The ideological revolution was considered a historical breakthrough for the Mojahedin first of all for their struggle against the Iranian regime, but also for the emancipation of women in general; "I salute all those women who by their sacrifice are the pride of the global equality movement" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006). When Maryam was appointed co-leader for the Mojahedin and later chosen as the organization's parliament's president-elect, she became the very symbol of women's liberation and national unity for her members, and the effect, they say, indeed revolutionized the structure of the Mojahedin.

"The Central Council and other members of the Mojahedin welcomed her nomination, electing her in the view of her competence, qualifications and experience. She had come to symbolize all the Mojahedin women" (iran-e-azad.org 2006).

According to Maryam Rajavi, the women in the Mojahedin and NCRI now enjoy absolute equal rights and have overturned the male-dominated value system by taking on key positions of leadership and management (Rajavi, Maryam 2003: 24).

"Under Maryam Rajavi's guidance, women assumed the most senior positions of responsibility in political, international and military arenas within the ranks of the Resistance. Women make up half the members of the NCRI. A third of the Resistance's military arm, the National Liberation Army of Iran, and two-thirds of its commanders are women. The PMOI's Leadership Council is comprised entirely of women" (NCRI, ncr-iran.org 2005).

Eliminating gender discrimination and the emancipation of women, they claim, is the absolute guarantee for democratic change after the toppling of the Islamic Republic.

"…the serious presence of women in the leadership is the source of the Resistance's power and capabilities. It is the guarantee for democracy. It is the source of the Resistance movement's resilience in the face of fundamentalism and ensures its decisive defeat" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

The ideological revolution did indeed put the Mojahedin on the opposite side of Khomeini's principle of *velayat-e faqih*. Through the emancipation of their own women, the Mojahedin wanted to represent everything they claim the "Khomeini regime" hold in contempt. This revolutionary change in ideology in many ways resembles the ideology of radical feminist thought. Radical feminists believe that their society is an oppressive patriarchy that oppresses women, and therefore seek to abolish this patriarchy. They also believe that the way to deal with patriarchy and oppression of all kinds is to attack the underlying causes of these problems and address the fundamental components of the society that supports them (wikipedia.org 2007). To the Mojahedin the fundamental problem that stands in the way of women's liberation is the Iranian regime. Critics of radical feminism, especially men's rights groups, see this type of feminism as misandrist (hatred of males), which is the opposite of the misogyny the Mojahedin fight against. They argue that radical feminist ideology has too much focus on sexual politics at the expense of political reform. The Mojahedin claim to be fighting for the liberation of both men and women. Men, they say, will be liberated through the liberation of women. And without this liberation, this ideology, democracy can never flourish.

"Parallel to the liberation of women, men are also liberated and become even more responsible. This is because men who reject gender-based distinctions and discrimination and recognize women's freedom of choice, first of all liberate themselves" (Maryam Rajavi, ncr-iran.org 2005).

The Third Option: A Global Solution

"Anyone supporting freedom and democracy must support the overthrow of the velayat-e faqih regime, discard its constitution and defend the Iranian people's right to democratic rule" (Rajavi, Massoud 1999: 18).

The Mojahedin believe that the answer to the "Iranian problem" is female leadership, "Challenging the mullahs' misogynist regime are the Iranian Resistance's women" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 35). Maryam Rajavi says female leadership and the liberation of women is the only way Iran can become a free and just democracy: "Peace, progress, and democracy are contingent upon the emancipation of women and men, and women in leadership. Ignoring or neglecting this reality will inevitably aggravate the situation and contribute to war, violence, dictatorship and retrogression" (ibid: 45).

"If the next century is to be called the century of women's emancipation, then all political, economic, social and cultural progress must travel this road. The emancipation of women is the issue of our time" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 45).

Accordingly, the Mojahedin present a "third option", which they claim is the only alternative capable of dealing with the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. The two other options are what the Mojahedin refer to as "appeasement and foreign military invasion". Maryam Rajavi says appeasement has been justified by its supporters as an approach to moderate the regime. According to Rajavi, this approach has only contributed to the regime's power and helped it develop its nuclear program (Lion and Sun 2005). However, the Mojahedin claim that they do not support foreign military interventions. War, they say, is not the answer to the "Iranian problem".

"We do not have to choose between appeasement and foreign war. The equation of "either military invasion or appeasement" is an exercise of political deception. A third option is within reach. The Iranian people and their organized resistance have the capacity and ability to bring about change" (Maryam Rajavi, Lion and Sun 2005)

Thus, the Mojahedin's third option is democratic change by the Iranian people and their organized resistance; where "organized resistance" refers to the Mojahedin and NCRI.

"With a democratic and tolerant vision of Islam, the PMOI is the antithesis to fundamentalism. It has exposed and isolated the violent and backward interpretation of Islam by the fundamentalists. The PMOI is the most serious buffer against the mullahs' fundamentalism and terrorism" (Maryam Rajavi, Lion and Sun 2005).

Relating to the third, option Maryam Rajavi aims to answer two questions: "How can women's active and equal participation in political leadership provide the necessary capacity and impetus to realize this option?" and "How can the Iranian Resistance guarantee that this option is democratic?"

"The answer to these questions accentuates the decisive and emerging factor in the Iranian Resistance's success. That factor is women's leadership. (…) The serious presence of women in the leadership is the source of the Resistance's power and capabilities. It is the guarantee for democracy. It is the source of the Resistance

movement's resilience in the face of fundamentalism and ensures its decisive defeat" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

Maryam Rajavi says that because women have been historically exploited and suppressed, they possess an "enormous motivation and high perseverance" in the struggle in order to make up for their lag. Thus, in the confrontation with the Iranian regime, the Mojahedin say they realized that women resemble a "compressed spring" that when released from the "shackles of discrimination" and faced with responsibility, take giant leaps forward (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

"The extensive presence of women in the anti-monarchic revolution in 1979, their heroic role in the confrontation with the clerical dictatorship, including their astounding resistance to torture in the regime's prisons, and the invaluable role they have played in the organized Resistance, prove that women are the growing force of our times. This growing force of women in the Resistance inspires women in Iranian society on a large scale to aspire to democratic change and transforms them into a major force to liberate Iran. Thus, it is the fundamental pillar of the Iranian Resistance's power" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

Maryam Rajavi further argues that women's active participation in leadership turns men into a force for change. She explains it as "eliminating exploitative thinking". For this, reason, "men who have become alienated due to the male-dominated culture, attain their human identity". This, she claims, is a development that is a true awakening and cultural change that leads to "liberated human energies" (ibid).

"On the surface it appears as though that when men accept women's leadership, they become pacified and take a back seat because they have lost their hegemony. But the experience of the Iranian Resistance demonstrates that when men choose this path consciously, their sense of responsibility increases much more than when they were in charge. This is so because they have been liberated from the inhumane thinking and culture that has acted as an obstacle to progress and creativity" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

The role women have in the Mojahedin's approach is unique and extraordinary as they claim to have eliminated gender discrimination within their own organization, and further believe that this is the correct strategy for overthrowing the Iranian regime.

"We have not and will not accept being confined to prevalent modes of problem-resolution that offer no hope for human liberty. Proposals and strategies that stem from exploitative thinking cannot offer a way out of this crisis. The mindset that stems from women leadership, however, rests on human resources and has an endless vision before it. The leadership we are referring to is the result of a matured human development that rests on humane relationships. This is a major rebellion against male-dominated society and a regressive culture that should be negated" (Maryam Rajavi, March 8th, 2006).

"In the fundamentalist mullahs' system of values, discrimination, dualism, war, suppression and bloodshed are the norms. A viewpoint which regards woman as wicked and satanic inevitably sees man as inherently corruptible. Hence, the fundamentalist quests for "purity" through bloodletting and killing. In the final analysis, the reactionaries view humankind as evil. So vengefulness, hostility, deceit, and all the other negative human characteristics become legitimate and predominant" (Rajavi, Maryam 1995: 31).

The ideology behind the third option seeks to make the Islamic Republic into the exact opposite force as what the Mojahedin themselves proclaim to be. While their ideology is presented with good and humane connotations, the Iranian regime's ideology is accused of being grounded on false Islam and misogyny, and for being lethal and destructive for Muslims and human kind in general. In the Mojahedin's view, they represent the ultimate good, while the Khomeini regime represents the ultimate bad. Accordingly, they seek to legitimise their struggle to overthrow the Islamic Republic, and simultaneously demand the de-legitimisation of the Republic's right to exist. The ultimatum the Mojahedin offer is uncompromising and leaves little room for dialogue. It is blatantly black and white, and they give the international community a choice between heaven and hell.

"Today, Europe faces a choice. A choice between firmness and compromise, which would give the mullahs the possibility to arm themselves with nuclear weapons; a choice between war and support for the Iranian people's demand for democratic change. With the correct choice, we can prevent a tragedy and war. I again call on you to make this choice in support of the Iranian people and Resistance. Time has come for the international community to recognize the Iranian people's Resistance and grant it an observer seat in the United Nations" (Maryam Rajavi, April 10th, 2006).

The third option is problematic. It is presented as an answer to the "Iranian problem", yet it raises more questions than it answers. The third option promises many things, but it is problematic to understand how this can be put into action and adjusted to reality. It seems

more connected to the Mojahedin's vision of an ideal world rather than a realistic solution to the "Iranian problem". Contrary to the extreme and complex problem they present, their solution seems oversimplified and impossible to attain. They create ultimatums in black and white, where something is either right or wrong, good or bad, even "love or hate". In the real world nothing is either or, and the world has many shades of grey. We all have visions for the future, dreams of how the perfect world ought to be, and no one should blame the Mojahedin for having theirs. However, when they promise to realise the Iranian dream through the third option, they fail to see reality in the eyes. It simply seems too good to be true. And things that seem too good to be true usually are.

Visions for the Future

"I have a dream"

"The Iranian people and Iran's brave women and men who are resolved in the struggle for freedom hold the key our nation's freedom. It is the Iranian people and Resistance who endeavor for change, bring about change and build the future. It is the Iranian people and their Resistance who will overthrow the evil of fundamentalism. Iran will become the land of democracy and human rights. The Iranian nation will triumph and will be free" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

In the "Iran of tomorrow", the Mojahedin talk of a peaceful nation, free from all weapons of mass destruction. "We want to rebuild Iran, which the mullahs have ruined, through people's participation, the return of our experts and friendship with the rest of the world" (Maryam Rajavi, Lion and Sun 2005). In tomorrow's Iran the rights to "life, freedom, and security of every citizen of the Iranian nation will be considered equal under the law regardless of their gender, race, religion, ethnic makeup, and dialect" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006). We are, they say, committed to the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". Further, all individual freedoms will be recognized, such as freedom of speech, clothing, marriage and divorce, employment, travel, choosing one's residency and citizenship. Democratic rights will be instituted, such as "the right to make key political decisions in society and the people's right to change the government will be respected" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

In the Mojahedin's vision of tomorrow's Iran, the death penalty will be abolished.

"This is our response to the ruthless killings and brutality with which the mullahs have ruled clutched on to their reign. Torture will be banned under any circumstances. There will be no room for cruel and degrading punishments under whatever pretext, including under the cloak of religion" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

Moreover, the Mojahedin say, they are committed to the separation of "church and state", and in the new Iran the principle of freedom of religion will be respected. Further, the country's laws will not ban any religion. "No religion will enjoy privilege over another and no citizen will be subjected to any personal or social privilege or privation in their individual or social rights because of their belief or non-belief in any religion" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006). Additionally, they say they are committed to the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (ibid).

"In the Iran of tomorrow, men and women will enjoy equal rights in all political, social and economic sectors. Women will have equal participation in the political leadership of the country. In the Iran of tomorrow all forms of sexual exploitation of women will be prevented. Polygamy will be banned. Physical, sexual and psychological violence against women will be considered a crime. In the Iran of tomorrow oppression, discrimination and lawlessness concerning children and child labor will be banned" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

The judiciary of the future Iran, the Mojahedin claim, will be founded upon a standardized system of justice. In this system, they say, there will be no discrimination on issuing judgment (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006). Economically, the "Iran of tomorrow" will respect the free market. The people will have equal economic opportunities, and all restrictions on self-employment will be lifted (ibid).

"We are determined to ensure that in the Iran of tomorrow every member of society will enjoy access to social services, including education, hygiene and athletic opportunities. Independent councils elected by the faculty and students will govern universities" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

Finally, they say, "We demand peace, mutual respect in international relations, good neighbourliness and the establishment of diplomatic relations with all countries of the world. The Iran of tomorrow will be a non-nuclear country and devoid of weapons of mass destruction" (ibid).

"We have forsaken everything to liberate Iran from the clutches of religious dictatorship. We seek to establish people's sovereignty in Iran. We want to replace religious despotism with freedom and democracy. For us, democracy is not merely a slogan. For us, democracy and freedom are ideals. For us, democracy is a historic necessity. Our objective is not to take power at all costs. Our objective is to guarantee freedom and democracy and hand over the governance to the people of Iran at all costs, even at the cost of sacrificing our own lives" (Maryam Rajavi, November 9th, 2006).

With the vision and prospect of tomorrow's Iran, the Mojahedin play on the Iranian people's dream and idea of a free homeland: A democratic Iran, free from reactionary "mullahs" and retrogression. This vision tells of an Iran where people finally live in peace and harmony, and where every necessity and human right Iranians have been deprived of for so many years, will be offered to them. Iran will become a nation based on human ideals and principles, and people will no longer have to fear for their lives or for the future of their children. The rest of the world can rest assure that the devastation and bloodbaths that terrorise the stability and security of world peace will vanish together with the Islamic Republic. With the Iran of tomorrow the world is promised to be a secure and safe place to live for all human beings. This dream will become reality with the Mojahedin. Through such active use of ideology and propaganda, the Mojahedin not only play on Iranian's dream of a free Iran, but also on the international community's vision and hope of a better future. Concurrently, through their anti-Iranian regime campaign, they seek to trigger emotions of fear, fright and panic of what nightmare the world will face if it doesn't follow the Mojahedin's demands and warnings. However, the lack of realistic thinking in the Mojahedin vision is so obviously present, making it difficult to take them seriously. This utopian vision may seem possible in someone's head, but it is unfortunately not achievable in today's extremely difficult and more and more vicious world. It is highly uncertain what a new revolution might bring in terms of an everyday reality. The Islamic Revolution deceived the Iranian people. Asking them to take another chance and thus sacrifice the lives of their young women and men may be a request they are not willing to accept. Nevertheless, the Mojahedin say *they* are willing to sacrifice their own life for the sake of this cause, and they claim, as they have for the last 27 years, to be closer than ever to accomplishing this goal.

In her speech given before the Norwegian parliament in November 2006, Maryam Rajavi said:

"I have a dream: an Iran free of execution and torture. I yearn to see a country, where cranes shall be used for construction and not destruction of human life, a country where stoning to death and limb amputations would be a thing of the distant past, a country where love, friendship and tolerance shall replace mistrust, hatred and vengeance. I have a dream: an Iran at peace and friendship, a country where war, bloodshed and violence shall be completely eradicated. A country which would promote peace and friendship in place of fundamentalism and terrorism. We shall eradicate fundamentalism from the pages of our history forever. Nothing could stand in the way of freedom dawning on Iran. I hear the cry of the great nation of Iran. It says: we shall overcome. Our homeland shall be free" (Maryam Rajavi, November 9th, 2006).

Though not mentioned explicitly, the concept of *nezame tawhidi* is very much present in the Mojahedin's ideology. When asked directly, they openly admit that *nezame tawhidi* is an ideal they strive for, and not something they expect will happen in near future. However, in Maryam Rajavi's speeches she makes it seem as if an ideal society surely will follow the destruction of the Islamic Republic at the hands of the Mojahedin and the "combatants of freedom" in Ashraf City. Perfectly fitted Shariati's idea of enlightened souls, these freedom fighters are presented as the ones responsible for guiding the Iranian people to awareness and leading them to the ideal world of *nezame tawhidi*.

"You free thinking women can and must follow the lead of 1,000 Mojahedin women in Ashraf City, who are the vanguards of Iranian women's liberation, to uproot the regime. As the tremendous force for regime change, you can uproot the mullahs and sweep them aside all over the nation. You have that capability. You must only believe in this point and rise up to achieve it" (Maryam Rajavi, July 1st, 2006).

There is no reason for doubting the sincerity of the Mojahedin's vision and ideology. The problem lies in the vision's believability; the Mojahedin, with their tireless and repetitious demonising characteristics and self-sacrificing clichés, lose credibility, as parts of their vision must be said to be unrealistic.

7 THE EFFECT OF MEK'S STRATEGIES

A successful strategy is dependent on its ability to affect the recipients. In the Mojahedin's case, the recipients of their strategies are the international community and the Iranian people. In my analysis I argue that due to the Mojahedin's lack of support they apply tradition, charisma, legality, and ideology as strategies to gain legitimacy and de-legitimise the Iranian regime. In this chapter I will look at the different strategies I have presented and discuss how effective they are for the Mojahedin's search for recognition.

De-legitimisation

In chapter four I argue that the Mojahedin seek to de-legitimise the Iranian regime by demonising and discrediting it. This way they also claim legitimacy for being the antithesis to the "evil mullah regime". They claim that the Islamic Republic's interpretation of Islam is based on falsity, contrary to *their* interpretation, which is based on "true" Islam. The pillar of the Islamic Republic's constitution, *velayat-e faqih*, they say, is the root to everything that is wrong in this world and is used by the regime to legitimise terrorism, killings, and suppression. The Mojahedin claim the Iranian regime is a threat to humanity and world peace.

The de-legitimisation of the Iranian regime is effective, and especially the threat of Iran's nuclear ambitions and its alleged desire to spread Islamic fundamentalism. The Mojahedin know that the international community cannot support or contribute to the overthrow of a regime, because of its interpretation of Islam and violations of human rights, unless the regime poses a threat. Thus, by "revealing" Tehran's nuclear ambitions and intentions to install a despotic empire under the banner of Islam, the Mojahedin make the Iranian regime into the international community's ultimate threat. By characterising the Islamic Republic as a bloodthirsty, suppressive dictatorship, which stones women in public, executes youngsters, and cuts off people's hands, the Mojahedin are describing the devil himself. However, they fail to come across as fully convincing. The Mojahedin claim, contrary to what experts say, that Tehran is only one or two years away from making the bomb. Consequently, they are not perceived as completely credible as they appear to over-exaggerate and create a crisis that in reality is based on their hatred for the "Khomeini regime" and the struggle to overthrow it.

They add to this impression by giving themselves a grandiose role and significance in creating peace and stability in the world. As the antithesis to the devil, they introduce themselves as the *only* solution to the Iranian regime. The UN Security Council have recently decided upon the first sanctions against Iran for not cooperating with the international community on its nuclear program. The Mojahedin took this as a victory, as they have been calling for sanctions against the Iranian regime for some time. They claim to have spies in Iran reporting and revealing Tehran's dangerous and threatening intentions. However, the sanctions against Iran would most probably have come independently of the Mojahedin's revelations. The Iranian regime has itself managed to attract the international community's attention by officially declaring its right to nuclear power (for peaceful means only). President Ahmadinejad's statements about Israel and the U.S., together with the fact that Iran needs to defend itself, can only make one assume that they have a big interest in making the "bomb". Thus, when it comes to de-legitimising the Iranian regime, the positive effects this have had on the Mojahedin's support has not so much to do with them being a better alternative, but more to do with Iran's effort to isolate itself and burn its bridges to the international community.

A problem with the Mojahedin's de-legitimisation of the Iranian regime is their absolutism. To them, the Iranian regime represents the absolute evil, while they represent the absolute good. By characterising the whole system of the Islamic Republic as the ultimate bad, they basically say that the ones supporting it or even parts of it are representing the enemy. Consequently, they fail reaching a wide audience and they lose support from ordinary Iranians. In general, Iranians in and out of Iran strongly criticize the regime for its violation of human rights, and especially the principle of *velayat-e faqih*. Within the regime, *velayat-e faqih* is highly controversial and is the issue of internal strivings between different factions in the government. The reformists see Islam being destroyed by politics and wish to separate the two. The conservatives, on the other side, deny this view (Brumberg). The fact that the Mojahedin refuse to have a constructive discussion about the different interpretations of Islam, and deny the clergy from taking part, is problematic. The Mojahedin blame the "mullahs" for taking monopoly on Islam, yet they seem to be doing the exact same thing by claiming *their* teachings of Islam is absolute true. By creating ultimatums based on "either you are with us or against us" the Mojahedin become isolated. They denounce the whole system as a dictatorship, not willing to support any faction of it or any effort to reform it. Thus, the only weapon they are left with is violence and armed struggle.

Since Ahmadinejad became president in 2005 the economy and people's freedom have suffered. I was in Iran myself during Khatami's presidency and saw how things changed from week to week after Ahmadinejad took office. Teahouses were closed for serving Iranian women *Ghalyon* (waterpipe), and shops were closed for selling clothes that exposed the female figure. When I went back six months later, the most popular teahouse among tourists in Esfahan had put up a sign with Latin-letters saying: "Women will not be served", demonstrating that the ban also included Westerners and non-Muslims. My friends in Iran say the prices have gone up and that they experience life to be more difficult and challenging now than before. A deterioration of this situation might make people more radical and desperate, forcing them to seek new and violent ways. The Mojahedin's radical approach to the regime may appeal to such people. However, in general people seem to have abandoned the idea of an ideal society through revolution based on Shariati and the Mojahedin's ideology. In Iran today people seem to strive for change through gradual steps. They are influenced by ideas introduced by people like the Muslim ideologist Abdulkarim Soroush (b.1945). Soroush calls for a separation between religion and politics, and argues that the conservatives in Iran must share power with the reformists (Brumberg: 207). Contrary to the Mojahedin, he doesn't call for an overthrow or exclusion of the religious clergy. He believes the solution lies in rethinking religion and politics and re-defining *velayat-e faqih* (ibid). The Mojahedin's denial to even consider that the Iranian system has ability to reform contradicts with what Iranians in general are struggling for. The Mojahedin call for democracy through the destruction of the Islamic Republic; something that undermines their claim for legitimacy as the democratic alternative to the Iranian regime. You cannot seize democracy through violence. A democracy needs to develop within a society. You can never force democracy on anyone, as it undermines the very essence of the concept.

Tradition, Charisma, and Legality

Traditional legitimacy

In chapter five I argue that the Mojahedin use tradition, charisma, and legality when they search for legitimacy. As an opposition group fighting an authoritarian regime, the Mojahedin have support in certain circles within the international community. According to Mahan Abedin it is "widely assumed outside the United States that the Mojahedin find their most

ardent supporters in the neo-conservative bastions of the Pentagon and conversely meet their opponents in the State Department and the CIA" (Abedin 2003). Nevertheless, as Brynjar Lia, a researcher at *Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt* (FFI) in Norway, pointed out to a Norwegian newspaper: "No other group on the American or European terrorist list is as popular among international officials as the Mojahedin" (Øverbye 2004).

Those who support the Mojahedin and NCRI see their tradition of fighting despotic and authoritarian regimes as proof of their sincere intentions. Supporters consider them to be representative of the Iranian people and a good alternative to the Iranian regime. They are perceived as having deep roots in the Iranian society, which makes them into "experts" on how the crisis with Tehran should be solved. However, most of the members of the Mojahedin and NCRI left Iran right after the Islamic Revolution. Although they say the NCRI was established in Tehran, it was established the same year Massoud left for Paris. Therefore, it cannot be said to have deep roots in Iranian society. Furthermore, neither Maryam nor Massoud have been in Iran since early 1980's. How can they possibly know first hand how the Iranian society functions *today*? Since Massoud Rajavi left Iran in 1981, he has promised that the Mojahedin will win the war against the Islamic Republic, and that when they enter Iran, Iranians will join them in their fight. They tried this during Operation *Eternal Light*, but failed. Inexperienced fighters were sent to fight the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and were slaughtered (Banisadr). The fact that the idea of the "great resistance" returning is still present in the Mojahedin's way of thinking shows that they are not willing to accept the changes the Iranian people and society have gone through since the revolution. Their vision of success is based on a tradition that no longer exists and that they are no longer identified with. Thus, they do not have the ability to relate to and understand the needs and hopes of a nation living in the complex aftermath of the Islamic Revolution.

Another problem with the Mojahedin's claim for traditional legitimacy is their violent past. Their armed struggle against the Iranian regime, which they were forced to renounce, but nevertheless wish to continue, followed by their relationship with Saddam Hussein make people in general sceptic and intolerant of them. Consequently, their claim for legitimacy based on tradition contributes to de-legitimise them instead. The Mojahedin fail to come out as sincere when they so intensely demonise the Iranian regime, yet refuse to take any criticism

for the war they themselves have led in the past. They are accused of national treason, an extremely serious accusation that undermines their claim for traditional legitimacy. Their unwillingness to deal with the past, answering any accusation with an accusation, makes them appear arrogant and less credible. It seems the only explanation they are able to produce to the accusations they are faced with, is that this is propaganda propagated by the Iranian regime.

Charismatic legitimacy

Maryam Rajavi is fascinating. She has a unique ability to make the people she talks to and the audience listening to her feel special and important. She looks like she hasn't had one day of hard work in her life, yet nothing could be farther from the truth. Maryam is inspiring and in international settings, nothing could be more appealing than a Muslim women yearning for democracy and human rights. Internationally, Maryam's charisma works wonders. However, it is also the object of scepticism and controversy. Maryam's effect on her devotees is shocking and scary. Why did people turn to self-immolation when Maryam was arrested? And why did they stop when she told them to? The Mojahedin explained these protests as acts of despair and hopelessness. It is not problematic to believe this explanation. However, when people turn to such extreme actions, and when they choose to leave their children and separate themselves from their families to fight a battle for the sake of others, a battle many of them have fought desperately for over 30 years, there must be powerful leaders behind them, giving them reasons to continue. What could possibly be more important for a human being than to watch a son or a daughter grow up? The Mojahedin's answer to this is freedom for their people. However, Massoud's promise of victory has not yet born fruit, and the force behind the members' continuous loyalty to the cause must be more powerful than life itself. Not to say that their choice of how to live their life is wrong. However, people in general both in and out of Iran have a different way of looking at life and therefore have a hard time understanding that people voluntarily choose such extreme methods. It is also problematic to see an organization with such devotion to the leadership as progressive and able to create a pluralistic democracy. Maryam and Massoud's charismatic authority and the effect they have on devotees come across as frightening to the general public. Seeing how far members are willing to go to show their sympathy and undying support for the leadership makes one question how they will be able to deal with opposition if they ever manage to overthrow the regime.

Legal legitimacy

Internationally, the NCRI has been struggling to be identified as the democratic alternative to the Iranian regime. This is an image they claim to be identified with by an increasing number of international parliamentarians. Among the Mojahedin's European and American supporters, the NCRI is referred to as a parliament in exile, an interim government, and Maryam Rajavi as president-elect. The debate concerning whether the Mojahedin should be removed from the terrorist list or not is ongoing and many high-ranking officials call for removal. Just recently (December 2006), the European Court of Justice issued a verdict, annulling the "Council's Common Decision" to include the PMOI to the European Union's terrorist list. This might eventually lead to full removal. Through lobbying European parliaments the Mojahedin and NCRI have succeeded in getting political support in certain circles working their case for them. This has become possible because of the institutionalisation of the armed struggle. Through the NCRI, the Mojahedin have gained support, especially in Europe. However, the international community is divided. As pointed out, the U.S. includes the NCRI on the terrorist list and the Council is therefore not recognized as a legitimate coalition. The first Bush-administration closed down NCRI's main office in Washington due to the terrorist charges, even though they characterise the Mojahedin as protected people under the fourth Geneva Convention who cannot be prosecuted or returned to Iranian authorities. In general, the increasing tension between Tehran and the international community benefits the NCRI and Mojahedin. The fact that they already have a "parliament" and "president" ready to step in if necessary contributes to their international recognition.

The problem with the Mojahedin's political institutions is that the structure lacks democratic credibility. It is problematic to see how anyone can challenge the authority of Maryam and Massoud, as the two of them seem to have more power and legitimacy than what their respective positions represent. Massoud's shift from political leader to ideological leader has made him into a supreme leader one cannot question the authority of. He has become for the Mojahedin what Khomeini was for the Islamic Republic. Massoud's supreme status contradicts the idea of an organization that has installed political institutions and claims to function as a parliament in exile. This makes it difficult for the Mojahedin and NCRI to gain legitimacy among Iranians and it undermines their legal legitimacy. Contrary to many

politicians, who seek simple answers that legitimise their radical policy against Tehran, Iranians have more knowledge about the Mojahedin and question their motives. A political prisoner I talked to in Iran, who had been jailed many times because of his anti-regime activities, said he would fight the Mojahedin if they were ever to come back to Iran with the intention of overthrowing the regime. The Mojahedin are no better than this regime, he said, and pointed out: How can we trust someone who talks about democracy but does not follow the rules of democracy themselves? (Political prisoner, Tehran, May 14th, 2006).

Ideology

The ideology behind the Islamic Revolution was influenced by Shariati's vision of utopia or *nezame tawhidi*. As I mentioned in chapter six, the Mojahedin's vision of *nezame tawhidi* lies between every line in Maryam's speeches; however, in international settings she never mentions the phrase explicitly. The idea of a classless society is connected to Marxism; a label the Mojahedin will not be identified with. Internationally, the Mojahedin's focus is on the principles of democracy, freedom, and human rights. These values are repeatedly stressed as the organization's fundamental principles that lay the ground for their ideology and the future Iranian nation. The problem with the Mojahedin's ideology is not so much these ideals, but their visions and strategies to achieve them. To begin with, the Mojahedin claim the only way Iran will become a free and just democracy is through the destruction of the Iranian regime. They aim to overthrow it through armed struggle. However, after the Islamic Revolution Iranians seem to have become increasingly nationalistic and relativistic. As mentioned earlier, they have left the idea of utopia through revolution. Thus, the Mojahedin's ideology of *nezame tawhidi* and armed rebellion does not have support among Iranians in general. "Evolution, not revolution", was a standard comment I got from Iranians when they talked about the future of their country. They all expressed fear of what another violent uprising will bring and hoped for slow and natural change. The Mojahedin's logic, however, is "how can the conditions in Iran possibly get worse?" It is problematic to agree with this logic. Although the conditions in Iran are far from good, they can definitely get worse. A new revolution could trigger a war between the many ethnic minorities that want to become independent of Iran. The total chaos that usually follows a violent uprising cannot guarantee peace and stability or prevent extremists from claiming power. The result of another revolution in Iran is *highly* uncertain and could contribute to de-stabilizing the whole region.

Furthermore, the Mojahedin claim that the key to their success and the establishment of democracy and freedom is the emancipation of women. They claim men are liberated through the liberation of women, which lays the ground for a democratic society. They want to eliminate gender discrimination, and they claim to have succeeded with this in their own organization. This vision of how to establish democracy is radical and similar to radical feminist thinking. Such thinking does not reflect the general opinion of the Iranian people, who seem to struggle for political reform. The Mojahedin's extreme focus on sexual politics – how women are exploited in patriarchal societies and looked upon as sexual objects – may stand in the way of political reform, as the elimination of gender discrimination does not automatically eliminate authoritarian behavior. Dissident members' testimonies of how the ideological revolution radicalised the organization and made it more authoritarian contradict with the Mojahedin's claim to have created democracy due to the emancipation of women. Stories of mass-divorces, and the demand for members to totally submit to Maryam and Massoud's authority and ideology contribute to undermine the Mojahedin's claim to have the ideological "key" to a future Iranian democracy. Also, the ideology behind the revolutionary marriage between Maryam and Massoud raises many questions, as it is challenging to understand the connection between this act and a woman's emancipation. The idea is perceived as bizarre and incomprehensible.

Lastly, the Mojahedin and NCRI claim to offer a solution to the "Iranian problem". They argue that diplomacy or appeasement is not the way to deal with the Iranian regime. Neither is foreign military invasion. Internationally, the Mojahedin and the NCRI hardly mention the word revolution when they talk about ending the Iranian regime. They refer to the "third way", which is democratic change by the Iranian people and their resistance. Democratic change sounds a lot better than violent uprising, something the Mojahedin are probably well aware of. However, the democratic change the Mojahedin introduce must come through a violent uprising, as they have made it clear that the present regime must be destroyed. The Mojahedin claim to have both the political and social capacity to realise the change from a suppressive dictatorship to a free and just democracy. However, the "third way" is related to the Mojahedin's idea of a classless society, an ideology that no longer has root in the Iranian people's vision of how to build an Iranian democracy. Thus, their solution to the "Iranian problem" is not representative for the majority of the Iranian people or a key to a peaceful future.

Another problem with the “third way” is that it presents the solution in black and white. You either support it, or you support the regime. Internationally, the Mojahedin and the NCRI say that they will welcome any alternative that proves to be better than theirs. However, they have not yet been willing to accept or even consider supporting another alternative. When Iranians in Iran were hoping for change through the more moderate Khatami in 1997, the Mojahedin did not support the efforts that were made to reform the Iranian system. They have never recognized the reformist movement. To the Mojahedin, they are all part of the evil “Khomeini regime”, and they believe no faction of this regime has even the slightest ability to reform. The ultimatum the Mojahedin create undermines their claim for having an ideology based on democracy and freedom. An option that is supposed to be democratic cannot offer an absolute solution, where something is either good or bad, right or wrong, true or false. It is an isolated solution where you have to pick a side, leaving the ones unable or unwilling to choose pacified. The Mojahedin seem more determined to win the ideological battle against Khomeini’s ghost than to do what is best for their fellow countrymen. The war they are leading, originally based on the love for their people, is now based on their burning hate for Khomeini’s legacy; a legacy they will fight whatever the costs.

8 CONCLUSION

The Mojahedin have several advantages when it comes to gaining legitimacy. To begin with, they are fighting against an unpopular and authoritarian regime. They present themselves as the antithesis to this regime, thereby making the world see them as everything the Iranian regime isn't. Furthermore, they have a tradition that goes 40 years back, a charismatic leader that goes well with international officials, political institutions that have access to the international parliamentary arena, and an ideology that they claim offers a solution to the "Iranian problem". They even argue to have the Iranian people on their side. They have established the right elements for success.

In spite of this, the Mojahedin fail to be recognized as the Iranian people's legitimate resistance. The reason is that they lack trust and credibility. The inconsistencies in their strategies contribute to de-legitimise them, and consequently they not only lose legitimacy, they also appear insincere. Thus, it becomes difficult for them to regain support and convince Iranians and the international community about the potential of their ideas. The de-legitimisation of the Iranian regime, as said, has effect. However, the support the Mojahedin receive seems to be based on the concept of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" and the fact that they provide the "right" answers for politicians who seek to justify their radical policy against Tehran.

Furthermore, the Mojahedin's violent and controversial past undermines their claim for traditional legitimacy. Their unwillingness to take criticism for the war they have led against the Iranian regime, denouncing all accusations as propaganda produced by regime-loyalists, has little credibility. They come across as narrow minded and not open for criticism. Maryam's charisma has effect, especially in the international community. She presents herself as a representative for peace, freedom, and democracy and does not come across as a typical terrorist leader. However, the supreme status both she and Massoud have within the organization undermines their claim for being democratically elected and contributes to suspicion of sectarian behaviour.

Although the Mojahedin's political institutions have a certain effect internationally, they too lack credibility. They are supposed to be based on democratic principles, yet the leadership have more power than the political posts they fill and thus the structure becomes authoritarian. They cannot prove their democratic intentions by simply announcing it; they must prove that the rules they advocate also apply to them. However, they fail to prove this. Finally, the Mojahedin's ideology fails to gain support. Their radical approach stands in the way of political reform, and consequently they exclude potential supporters instead of reaching out to a broad audience. Their absolutism, basing arguments and actions on being absolute true or absolute false, absolute good or absolute evil, contributes to political isolation.

As a result of the inconsistencies in the Mojahedin's strategies, they fail in gaining legitimacy and continue to struggle for recognition. The future ahead is uncertain and complicated. They seem to be dependent on continuous provocative and threatening behavior from the Iranian regime, as it seems to be this that is keeping them alive. If the Islamic Republic continues its hard line, making the Iranian people so desperate that they see no other way out than through a new revolution, perhaps the Mojahedin will for the second time be brought back to prominence. *"Maryam mehretaban, rais jomhore Iran, mibarimet be Teheran"* (Maryam the shining light, president of Iran, we will bring you back to Tehran)[4]. If so, the Mojahedin must prove their critics wrong.

[4] Mojahedin slogan when Maryam Rajavi was elected president in 1993 (Javdan 2006 [personal correspondence]).

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QUESTIONS TO MARYAM RAJAVI

1. Do you legitimise the Mojahedin's methods in their struggle to bring down the Islamic Republic?

2. Do the Mojahedin owe the Iranian people an apology for risking civilian lives in their violent struggle?

3. Do you understand that the international community reacted with shock and fear when they saw members of the Mojahedin turning to self-immolation after your were arrested in 2003? And, are you giving out the wrong message when you honour the people who died in this protest as martyrs?

4. How will the Mojahedin and the NCRI manage to remain peace and establish democracy in the chaos and violence that often follow a revolution?

5. Is it realistic to think that elections will be held within six months after a possible overthrow of the present regime?

QUESTIONS TO PERVEZ KHAZA'I

1. How do the Mojahedin and NCRI struggle for legitimacy?

2. Do you think it is reasonable to assume that the Mojahedin lack support in Iran due to their violent struggle in the past?

3. What was the Mojahedin's role in the war between Iran and Iraq?

4. Do you support the Mojahedin,s decision to establish bases in Iraq?

5. What roles do Maryam and Massoud Rajavi have in the organization? And, is the existence of the Mojahedin and NCRI dependent on the leadership?

LIST OF INFORMANTS

In exile:

Female 1: 45, non-believer active

Female 2: 30, non-believer

Male 1: 55, non-believer

|Male 2: 35, non-believer

Male 3: 25, non-believer

Male 4: 40, non-believer

Iranians studying abroad:

Female 1: 25, non-believer, politically active

Female 2: 25, non-believer

Male 1: 24, non-believer

Iranians living in Iran:

Female 1: 28, practising Muslim

Female 2: 25, practising Muslim

Female 3: 23, practising Muslim

Female 4: 24, non-believer

Male 1: 25, non-believer, politically active

Male 2: 26, non-believer, political prisoner

Male 3: 24, non-believer, politically active

Male 4: 21, non-believer

Male 5: 23, non-believer, politically active

Male 6: 24, practising Muslim

Male 7: 26, practising Muslim

Male 8: 30, practising Muslim

Male 9: 26, practising Muslim

Male 10: 26, practising Muslim

SUMMARY

The Mojahedin-a Khalq is a radical opposition movement that calls for the destruction of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Between 1980 and 2001 they mustered violent attacks from their military bases in Iraq against the Iranian regime, and also against Iranian embassies in Europe. This placed them on the U.S. and EU's list of terrorist organizations in 1997 and 2002. They were disarmed in 2003 after the U.S. led invasion of Iraq.

MEK and their political wing, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, are led by husband and wife Maryam and Massoud Rajavi, who are accused of leading a personal cult. Their ideology is based on Massoud Rajavi's secular interpretation of Islam. Due to their violent past and relationship with the late dictator Saddam Hussein, MEK have lost most of their support in Iran and in the international community. However, they are popular among many high-ranking officials in Europe and the U.S. because of their fight against an authoritarian regime.

This study analysis what strategies MEK apply in their search for legitimacy, and how effective these strategies are for seeking recognition in and out of Iran. I discuss why MEK fail to rebuild legitimacy in spite of fighting an unpopular regime. I find that the primary reason for this is that they lack credibility due to inconsistencies in their strategies.