



FADĀ'ĪĀN-E ẔALQ

FADĀ'ĪĀN-E ẔALQ (Sāzmān-e čerikhā-ye Fada'i-e Ẕalq-e Irān/Organization of Iranian People's Fada'i [Fedā'i] Guerrillas [OIPFG or Fadaïyan]), a revolutionary political organization that emerged in Tehran in April 1971. As a Marxist-Leninist urban guerrilla group arising from the student movement and the urban middle-class intellectuals and influenced by the Latin American revolutionary discourse, its objective was to instigate, and eventually lead, a popular movement against the Iranian monarchy. Below, an account of the OIPFG's origins, politics, organization, and further developments beyond the 1979 Revolution will be provided (Vahabzadeh, 2010).

Historical contexts. Analysis of the emergence of Čerikhā-ye Fada'i-e Ẕalq must be treated in relation to the national and international contexts. As regards the national context, the urban guerrilla movement that the Fadaïyan founded and spearheaded, in general, dovetails with the Iranian nation's movement for national self-assertion that originally dates back to the [Constitutional Revolution](#) of 1906-11. Specifically, though, two historical events must be cited with respect to the Fadaïyan's *raison d'être*. The first is the defeat of the nationalist movement by an American-British-engineered [coup d'état](#) in 1953, while the second pertains to the reemergence and subsequent crushing of the democratic movement in 1960-63. As will be noticed, these two formative experiences influenced the prominent figures of the two founding groups of the OIPFG.

The 1953 coup ended the oil nationalization movement led by popular Premier Moḥammad Moṣaddeq and his democratic-liberal alliance known as the



National Front (Jabha-ye melli). Moṣaddeq's downfall and the return of Mohammad Reza shah to Tehran from his brief "exile" in Baghdad and Rome marked a new era in the political and economic development of the country. With the instrumental role that the military played, political parties were banned, newspapers shut down, and thousands of members of the National Front and the (pro-Soviet) Tudeh Party of Iran jailed. The repression of both nationalist and socialist oppositions, the founding of the country's security agency (SAVAK) in 1957, the consolidation of power in the hands of the shah, and Iran's increased leaning toward the United States, define the Iranian political life until 1960. Mohammad Reza shah was intent upon modernizing the country, and his model was a typical post-World War II Third World model of authoritarian, top-down, economic development by making alliance with the United States and Western countries that enjoyed an international hegemony in the context of the Cold War. This approach to economic development goes back to the implementation of the Marshall Plan, which led to the speedy rebuilding of war-stricken Europe. In the face of the emerging Socialist Block in Eastern Europe and the leaning toward socialism of several post-colonial countries in Africa and Asia, ideas behind the Marshall Plan were used within the West's strategic plan for creating the push for speedy economic development in former colonies. The Third World countries were to be "guided" in economic modernization through foreign investment of, and political alliances with, the United States and its allies (see Escobar).

After securing his uncontested leadership over the affairs of the country, by the late 1950s, the shah launched modernization projects that involved building the necessary infrastructure and concomitant administrative and educational institutions. Oil revenue would fall short in funding the ambitious plans; therefore, the shah sought to obtain loans from the United States and the World Bank. In the United States, the Kennedy administration demanded democratic reforms alongside economic modernization. To this end, the majority Democratic Party in the United States favored 'Ali Amini, Iran's ambassador to Washington, as the prime minister (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 422). In 1960, the shah had allowed the two rival state-run parties and the Second National Front (Jabha-ye melli-e dovvom) candidates to run for the Twentieth Majles. Electoral irregularities and the dismissal of two successive handpicked premiers finally forced the shah to concede to Amini's premiership. The United States support emboldened Amini, and, upon his request, the shah dissolved the Twentieth Majles and exiled General Timur Bakhtiār, the head of SAVAK. Amini negotiated with the Second National Front and introduced land



reform before his disagreement with the shah over military expenditure ended in his dismissal in 1962. The shah repackaged and expanded the reforms, now presented in the six-point White Revolution (*Enqelāb-e safid*).

The years 1960-1963, however, witnessed the country's political rejuvenation: the heightened return of the student movement and the Second National Front indicated hopes that a parliamentary democracy in the country would be possible through peaceful means. In the meantime, the shah's land reform and women's suffrage angered the traditional sectors of society congregating around the bazaar and led by the Shi'ite clerics. The shah's heavy-handed suppression of religious opposition in June 1963 and the exile of Ayatollah Ruḥ-Allāh Komeyni had the domino effect of repression of all opposition. Regaining full control, the shah expanded his reforms and received the loans (Keddie, p. 159; Abrahamian, 1982, chaps. 5, 9, and 10). The year 1963 marked Iran's entry into a new phase of her socioeconomic life that lasted until 1979. This phenomenon has been called "repressive development" (Vahabzadeh, 2010, pp. 1-5), a mutant form of state-sanctioned, top-down modernization involving economic development and social transformation along with political repression. Repressive development created a state whose "main relationships to Iranian society were mediated through its *expenditures*" (Skocpol, p. 244). "Suspended above its own people, the Iranian state bought them off, rearranged their lives, and repressed any dissidents among them" (Skocpol, p. 244).

As regards the international context, the guerrilla movement in Iran must be understood in the context of the Cold War; heightened postcolonial self-assertion in Asia and Africa in post-World War II era; wars of liberation in Vietnam, Algeria, and Mozambique (to name a few) in the 1960s and 1970s; the surge of revolutionary activism in Latin America in the 1960s; and appearance by the late 1960s and early 1970s of the militant Left out of the student movement in the West (e.g., the Red Army Faction [RAF] in Germany, Red Brigade/Brigate Rosse in Italy, the Weather Underground in the United States). For the militant Left, national self-assertion equaled challenging the international hegemony of the United States. Specifically, after the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia in October 1967, which ended the myth that the Cuban Revolution can be duplicated, the dissident, revolutionary intellectuals of Latin America sought to assert guerrilla warfare in the city. A new generation of militants, influenced by the Brazilian Marxist theorist Carlos Marighella (d. 1969), shifted to urban guerrilla warfare.



The 1953 coup and the 1963 repression of opposition provided a new generation of activists with the historical motivation and convinced them that the “militant method” was the only response to the Iranian rentier state. In fact, founders of the Fadaiyan explicitly trace back the emergence of the guerrilla to the “point of no return” in 1963, when all hope for peaceful and legal transformation toward a parliamentary democracy dissipated (Jazani, 1978; Aḥmadzāda, 1976; Puyān, 1979; Abrahamian, 1980, p. 4; idem, 1982, p. 482; Alaolmolki, p. 218; Behrooz, pp. 33-34). The liberation wars, in general, and the Latin America urban guerrilla movement in particular, gave this generation the inspiration, approach, and organizational necessities for launching People’s Fadaī Guerillas (Čerikhā-ye Fadā’i-e Kālq) in 1971. Noteworthy is the fact that the idea of armed struggle originally emerged among leftist activists of the Confederation of Iranian Students-National Union (CISNU) abroad, later these ideas reached the activists in the country (Matin, pp. 198-201).

The founding groups of what later became the OIPFG spent the rest of the 1960s preparing for prolonged guerrilla activity in the country. In the meantime, during the 1960s, Iran witnessed the advent of several militant uprisings and operations in Tehran, Kurdistan, and among the tribal peoples of central Iran; but since these early militant attempts had no active relationship to the country’s growing dissident student movement and were also under continuous surveillance and suppression by security forces, they did not last long (Vahabzadeh, 2010, pp. 1-15).

The formative groups. The People’s Fadaī Guerrillas organization was founded in April 1971, following negotiations between two groups from two different historical-formative experiences. These two groups are commonly called after their founding figures: the Jazani-Žarifi Group (or Group One) and the Aḥmadzāda-Puyān-Meftāḥi Group (or Group Two).

The Jazani-Žarifi Group. Bižan Jazani (1937-1975) had joined the Tudeh Youth Organization (*Sāzmān-e javānān-e ḥezb-e Tuda*) at the age of ten. His father, an army officer supporting the Autonomous Province of Azarbaijan, had fled to the Soviet Union after the fall of the Azarbaijan government in December 1946, and Bižan was raised by his mother and extended family. As an activist, Jazani was briefly arrested following the 1953 coup and spent a year in prison after his 1954 arrest. In prison, he was disillusioned with the Tudeh Party. When the Second National Front emerged in 1960, he was a Social Sciences Honor student in the University of Tehran. He became an elected student



representative to the Second National Front, a member of the University Student Committee, and a founder of the periodical *Payām-e dānešju*. In 1963, he graduated as the top of his class with an Honor's degree (Vahabzadeh, 2010, p. 17).

In March 1963, Bižan Jazani, Manučehr Kalāntari, Hešmat-Allāh Šahrzād, and Kiumart Izadi founded the nucleus of the group that later evolved into Group One. They created three partitioned units: one dedicated to open (student) activism; another reserved for the potential recruits; and a larger unit of militant activists who prepared for armed struggle. This last unit was split into the “urban team” and the “rural team” (or the “mountain team”). A number of future well-known activists, including ‘Ali-Akbar Šafā’i Farāhāni, Moḥammad Šaffāri Āštiāni, ‘Aziz Sarmadi, Aḥmad Jalil Afšār, Moḥammad Čupānzāda, Maš’uf (Sa’id) Kalāntari, and Ḥamid Ašraf (1946-1976) were recruited into the third unit. The group’s slow preparation caused Izadi to leave the group in 1965 (“Goruh-e Jazani-Žarifi,” p. 18). It is worth noting that the militants in the 1960s used the cover of mountaineering groups (e.g., Āraš and Kāva and Abar Mard) to map the country’s mountains and wilderness for their future operations (Vahabzadeh, 2010, p. 25).

Ḥasan Žiā’ Žarifi (1939-1975) was a young Tudeh supporter who was first briefly arrested in 1956. He became a law student at the University of Tehran and the leader of the National Front Student Organization in 1960-63, during which time he was arrested several times and once severely injured. Žarifi joined the central cadre (Kādr-e markazi) of Group One in 1965 and recruited ‘Abbās Sorḳi, a former member of the underground circle, “Warriors of the Tudeh Party” (Razmāvarān-e Hezb-e Tuda). Through Sorḳi, Ž. Zāhedīān, and Nāšer Āqāyān (a SAVAK agent) joined the group. The group’s earliest internal analysis, later published as “Thesis of the Jazani Group” (*Tez-e goruh-e Jazani*), must have been written in the mid-1960s (*Tāriḳča*, pp. 21-22). The group also compiled three book-length rural studies, and other studies and works, including “What A Revolutionary Must Know” (*Ānča yak enqelābi bāyad bedānad*) backdated 1969 and bearing Šafā’i Farāhāni as the author’s name (“Goruh-e Jazani-Žarifi,” p. 50), while it is attributed to Jazani (Miḥan Jazani, p. 67). Upon disagreements with the group in the mid-1960s, Manučehr Kalāntari left for Europe and became the group’s logistics person. In the 1970s, he published the writings of Jazani in London in his *19 Bahman te’orik* series. In 1967, Hešmat-Allāh Šahrzād also left the group due to security concerns that he had regarding the dubious activities of Āqāyān. (Vahabzadeh,



2010, p. 19).

As security preparations for the 1971 celebration of 2,500 years of the Persian Empire increased, on 9 January 1968, three days before the group's first planned bank robbery, Jazani and Sorḡi were arrested at a rendezvous in possession of a handgun. Āqāyān had an instrumental role in this arrest. Members of Group One, including Farroḡ Negahdār, Qāsem Rašidi, Šahrzād, and Izadi were arrested. Żarifi was arrested in his hideaway a month later along with Jalil Afšār. Of Group One, only five escaped (Šafā'i Farāhāni, Moḡammad Čupānzāda, Sa'id Kalāntari, Moḡammad Šaffāri Āštiāni, and Moḡammad Kiānzād). But upon crossing the border to Iraq to join the Palestinian Resistance, Kalāntari, Čupānzāda and Kiānzād were arrested in July 1968. Šafā'i Farāhāni and Šaffāri Āštiāni did manage to cross the border. This "escape" was arranged by a SAVAK infiltrator named 'Abbās-'Ali Šahriāri-nežād, a Tudeh Party/SAVAK double-agent whose true identity and successful operations against Tudeh Party, Group One, and deposed first SAVAK chief Timur Baḡtiār was revealed triumphantly in the summer of 1970 by SAVAK spokesman, Parviz Sabeti (Tābeti), who nicknamed him the thousand-faced man (see below). SAVAK let the latter two activists leave the border to Iraq in order to get the confidence of the three more major figures, who might show up at the border crossing and be arrested (Nāderi, pp. 107-122).

In the trial that began in February 1969, charges were brought against fourteen members of the Jazani-Żarifi Group. Amnesty International sent observers to the court proceedings, and CISNU launched an international campaign to save the prisoners. Eventually, the Appeal Court ratified the heavy sentences of the Military Court, which included a fifteen-year prison term for Jazani and a ten-year term for Żarifi (Jazani, 1999, p. 55). Soon after the trial, some of these prisoners' escape attempt from Qašr Prison in Tehran failed, and the members of the group were scattered and assigned to various prisons across the country (Sāme', 1999, pp. 138-39; Qahramāniān, pp. 192-93; 'Amu'i, pp. 316-17; *Čap dar Irān*, pp. 35-39).

By the winter of 1968, three members of Group One still remained unidentified (Ašraf, p. 7), including Ḥamid Ašraf (engineering student at Tehran University), Eskandar Šādeqi-nežād (leader of Iran Metal Workers Syndicate), and Ġafur Ḥasanpur (a recent graduate of Tehran Polytechnic, now Amir Kabir University), who recruited from among their trusted activist friends Jalil Enferādi, Raḡim Samāyi, Mehdi Ešāqi, Nāšer Seyf Dalil Šafā'i, and



Esmā'il Mo'ini 'Arāqi. These individuals, and several more, along with returning veteran members, carried out the Siāhkal operation (see below) in February 1971 ("Goruh-e Jazani-Ẓarifi").

The Aḥmadzāda-Puyān-Meftāḥi Group. In their hometown of Mashhad, Mas'ud Aḥmadzāda Heravi (1947-72) and Amir Parviz Puyān (1947-71) became politically active just as the Second National Front declined. Mas'ud was the son of Ṭāher Aḥmadzāda, a well-known nationalist and a prominent religious opposition figure in Mashhad. Puyān had associated with a political-Islamic circle and spent two-and-half months in prison. In 1965, Puyān started his studies in the Faculty of the Social Sciences at the University of Tehran. He was joined by Aḥmadzāda in 1967, who had been admitted to Ariyamehr Industrial University (Dānešgāh-e Ṣan'ati-e Āriāmeh, renamed ca 1980: Dānešgāh-e Ṣan'ati-e Šarifi) to study mathematics (Nejāti, p. 383). 'Abbās Meftāḥi (1945-72) had already been admitted to the School of Technology at the University of Tehran in 1963. The three met in 1965 and all gradually adopted Marxist ideas by 1967.

In the winter of 1968, Puyān and Meftāḥi planned for an underground militant group (Ḥamidiān, p. 28). They were later joined by Aḥmadzāda and formed the central cadre of the group. They adopted views of the Latin American revolutionary literature, including those of Che Guevara, Régis Debray, and the Tupamaros. The group recruited from among trusted friends and classmates, and a Mashhad branch was also created through Majid Aḥmadzāda, the younger brother of Mas'ud. In Tabriz, the leftist writers and activists 'Ali-Rezā Nābadal (1944-1971), [Ṣamad Behrangi](#) (1939-1968), Behruz Dehqāni (1939-1971), Kāẓem Sa'ādāti (1940-1971), and Manāf Falaki (1944-1971) had already formed a circle in 1966. After being approached by Puyān in 1968, the circle became the Tabriz branch of Group Two by 1979 (Behrangi drowned in the Aras River in August 1968; Nābadal, pp. 12-14; Karimi, p. 6). Meftāḥi created the Mazandaran branch in 1968 and a second partitioned Tabriz branch in 1969. Within a year the group had organized about 50 individuals in four cities.

By early 1970, after intra-organizational discussions, the group decided on launching armed struggle. The internal circulation of Puyān's *The Necessity of Armed Struggle* (spring 1970) played a significant persuasive role. The Latin American influence is revealed in Aḥmadzāda's *Armed Struggle* (summer 1970), which became the guiding treatise of the Fadaiyan in the next three years. The operational manner of the organization did not come up to that of



its clandestine activities. As a result, the group was uncovered by the SAVAK, and only a handful could escape the security raids by the summer of 1971 (*Tārik̄ča*, pp. 28-30; “Goruh-e Aḥmadzāda-Puyān-Meftāḥi”).

Group’s formation and operations. The People’s Fadaī Guerrillas (PFG) announced its advent in April 1971 through a series of communiqués pertaining to the group’s first operations in Tehran and Tabriz. The PFG’s foundation is accentuated in the context of the attack on a gendarmerie post in Siāhkal (a rural district near Lāhijān) in February 1971, a small operation that was venerated by Iranian dissidents as *rastākiz-e Siāhkal* (the Siahkal resurrection). The three surviving members of Group One who rebuilt the group had managed to have 22 men organized by the end of 1970 (Ašraf, p. 93; Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 480, 487-88). Weapons were obtained in Iraq or supplied by George Habash, the Palestinian political activist (Ḥasanpur, p. 171), and two bank robberies in 1970 supplied the finances. The group selected the Caspian region, since its mountains and forests provided natural cover and its dense population the possibility of accessibility and mobility. On 5 September 1970, the six-man mountain team, commanded by Šafā’i Farāhāni, who had returned from a visit to the Palestinian resistance, left for the Caspian region (Nayyeri, p. 63) and was joined by three others in the following months. The arrest of Ġafur Ḥasanpur in December 1970 led to further arrests of logistic teams in January 1971 (*Kār*, 8 February 1995, p. 5). At the height of the arrests, on 4 February 1971, Šafā’i Farāhāni convinced Ašraf, as the liaison between the mountain and city operational teams of Group One as well as the main contact with Group Two, to launch the planned operation within three days. On 8 February 1971 (19 Bahman 1349) the nine militants attacked the Siāhkal gendarmerie post to force the release of a comrade arrested the night before (*Tārik̄ča*, p. 39). A gendarmerie officer and a civilian were killed in the attack (*Žamima-ye nabard-e kalq*, p. 2; *Kār*, 9 February 1980; Ašraf, p. 101). Retreating, the guerrillas stayed in the region, but they subsequently scattered for various reasons. By 26 February, two of them were killed, and seven captured. The trial of fourteen militants, including the arrestees from the urban teams, started quickly; thirteen of them were sentenced to death on 16 March 1971 (*Tārik̄ča*, p. 41; *Kār*, 9 February 1980). Only five members survived the police raids (Ašraf, p. 106; Nāderi, 2008, pp. 97-240).

Group Two and the survivors of Group One, led by Ḥamid Ašraf, had begun their liaison in the late summer of 1970. Ašraf and Aḥmadzāda initially agreed



on unification in January 1971 (Ḥaydar, 1999, p. 251), pending the resolution of some disagreements (Ašraf, pp. 97-98). On 7 April 1971, a team of Group One assassinated Lieutenant-General Žiā' Farsiu, chief military prosecutor, in retaliation for the death sentences of the Siāhkal militants (*Tārikča*, p. 35; Dehqāni, 1974, p. 2; Ḥamidiān, p. 428).

The central cadre of the PFG (Aḥmadzāda, Puyān, Meftāḥi, Ašraf) met for the first time on 17 May 1971 to create operational, publication, and technical teams (Ašraf, pp. 15-16, 22-23). Puyān was killed in May, and Aḥmadzāda was arrested in June 1971; he was severely tortured and executed in 1972 (Nobari, p. 148). Majid Aḥmadzāda succeeded his brother in the central cadre, but he and Meftāḥi were also arrested in the next few weeks, and Ašraf formed a new central cadre. By 1972, the tightening surveillance of the security forces had reduced the Fadaiyan, led by Ašraf, to two cells and eight militants (Ḥaydar, 1999, p. 248), but they enjoyed the vast support of university students, hundreds of whom were in jail because of campus demonstrations in support of ongoing PFG urban guerilla operations, mostly by their former activist classmates and student leaders and acquaintances. Recruiting new members, the guerrillas carried out bank robberies and blasted power lines on the eve of televised celebrations of 2,500 years of the Persian Empire in 1971 (Ašraf, p. 52). Guerrilla insurgency caused the establishment, in February 1972, of the Anti-Terrorism Joint Task Force (Komita-ye moštarak-e žedd-e qarābkāri), which involved both SAVAK and the military police.

By 1972, Ašraf and Ḥasan Nowruzi (1945-1974), one of the group's few workers, led a lean and efficient PGF. While highly practice-oriented (*amalgara*), the group held Aḥmadzāda's ideas as its guiding theory. The group expanded its central cadre and published its official periodical, *Nabard-e kalq* in April 1974. By 1975, the group had regular liaisons with the region's revolutionary movements (George Habash's People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine) or states (Libya and the Democratic Republic of Yemen), receiving cash and weapons from them. The PGF also received continuous flow of funds from the CISNU activists, to the extent that the Fadaiyan no longer needed to engage in perilous bank holdups (Vahabzadeh, 2010, pp. 38, 43; Fatāpur; Chaqueri interview, 2001). Likewise, the network of support (especially through CISNU propaganda and Setareh Group assistance), as well as the international human rights campaigns on behalf of Iranian political prisoners by London-based Manučehr Kalāntari, and by Ašraf Dehqāni and Moḥammad Ḥormatipur, PFG delegates abroad who launched radio stations out of Iraq



and Dhofar (Yemen), brought publicity and media attention to PGF and immensely aided the popularity of the group in the minds of young Iranian dissenters.

Having established networks in Mashhad and Isfahan and smaller cells in Sari, Qazvin, Tabriz, and Shiraz, in 1973, an energized PFG launched an extensive offensive, which continued until June 1976. The operations of the Fadaiyan in this period were propagated mainly through their supporters among university students. Following Jazani's theory of "armed propaganda," the Fadai Guerrillas assassinated carefully chosen targets in order to send a message to specific groups and to the state. Their most significant operations included the assassinations of General Žiā'-al-Din Farsiu (see above); capitalist tycoon Moḥammad Fāteḥ Yazdi (11 August 1974), following labor strikes in his fabric mills that led to violent clashes with the police and left several workers killed and wounded in early 1970s; SAVAK interrogator Major 'Ali-Naqi Niktab'a (30 December 1974); Khorasan Province SAVAK assistant director Ḥosayn Nāhidi (1975); commander of the Ariamehr University Guard, Captain Yad-Allāh Nowruzi (3 March 1975); SAVAK double-agent 'Abbās-'Ali Šahriāri-nežād, commonly known as "a man with a thousand faces" (5 March 1975); and a former member of the group and an alleged collaborator, Ebrāhim Nuširvānpur (May 1975). They also carried out the bombing of a Lahijan gendarmerie detachment, a Solaymāniya gendarmerie post in Tehran, [Babol](#) police headquarters, governorship buildings in [Rudsar](#) and in Khorasan Province, to celebrate the Siāhkal anniversary (February 1975); the Khorasan provincial department of labor (April 1976), and the gendarmerie headquarters in Tehran (*Žamima-ye nabard-e kalq*, pp. 1-2, 14-15; *Nabard-e kalq*, May-June 1976, pp. 78, 87, 117-18, and December 1974-January 1975). In solidarity with the taxicab drivers, the Fadaiyan bombed several traffic booths in Tehran (*Nabard-e kalq*, May-June 1976, p. 87). They were also frequently engaged in street battles with the police.

Top SAVAK interrogators retaliated for these attacks by shooting (on 19 April 1975), Bižan Jazani and six members of Group One (Žiā' Žarifi, Šarmadi, Sorki, Sa'id Kalāntari, Čupānzāda, and Afšār) and two members of the Muslim militant group, Mojāhedīn-e Kalq (Kāžem Du'l-Anwār [Zolanvar] and Moštafā Javān Košdel), outside the Evin Prison, claiming that they were shot during an escape attempt (*Čap dar Irān*, pp. 50-53).

Also, in the mid 1970s, SAVAK, aiming at misleading the militant organizations, in some cases publicized the death of urban guerillas in clashes



while they were actually captured alive and later on killed under torture, for instance, Bahman Ruḥi Āhangarān, Maḥmud Namāzi, Maṣṣur Farṣīdi (Nāderi, pp. 569-74).

The activities of the guerrillas caused the security force to increase its use of systematic, clinical torture, a point of frequent criticisms against the Iranian state by Amnesty International and human rights groups. The prospect of horrendous torture, in turn, caused militants, namely Purān Yadollāhi (d. 22 January 1973, Tehran) and Kiumars Sanjari (d. 29 January 1978, Mashhad), among many others to commit suicide upon arrest. SAVAK also upgraded its counter-terrorist training, increased unmarked patrols, extensively tapped telephone lines, and held surprise midnight neighborhood house searches.

As guerrilla activity intensified, Aḥmadzāda's optimistic theory that armed struggle would soon give rise to a popular uprising dissipated. While in prison and, ironically, marginalized by the pro-Aḥmadzāda Fadai prisoners, who were in majority, Jazani recruited for the PFG certain prisoners with short prison terms and sent them, upon release, to Aṣṣraf along with his writings. Among these prisoners was Behruz Armaḡāni, who quickly moved into the central cadre and played a significant role in directing the PGF toward Jazani's theory. Details of the virtual debate between Jazani and Aḥmadzāda are now available (see Vahabzadeh, 2010, pp. 146-55; idem, 2011). The key to Jazani's theory was that the armed movement was only a preparatory (and thus tactical) stage for mass mobilization. Practically, this meant that the Fadaiyan would need to create a "political wing" (the "second leg" in Jazani's words) separate from the militant organization. This wing was intended for activity among the workers and other sectors of society. But that project was suspended when ten members of the Fadai central cadre, including the group's elusive and able leader, Ḥamid Aṣṣraf, were killed in southern Tehran in June 1976, as a result of SAVAK's extensive surveillance and telephone tapping (Ḥasanpur, 2007, p. 234). Although the former director of internal security (Division 3) of SAVAK, Parviz Tābeti, confirms this account, he offers a rather incredible story about how Ḥamid Aṣṣraf, has been tracked down (Tābeti, 2012, pp. 249-51). Other sources, including published SAVAK documents, do not confirm his account.

In any case, Jazani's vision of developing a long-term movement, through both military and political campaigns (reminiscent of the dual organization of the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Féin), was not compatible with Aḥmadzāda's understanding of armed struggle as the instigator of popular uprising.



Aḥmadzāda advocated a “squeezed spring thesis,” according to which the masses’ pent-up anger was ready for revolutionary explosion, should the guerrillas’ armed struggle release the people’s revolutionary potential (Aḥmadzāda, 1976, p. 136). The two tendencies, indicative of PFG’s dual origins, did not re-merge, due to the harsh conditions related to running a guerrilla organization, until the split by Dehqāni and Ḥormatipour, who advocated Aḥmadzāda’s ideas, from the Organization of Iranian PFG in April 1979 (see below).

The loss of leadership and key cadres spelled disaster; it is said that only two cadres in Tehran survived the attacks (Hāšemi, p. 43). Rank-and-file militants were scattered, without safe houses and money. Cells in Mashhad and Isfahan remained intact but insulated. By the end of summer the Mashhad branch took charge of the group. The formidable task of reviving the OIPFG took the entire next year. In the meantime, aside from loss of militants in street battles, the Fadaiyan carried out no operations. The new central cadre functioned more as a managing body and had no political authority to decide the group’s strategy. Because most of the militants were now disillusioned about armed struggle, in December 1977, the OIPFG declared Jazani’s ideas as its directive theory. Under pressure from United States President [Jimmy Carter](#), in 1978, the shah allowed the release of political prisoners who had been kept in prison beyond the terms to which they were sentenced. Veteran Fadai prisoners, now released, were recruited by the central cadre, and they created a *de facto* “political leadership,” as opposed to the “organizational leadership” of the central cadre (Ḥamidiān, pp. 217-18).

The disillusionment with armed struggle led to the split of a group of about ten cadres (*monša’ebin*) in Tehran, led by Turaj Ḥaydari Beigvand (1953-1976), who were critical of the OIPFG’s undemocratic leadership and its theories, as well as the assassination of Ebrāhim Nuširvānpur. This group later on collaborated with a secret pro-Tudeh Party circle called Navid and joined the Tudeh Party in 1979.

The heightened revolutionary spirit of 1978, especially after 8 September 1978 (the so-called Black Friday), when a large number of people were killed by security forces (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 515-17), caused the Fadaiyan to join the protest movement and launch operations, including the bombing of the Iran-America Cultural Society (Anjoman-e farhangi-e Irān wa Āmrīkā) in Tehran on 28 December 1977 (the group’s first operation since 1976) and the assassination of Lieutenant-Colonel Morteżā Zamānipur in Mashhad in



October 1978. The coincidence of the pro-Fadai demonstration celebrating the anniversary of the Siāhkal operation (10 February 1979) with the battle between the Imperial Guard and the renegade Air Force technicians (*homafar*), which had begun on the night of February 9, allowed the Fadai cadres and hundreds, or maybe thousands, of their supporters to play a decisive role in the armed uprising that led to the downfall of monarchy on 11 February 1979. Two Fadai cadres and several supporters were killed in armed clashes during the uprising. This was an uprising for which the leaders of the revolution were not prepared at all, but they were quick to act and equipped to appropriate it (Vahabzadeh, 2010, 58-59).

Organizational Life. The development of the designation of the Fadaiyan is reflected in the groups' organizational evolution. Upon their advent in 1971, the PFG was based on strictly partitioned operational and logistics cells. Under the severe surveillance of Iranian security, the group remained inevitably lean and relied on its supporters within the student movement to propagate its ideas. Judging from the publications of the group, within the first couple of years the Fadaiyan viewed the PFG more as a front than a party, strictly speaking. The group's *Internal Bulletin*, for example, relays the proposal of certain Fadai cadres that "the Marxist-Leninist groups that could not contact the People's Fadai Guerrillas should operate under the name 'People's Fadai Guerrillas' (with a suitable suffix)." But the leadership expressly rejected this proposal (*Našriya-ye dākelī*, 1975, p. 37).

As mentioned above, by 1973 the Fadaiyan had created sufficient number of networks and had branched out to major cities in the country. In 1974, the group's earlier title was changed into Organization of People's Fadai Guerrillas (*Sāzmān-e čerikhā-ye fadā'i-e kalq*; OPFG), which indicates that by this time Fadai leadership conceived of the group primarily as a political party. Later, in early 1975, the liaison between OPFG and the revolutionary movements or states of the Middle East necessitated another adjustment, and Organization of Iranian People's Fadai Guerrillas (OIPFG) became the group's official name. The PGF did not have an emblem until 1972, when Farāmarz Šarifi designed an emblem that contained a star, a machinegun held out by a rising arm, and the contour of Iran's map against the globe in the background. The pictorial emphasis clearly lay on the militant aspect of the group. 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari and Kiomart Sanjari reworked the emblem until 1975, when a hammer and sickle completed the insignia of Fadaiyan, leaving no doubts about the ideological identity of the group (Dehqāni, p. 17; Ḥaydar, 1999, p. 261, n. 4).



In the early years, trust and proof of dedication were the only criteria for recruitment of members. The group was led by a small central cadre of often three or four experienced members. In 1975, an internal bylaw (*asās-nāma*) was approved, according to which the highest leadership body was called the Supreme Council (Surā-ye 'āli). Reports conflict on whether the Supreme Council ever actualized. However, the death of ten leading members of the OIPFG in an ill-fated meeting on 28 June 1976 shows that at this time the central cadre was certainly a larger body (Ḥaydar, 2001, pp. 29, 31; 'Abd-al-Raḥimpur, 1999, p. 277). After June 1976, the OIPFG returned to having a small central cadre until late 1978, when the group was joined by veteran Fada'i prisoners, who created a de facto extended leadership.

The success of the Fada'i offensive in their psychological warfare against state security, aside from the total dedication of its members, must be credited to the leadership of Ḥamid Ašraf. At his death, Ašraf had almost ten years of experience in underground activities. He was an elusive leader and the country's most wanted man, who had reportedly broken fourteen times through police lines. He was a meticulous leader and, according to the memoirs of surviving members, a kind and caring comrade. Ašraf's legendary profile was very significant for the group's rising social profile. He was praised by friend and foe alike. He is said to have survived fourteen clashes with the security forces. SAVAK's internal security director, Parviz Tābeti, describes him as "a very courageous and well-trained individual" (*fard-e besyār šojā' wa varzida-i*) and reports the shah's particular attention to him and continued queries about him (Tābeti, p. 248). Ašraf's numerous successes in breaking through the security line contributed also to his prestige among the Fada'i ranks and pro-Fada'i supporters, to the extent that a member of PFG, jokingly, calls him *naẓarkarda* (God's "elect"; Nāderi, 2008, p. 673). Even after his death, he continued to be the emblematic Fada'i leader. This is evidenced by the billboard-size image of him overlooking tens of thousands of Fada'i supporters on the OIPFG's "Martyrs' Day" meeting held in the University of Tehran on Friday 29 June 1979 (*Kār*, 2 July 1979), while the OIPFG leadership had already clearly rejected armed struggle and what Ašraf stood for. Another legendary Fada'i figure was Ašraf Dehqāni, whose escape from Qaṣr Prison in Tehran in March 1973, with the assistance of families of Mojāhedīn-e Kalq prisoners, and the subsequent publication of her prison memoirs, *Ḥamāsa-ye moqāwamat*, made her a household name (Ḥājebi, II, p. 354; Dehqāni, 1974).



This aspect of PFG's action did not escape Jazani's attention, as he wrote: "Although these [guerrilla] groups are extremely small in comparison to the forces of the regime, their militancy and immortality [*fanā-nāpaziri*] in the face of the regime's great power put an end to the one-sided and absolute reality of the regime" (Jazani, 1978, p. 43). He specifically referred to the socio-psychological and metonymic aspect of armed struggle (Jazani, 1978, p. 78; see Vahabzadeh, 2015).

Other leading figures of the group who also significantly contributed to the group's survival included Ḥasan Nowruzi (1945-1973), 'Ali-Akbar Ja'fari (1948-1975), and Nastaran Āl-e Āqā (1949-1976). On the theoretical side, Ḥamid Mo'meni (1942-1975), a pro-Aḥmadzāda theorist with Maoist tendencies, and Behruz Armaḡāni (d. 1975), who advocated Jazani's ideas, served as prominent members of the central cadre.

Despite the ideological appearance of the OIPFG, the Fadaiyan must be understood as an internally diverse group of Iran's dissident younger generation that had come of age by late 1960s and early 1970s. This was a highly practice-oriented (*'amalgarā*) generation, for which the Fada'i Guerrillas embodied the possibility of an alternative to the status quo. As such, although these are self-declared Marxist-Leninists, rank-and-file Fada'i cadres generally remained theoretically uneducated. Their joining the Fadaiyan was more of a conscientious, moral decision than a political or ideological one.

As is expected with decisions like this, there have been cases in which certain individuals had a change of heart after joining the group. Cases include those of Iraj Šāleḡi, who fled the Siāhkal team only to be arrested later, and Orānus Purḡasan, who quit Group Two and slipped into obscurity. Under the leadership of Ašraf, such individuals were punished by death. He defended this idea in his published writing (Ašraf, 1978, p. 69). Engineer Ebrāhim Nušīrvānpur, as mentioned, was assassinated by the PFG long after he had quit the group, had been interrogated and imprisoned, and had returned to normal life after recanting on national television and allegedly collaborating with the police—a charge that is not true (Vahabzadeh, 2010, p. 61). Aside from these, there are reports that at least three members who were purged between 1972 and 1974. One, whose identity was recently released, was 'Ali-Akbar Hedāyati (also known as Asad), who joined the PFG but was killed in 1973, after he left his team without notification (OIPF-M Press Release; Nāderi, "Kīāl-andīši"; idem, 2011, p. *n*). The report of his "elimination" actually reached and upset the Fada'i couriers in Middle East, who broke the news to



others (Māsāli, pp. 55-56). There are two other cases of purged members, but their names remain obscure (Ḥaydar, 2001, p. 33). According to Anuš Šāleḥi and Nāderi, these two were Manučehr Ḥāmedi, who joined through foreign-based Setāra Group, and Rezā Šadri, a close comrade of Šo'ā'īān, and Nāder Šāygan later on joining Fada'is, who both had become disappointed with urban guerilla struggle and may have been sacrifices. While these cases potentially indicate ideological disagreement with armed struggle, the Fadai activists to this day treat them as security breaches. A last case, now well known, pertains to the purging of 'Abd-Allāh Panjašāhi, who was killed by the post-1976 OIPFG-leadership due to his love affair with a comrade, Ednā Tābet (Behruz, p. 68; Setwat,; Hāšemi 2008). At this time many rank-and-file members, including Tābet, had already rejected armed struggle (Setwat), so the assassination cannot be attributed to ideological reasons.

The Fadai leadership was anything but consistent; so the case of the purges must be put right next to the Ašraf leadership's occasional acceptance of the formation of a faction that later was called the *monša'ebin*, those who had rejected armed struggle and were radically critical of the OIPFG leadership. This does not mean that Fadai leadership was democratic, but it shows that the individuals joining PFG came from such diverse backgrounds and tendencies that the leadership could not, in practice, bring all such tendencies in line with the leadership's theoretical vision. Also it must be mentioned that, after 1976, many disillusioned members of the OIPFG simply quit and returned to normal life, without any report of retribution being intended by the new OIPFG leadership (Setwat).

The OIPFG was continually rejuvenated when self-made militant circles of student activists joined it. The group was also joined or approached by the following three well-established groups.

(1) It was joined by the People's Democratic Front (PDF; *Jabha-ye demokrātik-e kalq*), led by Nāder Šāyḡān Šāmasbi and the maverick theorist Mošṭafā Šo'ā'īān (1935-1976). Following extensive raiding of SAVAK that led to the death and arrest of several members, including Šāyḡān, the surviving cadres of the PDF joined the OIPFG in July 1973. PDF members were scattered among the OIPFG teams and some like Marzia Aḥmadi Oskuyi, quickly rose within the Fadai ranks. Šo'ā'īān, Šāyḡān's mother, Fāṭema Sa'idi, and her two young children were sent off to Mashhad, so that Šo'ā'īān, who had been challenging the OIPFG leadership based on theoretical grounds, would be isolated. Within six months, although Sa'idi was arrested, Šo'ā'īān (one of Iran's most wanted) was



cut off from the group without any support, and the two children were moved to a Fadai base. They were killed in 1976 when SAVAK raided a Fadai team (Vahabzadeh, April 2007; June 2007; 2007; and 2010, Chap. 6; Şālehi).

(2) In 1973, the OIPFG's started the unification (*tajānos*) process with a clandestine network of communist activists abroad, called Setāra, whose façade organization was called the National Front of Iran-Middle East Division. The OIPFG enjoyed the contacts of the Setāra, whose members had developed over the years with various revolutionaries in the Middle East. But when the news of the purges reached Setāra members in 1975, they abandoned the process of unification (Māsāli; Vahabzadeh, 2010, pp. 157-66).

(3) Lastly, after the coup-style ideological transformation that turned the Muslim group Mojāhedīn-e Kālq into a Marxist-Leninist group, the OIPFG leadership was approached by the new leadership of Mojāhedīn to explore the prospect of unification of the two groups. The OIPFG did not approve of the hijacking of a Muslim group by Marxists; nonetheless Aşraf and Armaġāni engaged in extensive (audio-recorded) ideological debate with Moġammad-Taqi Şahrām (1947-1980) and Moġammad-Jawād Qā'edi (1952-1983) in the autumn of 1975, but to no avail. The fundamental differences in perspective would not allow for convergence. Two volumes containing the debates were circulated in 1976 and 1977, and now the audiotapes of these debates are available online (Peykār o andiša). It is noteworthy that before the Marxist takeover, the original (Muslim) Mojāhedīn and PFG had mutual and collegial relations with one another, providing each other with intelligence, logistical, and communications support as needed.

Beyond the 1979 revolution. The Fadaiyan emerged in post-revolutionary days as Iran's most popular leftist group and the second most popular opposition group (after the Mojāhedīn) on the national level. In the face of an Islamic, revolutionary state, the Fadaiyan appeared utterly confused: although the group had abandoned armed struggle, thanks to its new leadership, it lacked the analytical knowledge for comprehending the nature of the new state. Thus, the group showed contradictory policies. The Islamic revolution was alien to what the OIPFG had envisaged the liberation movement would achieve. Following a maladroit class analysis, the OIPFG regarded the post-revolutionary state as a precarious alliance between traditional petit-bourgeoisie, represented by the radical clerics, and conservative nationalist bourgeoisie, embodied by Premier Mehdi Bāzargān and his provisional government (Vahabzadeh, 2010, 66).



The OIPFG boycotted the March 1979 referendum that installed the Islamic Republic of Iran. It published the weekly *Kār* with a circulation between 100,000 and 300,000. A rally of half-a-million people in Tehran under the OIPFG banner on May Day 1979 was a clear indication of Fada'i popularity (Alaolmolki, p. 218). In the first parliamentary elections, Fada'i candidates received about ten percent of the total ballots; so no Fada'i candidate was elected (*The Organization of Iranian People's Fadaian [Majority]*).

Right after the revolution, the OIPFG found itself inexorably involved in the first civil war in the Torkaman Şahrā in the northeast (beginning 26 March 1979), defending the locals' demand for land reform. Yet, Fada'i leaders also helped the provisional government and brokered a ceasefire. A year later, in February 1980, Fada'i activists joined a second civil war in the Turkaman region, but this time the movement was brutally crushed by the Revolutionary Guards (Ḥamidiān, II, pp. 239-74; Hāšemi 2001; Fatāpur). Similarly, OIPFG activists in Kurdish regions participated in the Kurdish civil war in summer of 1979 (*Kār*, 2 September 1979; *Kār*, 17 September 1979), while their comrades in the rest of the country were systematically persecuted and even killed by pro-state thugs (*Kār*, no. 13, 31 May 1979; no. 26, 9 August 1979; no. 28, 16 August 1979; no. 29, 20 August 1979; no. 30, 3 September 1979; no. 31, 10 September 1979).

In April 1979, a veteran member and Fada'i celebrity, Aşraf Dehqāni, who still advocated armed struggle, was expelled. Her small faction, called the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas (IPFG), engaged in the Kurdish civil war before the repression of all militant opposition in 1981 practically eliminated the group, leaving behind numerous casualties. While based in the Kurdish rebel-controlled zone, a small faction split from the IPFG to carry out armed operations in the Caspian region, in a manner reminiscent of the Siāhkal operation, before the group leaders were killed in March 1982 (Sāme', pp. 10-11). Surviving members of these factions moved to Europe in the 1990s.

The OIPFG held its first plenary gathering in September 1979. Plenary discussions hinged mainly on the group's approach to its past and the manner through which the OIPFG should participate in the Kurdish civil war. These debates consolidated a faction within the central cadre between a majority led by Farroḵ Negahdār and one of the dissenting minority, Moḥammad Dabirifard (Ḥaydar) (Ḥaydar, 2003, p. 30). The Majority-led OIPFG announced the American Embassy takeover (3 November 1979) as an indication of the anti-imperialist character of Ayatollah Khomeini, thus moving closer to the



position held by the Tudeh Party of Iran. The Minority rejected this analysis. The factions grew increasingly alienated until the Minority split in May 1981, after the Majority-led central cadre practically barred the Minority from publishing its views in *Kār* ('Abd-al-Raḥimpur, 2003, pp. 47-48; Mombeyni, p. 7; Madani, pp. 60-61; Aḥmadzāda, 2001). The Minority called itself the OIPFG. Subsequently, in October 1980, pro-Minority Moṣṭafā Madani broke away from the Organization of Iranian People's Fadaian-Majority (OIPF-M). Before joining the OIPFG (Minority) in January 1982, his faction called itself the OIPFG-Majority Left Wing (Madani, p. 62; Sāme', 1997, p. 10).

The state's heavy-handed suppression in June 1981 cost the Minority hundreds of its supporters, pushing the OIPFG to the Kurdish rebel region. As of July 1982, personality conflicts began to chip away the remainder of the OIPFG (Minority), now stationed in Kurdistan, building up to the bloody clash of factions over the group's radio station in the Kurdish village of Gāpilon (in Iraq) on 23 January 1986, which left five dead. Aside from the short-lived Revolutionary Socialism (1982), by 1986-87 the Fada'i factions included: OIPFG followers of the Identity Platform (later renamed as the OIPFG, led by Mehdi Sāme'), the Organization of Fadaian (Minority; led by Akbar Kāmyābi), OIPFG (led by Ḥosayn Zohari), short-lived Minority Cell (led by Mastura Aḥmadzāda), and OIPFG Supreme Council (led by Madani), which joined the Fada'i Organization to create the Union Of People's Fadaian Of Iran (UPFI) in April 1994 (Sāme', 1997, pp. 12-15; Aḥmadzāda, 2008; *Asnad-e Komisiun-e taḥqiq*, pp. 14-16).

Unimpeded by the Minority's presence after its split, the OIPF Majority lent its unconditional support to the state. It supported the war effort and remained rather quiet about the rampant human rights abuses in the country. It also (together with the Tudeh Party) reportedly collaborated with the Islamic state in nullifying the Kurdish resistance (Aḥmadzāda, 2008; Behrooz, pp. 115-16; *Kār*, 3 June 1981, pp. 7-9). The repression of opposition had, by 1982, rendered the OIPM Majority Iran's largest political organization outside the state, purportedly with "over half a million reliable supporters" (Behrooz, p. 105). For some time the OIPM-Majority had tried to merge with the Tudeh Party, but Tudeh leaders postponed the move, citing the political climate of 1982. In the shadow of an imminent merger with the Tudeh Party, in December 1982, a significant faction, led by 'Ali-Moḥammad Farḳonda ('Ali Keštgar), split from the Majority, calling itself the OIPF. In exile and after a number of mergers and splits, surviving OIPF members ended up co-creating the abovementioned



UPFI, a democratic socialist party, in 1994 (Rahnemā, pp. 28-29; Sāme', 1997, p. 13).

The security raids against the Tudeh in February 1983 and subsequent televised recantations of its leaders disillusioned the Majority about their naïve policy, but it was too late, as subsequent waves of arrests targeted the remaining factions of the Fadaiyan. Most of the leaders of the Majority and the OIPM fled from the country by the spring of 1983; the Majority leaders sought asylum in the USSR and were housed in Tashkent (Amir-Ḳosravi and Ḥaydariān, pp. 360-567; Farāhati, pp. 450-51; Faṭḥ-Allāhzāda, pp. 2-52). There, yet another faction within the central cadre challenged the leadership, but the leadership resigned to avoid yet another split. Following the disintegration of the USSR, members of the Majority gradually moved to Western Europe. The OIPM Majority has now become a social democratic group in exile. Majority supporters who stayed in Iran were arrested or scattered to avoid waves of arrests, although 1,000 Majority activists were arrested in 1985-86 due to the leadership's neglect of security. Most of the arrestees were executed in the 1988 massacre of political prisoners, adding to the hundreds already executed since the 1981-82 wave of repression (Abrahamian, 1999, pp. 209-28).

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