



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on April 9, 2012

U.S. Using Terrorist Group in Covert War on Iran

The MEK, wrote [The New American's Alex Newman](#), is “a notorious Islamic-Communist terror group” whose “history ... includes assassinations of more than a few senior U.S. military personnel, terror attacks on American installations, murder of civilians, and much more.” Despite public renunciations of violence and intense lobbying efforts, some involving former high U.S. officials, the group remains on the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations. As such, it is a [crime](#) for Americans “to knowingly provide ‘material support or resources’ ” to the MEK; yet that is precisely what the U.S. government has been doing with impunity for many years. And while current and former officials may never pay the price for their flouting of the law, average Americans may suffer as a result of it.



According to Hersh, from 2005 to at least 2007, the Defense Department’s Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) conducted training sessions for MEK members at the Energy Department’s Nevada National Security Site. The training included lessons “in commo [communications], crypto [cryptography], small-unit tactics, and weaponry,” a “retired four-star general, who has advised the Bush and Obama Administrations on national-security issues” told Hersh, saying he had been privately briefed on the training program in 2005. He also said that the site was being used simultaneously “for advanced training of élite Iraqi combat units.”

The Pentagon used Energy Department facilities for MEK training because it feared getting caught helping terrorists. “We did train them here, and washed them through the Energy Department because the D.O.E. owns all this land in southern Nevada,” a former senior American intelligence official told Hersh. “We were deploying them over long distances in the desert and mountains, and building their capacity in communications — coördinating commo is a big deal.” (A JSOC spokesman, naturally, denied the allegations of MEK training.)

MEK defector Massoud Khodabandeh, who now lives in England, told Hersh that he was also aware of the training in Nevada and that it went far beyond intergroup communication. “The U.S. provided M.E.K. operatives with the ability to intercept telephone calls and text messages inside Iran — which M.E.K. operatives translated and shared with American signals intelligence experts,” writes Hersh.

Why has the U.S. government, which denounces other governments’ involvement with terrorism, been supporting the MEK? Essentially it’s because the MEK is an enemy of the current Iranian regime. Such was not always the case, however. Initially the group opposed the U.S.-backed Shah of Iran and participated in the 1979 revolution that brought to power the Ayatollah Khomeini, who established the



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Islamic state that continues to rule Iran. Soon, though, the MEK turned on the new regime and began launching terrorist attacks against it. The government was successful in countering the MEK, and most of the group fled to France. In 1986 it relocated to Iraq, where it assisted Saddam Hussein in waging war on Iran; it also helped Saddam crush the 1991 Kurdish and Shiite uprisings.

In 2002 the MEK revealed that Iran was secretly enriching uranium — information that Mohamed ElBaradei, then head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, told Hersh had been supplied by Israeli intelligence. JSOC began operating inside Iran in 2003. “Funds were covertly passed to a number of dissident organizations, for intelligence collection and, ultimately, for anti-regime terrorist activities,” Hersh writes. “Directly, or indirectly, the M.E.K. ended up with resources like arms and intelligence.”

In 2004 retired CIA officer Robert Baer, who had spent much of his career in the Middle East, was recruited by a private American company to return to Iraq “to help the M.E.K. collect intelligence on Iran’s nuclear program,” Baer told Hersh. Baer, Hersh adds, “recalled that it was made clear to him at the time that the operation was “a long-term thing — not just a one-shot deal.”

Indeed it was. According to Hersh, the former intelligence official “said that he was aware of training that went on through 2007,” though he also claimed it “ended sometime before President Obama took office.”

Obama’s inauguration, unfortunately, was not the end of the United States’ relationship with the MEK. “The U.S. government is, among other support measures, currently helping to relocate members of the MEK to a former American military base in Iraq,” *TNA’s* Newman reported. “It is also assisting the group to settle around the world as refugees in a controversial deal brokered with help from the new Iraqi regime and the United Nations.”

In addition, writes Hersh, there is strong evidence to suggest that the MEK, with financing and training from Israel and intelligence from America, is responsible for the recent rash of assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists as well as other attacks in Iran. Hersh: “An adviser to the special-operations community told me that the links between the United States and M.E.K. activities inside Iran had been long-standing. ‘Everything being done inside Iran now is being done with surrogates,’ he said.”

In short, the U.S. and Israeli governments are, at the very least, using the MEK to disrupt Iran’s nuclear program. It is quite possible, however, that the MEK is also being used to set the stage for — or even to effect — regime change.

In either case, the dangers to Iran’s neighbors and to Americans are immense. U.S. intelligence [believes](#) Iran stopped working toward building nuclear bombs a decade ago and has not yet decided to resume. If Tehran obtains clear evidence that the Americans and the Israelis are trying to throw its nuclear program into disarray or — worse still — are trying to overthrow the regime, it may very well conclude it has nothing to lose and proceed toward making a bomb or launch retaliatory terrorist attacks against the United States or Israel.

But even if Iran chooses to keep its cool in the face of covert foreign aggression, the “freedom fighters” — as Rep. Ted Poe (R-Texas) [referred](#) to the MEK — the United States helps build up today may turn out to be the terrorists flying planes into our skyscrapers tomorrow. The Mujahedeen — remember, that’s what the *M* in *MEK* stands for — that the U.S. trained and armed to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan later [morphed into al-Qaeda](#). As for the current Mujahedeen on Uncle Sam’s nice list, a senior Pentagon official told Hersh: “The M.E.K. was a total joke, and now it’s a real network inside Iran. How did the M.E.K. get so much more efficient? Part of it is the training in Nevada. Part of it is



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logistical support in Kurdistan, and part of it is inside Iran. M.E.K. now has a capacity for efficient operations that it never had before.”

How it chooses to use that capacity, especially if and when it has a falling out with Washington — “America and capitalism have historically been the organization’s primary enemies,” according to Newman — could prove once again, in the most horrific way possible, that foreign intervention is an exceedingly dangerous game.

Photo of MEK soldier in Iraq: AP Images



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