

Civil Resistance in Iran: History, Challenges, Prospects for Change (Video Interview)

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Transcript of Interview with Mohsen Sazegara, Exiled Dissident, Journalist, and Writer

Full article: https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/blog_post/civil-resistance-iran-history-challenges-prospects-change-video-interview/

What sparked your interest in civil resistance as a form of political struggle?

The Islamic Revolution succeeded based on civil resistance tactics, just by common sense I can say. We followed the footsteps of civil resistance. But I didn't know about that, no knowledge about that, nothing.

What is your role in Iran's democracy movement as a diaspora actor?

I have started a 10-minute home video from 2009 so far seven days a week. Fortunately no stop all these years. I try to introduce the methods of civil resistance. Sometimes I compare the civil society of Iran's tactics with other countries and help them to enhance their knowledge about civil resistance through these 10-minute home videos at the same time. For a while I was in a weekly show, a news talk show that had more than 20 million audience in Iran (because about 50 million Iranians watch satellite TVs). Or social networks like Telegram, which is very popular in Iran, or Instagram, Facebook... Easily I post my daily program.

How effective can diaspora actors be at supporting movements from abroad?

So I can say that of course it [would be] better if I was at the middle of Tehran and inside Iran, but in that case I [would not be able] to do whatever I'm doing right now. Easily they arrested me and they have sentenced me to six years' jailing *in absentia*. This time if they grab me they will kill me.

How would you assess the unity, planning and nonviolent discipline of the Green Movement?

Leadership was good, but it did not have any understanding of civil resistance and after a while, because they didn't know that what they want to do the next step, it started to divide the leadership and to be criticized by some factions of the movement. So unity which was very good at the start point gradually started to diminish. Discipline of civil resistance and the nonviolent movement was fantastic during all the months of the movement. People believed in that and kept that discipline. With respect to planning, that was I think one of the most important shortages of that movement. If you have strategic planning, first of all, you should define the goal, the grand strategy, and based on that go for a diversity of tactics.

I believe that these types of movements like the Green Movement, they may be defeated in one stage, but the energy doesn't go anywhere. Based on the conservation of energy principle, it will continue, and this is what has happened in Iran.

What are the main challenges for the broader democracy movement in Iran today?

Civil society of Iran, amongst the nurses, journalists, teachers, laborers, women, environmental activists, in many parts of the society they have their own tactics and try to oppose based on their goals with this regime. I think that our main problem is now how to join all of them together and all these movements should gradually join each other based on one or two main goals, like a referendum on the constitution of the country. This is our main challenge right now.

What are the prospects for change through civil resistance in Iran?

In Iran there is a democratic movement under the skin of the society. And [the] Green Movement was just one of the faces of this democratic movement. I can say that Iran is the only country in the whole region that, if we can have a free and fair election, definitely seculars will win. And I believe that if we can have a referendum on the constitution, definitely the majority of people — absolute majority — will say NO to this constitution and will go for a democratic secular regime.