

Follow up questions for Dr. Stephen Zunes from his webinar presentation, “Civilian Defiance and Resistance to Coups and Military Takeovers.”

Delivered for the ICNC Academic Webinar Series on October 3, 2013

To learn more or to view a recording of this presentation, visit <http://nonviolentconflict.org> and click on “Learning and Resources”

Question 1

Would you consider the nonviolent resistance to Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia an unsuccessful attempt to resist a military coup backed by a foreign power?

Answer 1

From: Stephen Zunes

This is generally considered an example of nonviolent resistance to a foreign invasion rather than resistance to a coup, since the new regime was effectively imposed from the outside. Despite being ultimately defeated, the resistance continued for a good six months, quite remarkable given that it was largely spontaneous and was up against the military might of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

Question 2

What is the difference between nonviolent resistance against a domestic dictator and nonviolent civilian defense against a foreign invasion?

Answer 2

From: Stephen Zunes

Similar strategies are in effect, though the pillars of support of the usurping authority would be different, as would then be the resulting strategies. In certain respects, resisting foreign invasion could theoretically be easier, since the populace would presumably be more united in resistance and the international community more likely to be opposed.

Question 3

In how far can the international community (not in terms of regular politics, but in terms of NGOs) support or assist nonviolent movements, for example in the context of

nonviolent trainings and other available aid? More specifically: what could be the most effective relationship between formal NGOs and informal civil resistance movements in leading effective struggles against a coup or repressive regime?

Answer 3

From: Stephen Zunes

In terms of training, building relationships, etc.: this would have greatest impact *before* a coup, organized within democratic countries in which a coup is seen as a potential threat. (For example, back in 2006 in Venezuela, in which an attempted coup against the democratically-elected government had been carried out a few years earlier, I circulated Spanish-language copies of the Sharp/Jenkins monograph *The Anti-Coup* to some key players and showed the Chile segment of the film *A Force More Powerful* outdoors in a Caracas barrio.) Particularly if one is from the United States or other countries which have a history of foreign intervention, it's important to make sure that whatever support one does is done so at the request of democratic forces within the country. (For example, they could send a message that they need laptops, smart phones, other communication devices, etc.) Overall, though, my bias is that solidarity efforts should primarily be focused towards one's own countries, such as making sure media coverage is fair and accurate, getting the word out about the coup and the resistance in social media, making sure one's own government doesn't recognize the coup, and—in consultation with the democratic forces involved in the resistance of the country effected—support appropriate targeted sanctions and other means to isolate the regime.

Question 4

You spoke about the coup in Honduras. Why do you think that this coup took place, whereas a coup did not occur in a very similar situation in Nicaragua in 2012? How do you see the role of nonviolent resistance in both cases?

Answer 4

From: Stephen Zunes

On your first question: Primarily because, despite Ortega's revolutionary credentials and the Sandinistas' revolutionary heritage, they essentially made a bargain (a devil's bargain in my view) with Aleman and the right-wing. On your second question: Here's an article I wrote about Honduras during the nonviolent struggle following the Micheletti coup: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/the-power-of-nonviolent-action-in-honduras>

Question 5

How did you first get interested in the work on nonviolent conflict and why are you still so interested in it now?

Answer 5

From: Stephen Zunes

I grew up in a Christian pacifist family that was active in the civil rights struggles in my native South, as well as in movements against the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, and the Israeli occupation. In college in the late 1970s, I hung out with leftist students involved with Third World solidarity struggles, but was bothered by the romanticism attached to armed revolution by these largely white middle class kids who would never have to experience the horror of war. At the same time, as a privileged North American, I recognized that it would be wrong to pass any moral judgment against oppressed peoples who felt a compelled to take up arms for their liberation. If I opposed violence, I needed to advocate for nonviolent alternatives on utilitarian grounds. Though I no longer identify as a pacifist, I still recognize the power of strategic nonviolent action, continue to educate myself about it, and assist the process in disseminating such knowledge widely.

Question 6

Speaking of a substitute for force, we have seen nonviolent movements achieve rights, and nonviolent resistance to prevent coups. Have we seen "nonviolent interventions" to end a bloody conflict? What would an international nonviolent intervention look like to end a bloody civil war or brutal occupation of a local population (for example, in Gaza or West Papua)?

Answer 6

From: Stephen Zunes

The first priority for those of us in the United States would be to engage in nonviolent resistance against our own government's support for the Israeli and Indonesian occupations. In terms of third party nonviolent intervention, I'd encourage you to check out Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren's *Unarmed Bodyguards: International Accompaniment for the Protection of Human Rights*, (Kumarian Press), which makes a strong case that such work in Guatemala helped make the peace agreement that ended that country's long and bloody civil war possible. Indeed, there is a growing literature

about what is referred to as Third Party Nonviolent Intervention (TPNI) from which you can learn more, as well as from groups that organize such efforts, including Peace Brigades International, Nonviolent Peaceforce, Witness for Peace, and Christian Peacemaker Teams, as well as those that focus on specific conflicts, such as the International Solidarity Movement in Palestine. ISM's 2011 Gaza flotilla ended in tragedy, but it succeeded in forcing Israel to significantly relax their siege of Gaza and brought unprecedented attention to the plight of Palestinians in the besieged enclave, prompting a Hamas leader to acknowledge that such nonviolent resistance was more effective than thousands of rockets.