

COI QUERY

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Iran

The People's Mujahedin Organisation of Iran

1. Background on the People's Mujahedin Organisation of Iran

The People's Mujahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI)¹ is also known as Mujahideen-e Khalq² (MEK)³ in Farsi.⁴ The group was founded in 1965⁵, originally as an opposition Islamist-Marxist student militia group⁶ which 'described itself as belonging to "democratic and secular Islam".⁷ The PMOI/MEK is an opposition movement in exile⁸ which firstly moved to France in 1981, then in Eastern Iraq (1986) and in mid-2014 'some 3,000 MEK members resided at Camp Hurriya (Liberty) near Baghdad'.⁹ In 2016, the group 'moved' to Albania.¹⁰ An article dated 2018 stated that the PMOI/MEK's base in the north-west Albania numbered 2 300 members.¹¹ It is characterised as 'the most prominent political exile group'.¹² The organisation is 'committed to the overthrow of the Islamic Republic'¹³ and 'the Iranian regime'.¹⁴

During the 1970s, and especially during 1979, the group fought against the Shah¹⁵ and opposed 'to the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi'.¹⁶ In those years, the PMOI/MEK started targeting 'foreign and domestic supporters of the monarchy'.¹⁷ The PMOI/MEK supported Iraq and Saddam Hussein during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq and therefore was

¹ RFI, The People's Mujahedin: Iran's exiled opposition, 10 August 2021, [url](#); PMOI, A primer on the history of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, n.d., [url](#)

² For ease of reference, the abbreviation PMOI/MEK will be used throughout this document. The abbreviations MEK or PMOI will only be used whenever a direct quoted source uses such variations.

³ BBC, Who are the Iranian dissident group MEK?, 30 October 2015, [url](#); Guardian (The), Terrorists, cultists -or champions of Iranian democracy? The wild story of the MEK, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

⁴ France 24, The People's Mujahedin: Iran's exiled opposition, 10 August 2021, [url](#)

⁵ NCR-IRAN, The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (Mujahedin-e Khalq, MEK, PMOI), n.d., [url](#)

⁶ Guardian (The), Terrorists, cultists -or champions of Iranian democracy? The wild story of the MEK, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

⁷ France 24, The People's Mujahedin: Iran's exiled opposition, 10 August 2021, [url](#)

⁸ MEI, Competing over Islam: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran in the Balkans, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

⁹ CFR, Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MEK), 28 July 2014, [url](#)

¹⁰ MEI, Competing over Islam: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran in the Balkans, 11 January 2022, [url](#); Guardian (The), Terrorists, cultists -or champions of Iranian democracy? The wild story of the MEK, 9 November 2018, [url](#); PMOI, A primer on the history of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹ Guardian (The), Terrorists, cultists -or champions of Iranian democracy? The wild story of the MEK, 9 November 2018, [url](#)

¹² Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report, Iran, 14 April 2020, [url](#), p. 38

¹³ Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report, Iran, 14 April 2020, [url](#), p. 38

¹⁴ RFE/RL, Iran Resorts To 'Maximum Repression' In Fighting Perceived Domestic Threats, 12 September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵ BBC, Who are the Iranian dissident group MEK?, 30 October 2015, [url](#); Middle Est Eye, How Iranian MEK went from US terror list to halls of Congress, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶ Middle Est Eye, How Iranian MEK went from US terror list to halls of Congress, 17 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷ Donahue, C., Profiles: Iranian Opposition Groups, USIP, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

‘denounced as traitors’¹⁸ and classified as a ‘terrorist organization’¹⁹ by Iran. The group was listed as a foreign terrorist organisation by the United States of America (USA)²⁰ but in September 2012, PMOI/MEK and ‘its aliases’ were removed from the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO)²¹ as the group renounced to the use of violence.²²

Sources indicated that the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella group also comprising of the PMOI/MEK²³, and created in France²⁴, is the political wing of the PMOI/MEK.²⁵ Specifically,

‘In the early 1980s, the MEK united opposition groups under the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an umbrella movement with a parliament based in Paris. Beginning in 1985, the MEK – under Massoud and Maryam Rajavi—gradually took control of the NCRI and converted a movement originally made up of diverse opposition groups into an MEK subsidiary. The NCRI parliament also came under their control.’²⁶

According to sources, on January 2022, the exiled group hacked television channels and a radio station that are under the control of Iran’s state broadcaster.²⁷

The PMOI/MEK has female members, however it is not described as ‘a champion for women’s rights’²⁸ while the women who reside at the MEK’s Albanian camp ‘are allegedly forced to wear headscarves’.²⁹

2. Treatment of members of the People’s Mujahedin Organisation of Iran by state authorities

For information regarding treatment of political opponents, journalists and activists by state authorities, please see the EUAA COI Query Response [Political opponents, journalists, activists](#) published on 4 March 2022.

The Australian DFAT report stated that:

¹⁸ RFI, The People’s Mujahedin: Iran’s exiled opposition, 10 August 2021, [url](#);

¹⁹ DW, Where is the Iranian opposition?, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁰ Bloomberg, Iran State Tv Says Exiled Dissidents Hacked Live Broadcasts, 27 January 2022, [url](#)

²¹ USDOS, Office of the Spokesperson, Delisting of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, 28 September 2012, [url](#)

²² Donahue, C., Profiles: Iranian Opposition Groups, USIP, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

²³ RFE/RL, Facebook Says It Removed Accounts Tied To Exile Group Opposed To Iranian Government, 7 April 2021, [url](#)

²⁴ France 24, The People’s Mujahedin: Iran’s exiled opposition, 10 August 2021, [url](#)

²⁵ RFE/RL, Khamenei Hails Iran Vote After Presidential Race Called for Hard-Liner Raisi, 19 June 2021, [url](#); France 24, The People’s Mujahedin: Iran’s exiled opposition, 10 August 2021, [url](#); Open Secrets, Filings reveal Iranian dissident group’s foreign influence operation to push for regime change, 20 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁶ Donahue, C., Profiles: Iranian Opposition Groups, USIP, 2 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ Bloomberg, Iran State Tv Says Exiled Dissidents Hacked Live Broadcasts, 27 January 2022, [url](#); Times of Israel (The), Dissidents hack Iran state TV, call for Khamenei’s death, 27 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ New York Times (The), The Middle-Class Women of Iran Are Disappearing, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁹ Spiegel, The Cult-Like Group Fighting Iran, 18 February 2019, [url](#)

‘In 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa decreeing apostasy a legitimate reason to execute MeK members, leading to the execution of at least 3,000 MeK prisoners (a conservative estimate). Most MeK prisoners who escaped execution have reportedly renounced their membership in exchange for easier conditions of detention, or have subsequently been released from prison’.³⁰

The 2020 COI report published by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS), and covering the 2019 protests in Iran, referenced an Iranian journalist stating that ‘those condemned to death have in broad terms officially been accused of being in contact with and engaged in armed fighting for Mujahedin-e Khalq’.³¹ Specifically, in November 2019 mass protests took place in Iran after the increase in the price of gasoline.³² According to a source interviewed by DIS, during those protests, various protesters were arrested and some of them were sentenced to death while ‘those condemned to death have in broad terms officially been accused of being in contact with and engaged in armed fighting for Mujahedin-e Khalq’.³³

The Australian DFAT report on Iran stated that ‘the government systematically dismantled opposition political organisations in the years following the Islamic Revolution, notably the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation of Iran’.³⁴

In July 2020, members of the PMOI/MEK were arrested and detained ‘in the southwestern city of Shiraz’ by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).³⁵

During April 2021, Facebook announced that they had removed ‘hundreds of fake accounts’ linked to the exiled group for posting ‘content critical of Iran’s government’.³⁶ On the other hand, the NCRI supported that no account affiliated to them or PMOI/MEK has been deleted.³⁷

A study published in 2021 by Freedom House provided information about the assassination of a former member of the MEK, outside Iran. The same source reported that, ‘since 2014, the [Iranian] regime has been linked to five assassinations or assassination attempts in three countries, and plots were thwarted in at least two others’. According to the aforementioned report, in December 2015, a refugee living in Netherlands since 1981 was shot outside his home. The man was accused by the Iranian authorities ‘of being responsible for a 1981 bombing in Iran that was carried out by the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK)’.³⁸ During July 2018, a diplomat and three other Iranians were arrested by the Belgian authorities for planning to bomb a meeting of the NCRI in Paris, France.³⁹

³⁰ Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report, Iran, 14 April 2020, [url](#), p. 38

³¹ Denmark, DIS, Iran, November 2019 Protests, July 2020, [url](#), p. 26

³² New York Times (The), Protests Incited By Gas Price Hike Grip Iran, 16 November 2019, [url](#)

³³ Denmark, DIS, Iran, November 2019 Protests, July 2020, [url](#), p. 26

³⁴ Australia, DFAT, Country Information Report, Iran, 14 April 2020, [url](#), p. 38

³⁵ RFE/RL, Iran Vows To ‘Deal Decisively’ With Protests, 17 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁶ RFE/RL, Facebook Says It Removed Accounts Tied To Exile Group Opposed To Iranian Government, 7 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁷ MEK-IRAN, MEK IRAN: No Social Media Affiliated With Iranian Resistance Have Been Removed, 7 April 2021, [url](#)

³⁸ Schenkkan, N., and Linzer, I., Out of Sight, Not Out of Reach, Freedom House, 3 February 2021, [url](#), p. 36

³⁹ Reuters, Iran diplomat among six arrested over suspected plot against opposition meeting, 2 July 2018, [url](#)

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