

WHITHER THE MEK

Dilip Hiro is absolutely correct in his depiction of Tehran's growing and dangerous influence in Iraq ("Iran and America: Watching Each Other Warily," March 9). Indeed, immediately after the end of major combat in Iraq, Tehran began its long-planned and well-conceived scheme to flex its muscle in Iraq by sending thousands of Revolutionary Guards and firebrand clerics to preach Khomeini's fundamentalist version of Islam.

Hiro is, however, wrong to suggest that the Iranian Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) provided "assistance to Saddam to crush the Shiite and Kurdish uprisings after the 1991 Gulf War." A May 22, 2002, dispatch by Reuters quoted a senior Iraqi Kurdish official as saying, "There was no evidence the Mujahedin took part in the Iraqi government's 1991 campaign against the Kurds."

The author's observation that the MEK represents the only effective buffer to Tehran's rising influence in Iraq is spot on. Not so much because of MEK's military prowess but because the MEK espouses a virulently anti-fundamentalist reading of Islam, which explains why the Tehran-inspired fundamentalists in Iraq did not carry much weight with the Iraqi populace so long as the MEK went about its business in Iraq prior to the war.

Unfortunately, by bombing MEK's camps and disarming its forces, at the behest of Tehran and its staunchest European ally, the British, the United States played right into the mullahs' hands, leaving the door wide open for the fundamentalist clerics to meddle in Iraq.

Better late than never. The cause of stability and democracy in Iraq today could be best served by a reversal in the inexplicable hostility of the State Department toward the MEK, the only Iranian opposition movement with sufficient military might, legitimacy in Iran and political clout internationally to unseat Tehran's turbaned tyrants.

ALI SAFAVI
President, Near East Policy Research
Alexandria, VA