

IRAN

Raising Their Voices

Iranian Civil Society Reflections
on the Military Option

July 2011

Journalist Lawyer Activist Student Political Prisoner Poet Human Rights Defender Screenwriter Analyst Author Columnist
Religious Scholar Filmmaker Poet Human Rights Defender Screenwriter Analyst Author Columnist Lawyer Scholar Journalist
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Raising Their Voices: Iranian Civil Society Reflections on the Military Option

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Raising Their Voices

Iranian Civil Society Reflections
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INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

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ABOUT US

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization founded in The Netherlands in 2008 by a group of international human rights activists working in Europe and the United States. The Campaign's headquarters are in New York City.

The mission of the Campaign is to mobilize international support for Iranian human rights defenders who are advocating for their civil, political, social, and economic rights on the basis of international standards and treaties. The Campaign is founded on these principles: that human rights in Iran, and in every country, are a matter of legitimate international concern and essential to establishing international peace and security; that human rights in Iran can only be implemented with the assistance of civil society, whose role must be protected and sustained; that human rights compliance in Iran should be approached from a non-partisan perspective, and detached from political objectives; and that solidarity with any and all peoples prevented from enjoying their human rights is a moral imperative of our time.

The Campaign documents human rights violations in Iran via first hand and original sources within the country, and publishes statements, appeals, blogs, multimedia productions and comprehensive reports in both English and Persian (www.iranhumanrights.org). The Campaign advocates with national governments and intergovernmental institutions, and cooperates with a broad range of civil society organizations on behalf of strategies aimed at protecting civil society and improving human rights in Iran.

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FOREWORD

Iranian society has experienced much political and economic upheaval since the 1979 Revolution. Most of these developments have been accompanied with widespread violence, bloodshed, and civilian deaths, including post-revolutionary assassinations and mass-executions of dissidents, the eight-year long Iran-Iraq war, and massive internal repression that escalated since the disputed 2009 presidential election.

Along with this fresh memory of violence, Iranians have been haunted for nearly a decade by the specter of a foreign military strike in response to their government's nuclear program. Since 2002, when new information about the extent of Iran's nuclear activities came to the fore, suspicions about nuclear weapons development have dominated the international community's concerns. A potential US military strike against Iran was seriously contemplated in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, when US military might seemed at its most triumphalist. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have held onto the "military option" as a component of US foreign policy toward Iran.

More recently, particularly with the election of President Obama, the potential of a military strike against Iran, by either the United States or Israel, has significantly abated. Still, the use of military force continues to be promoted as a policy option.

Iran's human rights community and civil society have been seriously alarmed about the prospects of a military confrontation, as their primary goal has been to reverse the negative impact of three decades of political violence and war. As early as February 2005, when the threat of a military campaign against Iran seemed quite realistic, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi and I argued against a military strike on Iran, warning that it would escalate the ongoing deterioration of human rights in the country ("The Human Rights Case against Attacking Iran," *New York Times Op-ed*, 8 February 2005).

The potential for use of pre-emptive force against Iran by the United States or Israel is an unmistakable human rights concern and calls for a response from the human rights community. Moreover, Iran's human rights crisis has been used as a further rationale for the possible use of force.

At the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*, our mandate has always included bringing the voices of the Iranians advocating for civil, political, economic, and social rights to the international stage, and recommending policy options that will promote human rights norms in Iran and globally, while consistently advocating for respect for international law. We believe Iran, the United States, and all other governments should uphold their international legal obligations, including compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United Nations Charter and the principle of *Jus ad bellum*, and international human rights and humanitarian law.

Consistent with these mandates, the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* undertook the preparation of this report. The report transmits the viewpoints of influential representatives of Iranian society on the consequences of the exercise, or threat of the "military option" for their respective fields of activity, and most importantly, for the human rights situation in Iran. These are viewpoints and voices that have rarely been heard outside of Iran, and yet, belong to people who would be severely affected by a possible military confrontation.

We believe the concerns featured in this report should be factored into policy debates outside of Iran, particularly in quarters where the necessity of confronting the Iranian government's human rights crimes is intertwined with arguments for bringing about regime change through a preemptive military strike. We hope that by giving voice to the perspectives of 35 influential Iranian civil society actors and cultural icons, we will have positively enriched ongoing debates about the utility and morality of the military option.

Hadi Ghaemi
Executive Director
International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2002, the possibility of armed conflict between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been a constant refrain in the complex and contentious relationship between the two states. Threats of military force and overt calls for an attack on Iran by the United States or its allies have reverberated throughout US-Iranian relations and has become a factor in Iran's domestic politics.

Between January and June 2011, the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* interviewed 35 Iranian human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, student activists, writers, cultural leaders and members of the political opposition in order to document the perspectives of people inside the country, and particularly of the reform-oriented members of civil society, about the possibility of armed conflict with Iran. The Campaign identified these interlocutors on the basis of their intellectual independence, broad knowledge of Iranian society, and their capacity for differentiated judgments about the consequences of a military strike. Many of these individuals have faced censorship, harassment, arrest and imprisonment for their work. They represent some of the most accomplished and prominent members of Iranian civil society, and as respected household names, command considerable influence over the thinking of a sizeable share of the population.

Particularly in view of the relative isolation of Iran from the outside world over past decades, which has prevented all but a handful of Western analysts from having first-hand contact with local experts, these voices, which have been largely absent from debates in Western capitals, offer important insights and analysis about the probable consequences of such a conflict for Iran, and for the future of Iran's relationship with the United States and its allies.

Military force against the Islamic Republic has been considered as a means to deter or eliminate Iran's putative development of nuclear weapons, and the threat they would presumably pose to Israel, Saudi Arabia and other US allies; to protect the regional interests of the United States and its allies; and to precipitate "regime change," that would in theory accomplish both these objectives. Calls for military action against Iran are also often colored with admonishment about the government's abusive human rights policies and practices. The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq made the possibility of military action against Iran seem more tangible, especially considering President George W. Bush branded the country part of an "Axis of Evil."

While the likelihood of a strike on Iran has subsequently receded, numerous influential political figures and policy experts continue to advocate for an attack, as questions about the Islamic Republic's rationale for its nuclear development activities and its regional ambitions have continued. Possible military action against Iran has remained prominently "on the table" as official US policy. At the same time, some influential figures have also warned that an attack would backfire, failing to fully disable Iran's nuclear infrastructure and leading to larger regional conflagrations. Some of the more ardent advocates justify military action with the worsening human rights situation in the country, particularly the protests and repression following the 2009 presidential election, suggesting that the Iranian people would welcome foreign intervention and join in an effort to change the government.

Overwhelmingly, from the perspective of those interviewed for this report, military action against Iran by the

United States or Israel would be futile, counterproductive and irrational. Accordingly, while achieving none of the goals used to justify such action, a strike would lead to further political regression and repression, deeper enmity between the Iranian people and the United States, and severe humanitarian problems.

Much of the analysis and insight offered by Iranian civil society actors surveyed in this report thus bolsters existing arguments against military action made by the American and other international commentators.

An attack would further militarize the state, exacerbate the human rights crisis in Iran, and undermine Iranian civil society and the pro-democracy movement. Iranians interviewed by the Campaign said a military strike would lead to full militarization of the Iranian state and serve as a pretext for increased civil and political repression. A leading journalist said that given the Islamic Republic's ongoing repression against alleged "soft war" tactics, a "real war" would lead to the complete elimination of the freedom of expression. A military strike would likely lead to an upsurge of political violence, threatening all those considered enemies of the government. Given the mass executions of numerous political prisoners during the Iran-Iraq War, strong fears were expressed about the fate of hundreds of current political prisoners in the event of a conflict with the United States.

It is significant that these interviews were conducted nearly two years into the government's violent crackdown on civil and political rights following the disputed 2009 presidential election. Nonetheless, despite the human rights crisis, the civil society actors were largely united in their view that an attack would not diminish the repression and would instead prove fatal to civil society and the pro-democracy movement.

A war with Iran would strengthen the current regime by stoking nationalism and dividing the opposition, and undercut the Iranian public's goodwill toward the United States. While some proponents of a conflict with Iran have suggested that Iranians would turn on their own government in the event of an attack, the report's interviewees argued that, given the extent and power of Iranian nationalism, a military strike would, on the contrary, strengthen the regime by bringing even some dissenters to its side. This tendency would be reinforced by memories of the US role in the fall of the Mossadeq government in 1953; a screenwriter said that in the event of a war against Iran, "the United States' image will be more tarnished than ever for Iranians."

Interlocutors rejected any possible use of the assault on human rights in Iran and democracy as a pretext for a US attack. Iranian experts referred to events in Iraq and Afghanistan, which they said showed the impossibility of successfully importing human rights and democracy after a military attack. They said an attack would undermine Iran's long trajectory of internal political development.

Finally, some interviewees expressed serious concerns that a US military strike would have ruinous humanitarian, economic and environmental consequences. Iranians referenced their memories of the destructiveness of the Iran-Iraq War in expressing their fears that, in addition to leading to the loss of innocent civilian lives, a military strike would be a major setback to Iran's economic development for many years, given its likely toll on the country's economy and infrastructure.

Others argued that military action against Iran would likely be illegal under international law, and that a strike on Iran would lead to regional instability and encourage the regime to build nuclear weapons.

INTRODUCTION

For nearly a decade, United States (US) policymakers and analysts have been debating whether military action against Iran, particularly in response to its nuclear program, would be legal, necessary and feasible. Currently, it seems that most US officials have concluded that use of military force would be “ill advised” and such action seems unlikely. But while calls for a military strike against Iran have receded in recent years, they remain a palpable undercurrent in US and international policy circles and are very much a factor in Iranian domestic politics.

These policy debates have, in general, not reflected or taken into consideration the voices of Iranian civil society—that is, the population who would be most affected by a military conflict and who have the clearest insights into its likely consequences on the ground. How would Iranians receive a military strike? What would it mean for the political development of Iran? How would an attack affect the human rights situation in Iran? What would be the likely long-term effects of such a conflict on Iran-US relations?

The answers to these questions would help Western policymakers and analysts understand the impact and utility of a strike on Iran in a more comprehensive way. Iranians, especially those outside the ruling elite and those who are not supportive of the current government, have key insights to share regarding the consequences of a military attack with respect to the short- and long-term stability of Iran and the region, the protection of human rights, and the future of US-Iran relations.

This report by the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* gives voice to 35 of the most prominent members of Iranian civil society, a diverse array of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, writers, cultural leaders, student activists, academics and members of the political opposition. All currently live and work in Iran and are among the most accomplished, renowned, and legendary members of Iranian civil society. Many of these people are critical of the government and have faced persecution, arrest and imprisonment.

With this report the Campaign aims to support human rights advocates and members of civil society in Iran by conveying their views to the international community on an issue that has profound implications for the protection of human rights in the country. This report is arguably the first collection of leading indigenous Iranian perspectives on the use of military force against Iran in any language. Publicizing these perspectives is particularly important in view of the relative isolation of Iran from the outside world during recent decades, which has prevented all but a handful of Western analysts from having first-hand contact with local experts.

The responses of these civil society leaders overwhelmingly reflect the opinion that an attack on Iran, no matter how limited in scope, would have ruinous consequences for Iranian society by entrenching the authoritarian regime, intensifying human rights abuses and likely thwarting the democratic aspirations of a large portion of the populace. With a military attack, the United States risks provoking the ire and distrust of the segment of Iranian society most open, and least adverse, to the United States and its allies. The United States would lose much of its ability to influence human rights developments in Iran, while prolonging US-Iranian hostilities for another generation. As theater director Behrouz Gharibpour put it, “The United States caused many negative consequences with its support of the 1953 military coup and an attack today would have a lasting negative impact for decades to come.”

METHODOLOGY

Between January and June 2011, the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* (“the Campaign”) interviewed 35 members of Iranian civil society. This time period was approximately two years into a wave of civil and political repression that followed the disputed 2009 presidential election.

The Campaign chose these interviewees on the basis of several criteria.

All interviewees currently live in Iran and were in Iran when interviewed. At the time of this writing, some are in prison but spoke to the Campaign prior to their incarceration.

The Campaign looked for people with a track record of intellectual independence and valuable insights into Iranian society and, for some, Iranian politics. They are people outside the ruling establishment. Several interviewees have clear activist credentials and have been publicly critical of the Iranian government’s policies and practices. Some others are simply known for their social commentary or contributions to their respective fields and are not affiliated with any political or activist currents in Iran. These social commentators agreed to speak on the prospect of a military conflict with the United States because of what they believe are the grave potential ramifications for Iranian society at large.

Those interviewed are from a diverse set of professional backgrounds including human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, student activists, writers, academics, cultural leaders and members of the political opposition. They also represent several generations, ranging in age from 25 to 84.

The Campaign chose people who were highly accomplished in their respective fields. Many are household names and a number are among the most extolled figures in Iranian society, past or present. Thus, not only do these interviewees possess the capacity to understand Iranian affairs, but they also significantly influence public opinion.

The full names and biographies of the interviewees are found in Part II of the report, “In Their Own Words,” starting on page 21.

Some interviewees asked not to be identified by name due to security concerns and have been given pseudonyms comprised of a first name and last initial (e.g. Hamid R.).

The Campaign also interviewed dozens of other individuals inside Iran who for various reasons did not wish to be included or quoted in the report. Their testimonies, however, were largely consistent with what is presented below.

PART I: KEY REFLECTIONS ON THE MILITARY OPTION

This section of the report extracts the dominant concerns of most of the interviewees, distilling their recurring and most notable conclusions.

Many of the insights and analytical points offered by the individuals surveyed in this report are consistent with and support arguments against military action that have been made by American and other international commentators. Repeatedly, the interviewees expressed concerns that an attack would (1) lead to further militarization of the state, exacerbating the human rights crisis in Iran and undermining Iranian civil society and the pro-democracy movement; and (2) strengthen the current regime by stoking nationalism and dividing the opposition, while undercutting the Iranian public's goodwill toward the United States.

The interviewees also expressed fears that any military action against Iran would (3) be predicated on the pretext of human rights and democracy promotion, derailing Iran's long trajectory of internal political development; and (4) cause disastrous humanitarian, economic and environmental repercussions.

Additionally, some Iranians who spoke to the Campaign offered other insights, which will be reflected in Part II of this report, "In Their Own Words." For example, several lawyers argue that a military attack against Iran would likely be illegal under international law. A few observers argued that a strike on Iran would lead to regional instability and would strengthen the regime's resolve to obtain nuclear technology.

The Impact of a Military Strike on Civil and Political Rights

Since the disputed presidential election of June 2009, and the subsequent mass protests for civil rights and democracy, the Iranian government has been engaged in a crackdown on government critics and activists and a wide-ranging program to intimidate the population at large. Authorities have undertaken mass arbitrary detentions of journalists, student activists, human rights defenders, and opposition figures as well as conducted routine torture. Moreover, the government has increasingly imposed restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. This crackdown is largely aimed at crippling the work of human rights defenders and dissident journalists, as well as pro-democracy activists and opposition groups, many of whom work under the banner of the pro-democracy Green Movement.

Numerous US policymakers and international figures have expressed concern for the human rights situation in Iran. As Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in a written statement in December 2010:

To all those Iranians struggling to lift your voices and speak up for fundamental freedoms and human rights, you are not alone. The United States and the international community stand with you.¹

¹ DIPNOTE BLOGGERS, "Secretary Clinton Welcomes UN Resolution Calling on Iran to Respect Human Rights," post to "DIPNOTE" (blog) US Department of State, December 22, 2010, http://blogs.state.gov/index.php/site/entry/clinton_statement_iran_human_rights (accessed July 14, 2011).

Even given the government's severe repression, the prospect of further serious deterioration of civil and political rights is a major concern for the civil society actors interviewed for this report. Nearly all of the Iranians the Campaign interviewed feared that a military attack on Iran, even one limited to Iran's nuclear facilities, would have a dramatically negative impact on basic civil rights and political freedoms. They warn that such a strike would lead to the full militarization of the Iranian state and serve as a pretext for increased civil and political repression. Moreover, the increased repression would likely translate into the complete dismantling of the remaining elements of the Green Movement.

It is significant that these interviews were conducted nearly two years into the government's violent post-election crackdown. Despite the human rights crisis, the interviewees were largely united in their view that an attack would not diminish the current repression and would instead elevate it, proving fatal to civil society and the pro-democracy movement.

Kambiz Nowruzi, an attorney and former legal secretary of the Iranian Press Association until it was banned in 2009, warns, "If the United States, by itself or in cooperation with its allies, attacks Iran, we will witness severe and widespread violations of human rights. No doubt all social layers will be harmed by such an action. During wartime, civil, social, and political freedoms will be extremely constrained."²

Mohammad Maleki is the former Chancellor of Tehran University and a prominent dissident intellectual who was detained after the 2009 election. Maleki similarly warns that a "military intervention will undoubtedly lead to a much more closed environment inside the country and give the regime the perfect excuse to oppress the people even more."

Mohammad Seifzadeh, a leading human rights lawyer, who at the time of this writing was serving out a prison term, shared this concern. Prior to his imprisonment, he told the Campaign, "If a war were to take place right now, the atmosphere would definitely become more restricted and more limitations would be imposed upon intellectuals, human rights activists, social elites and students."

Sadeq Zibakalam, Professor of Political Science at Tehran University and a leading political analyst, spoke specifically about how a strike would militarize the state and undermine pro-democratic forces:

First of all, a military strike will not help the democracy and reformist movement at all because it will cause militarization of the country. The military and Revolutionary Guards will increase their power and radical elements on the conservative right will be strengthened. All of these will seriously harm the movement for greater freedoms.

An attack will seriously harm the reformist and democracy movements in Iran, providing a pretext for the government to increase its pressure on them.

Freedom of Expression

Many of the Campaign's interviewees spoke specifically about the potential repercussions of a military strike for freedom of expression. They stressed that while the government currently prohibits many forms of free expression, it would restrict these rights even more if Iran were attacked.

² All interviews conducted by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran between January and June 2011.

Nima R., a journalist, explained that censorship and limitations on the press are at an all time high because the state considers itself to be fighting a “soft war” against its enemies.³ He continued to explain why he believes that a “real war” involving foreign powers would lead to the complete elimination of freedom of expression:

[Today] as soon as newspaper editors and staff start their daily meetings to choose the headlines, a fax arrives from the press officers of the Intelligence Ministry. It outlines the topics allowed to be discussed in detail and those that are off limits. The justification given by them is from a security-minded framework that ‘we should not strengthen the views of enemies and cause uncertainties and in general aid the enemy’s soft-war.’ The newspaper staff has learned to implement such restrictions through self-censorship as well. Now, imagine if a foreign power were to attack Iran, then, with or without reason, any kind of activity by civil society and democracy advocates will come under complete attack and become the perfect excuse for repressing any critical thoughts.

Thus, I am of the belief that a war or military intervention would provide an opportunity for the state to finish off all civil society, social and political activists, journalists, academics, students, and [others]. It will certainly give more power to military men to take over the helm of the state, more than before, and to confront democracy advocates even more brazenly.

Several artists and writers said that, in the context of a military attack on Iran, censorship of arts and literature would increase dramatically. Ali Abdollahi, a well-known poet, said “The truth is that under the present circumstances life for writers and artists has been very difficult, but in case of war it would be much more uncertain.”

Renowned author Mahmoud Dowlatabadi echoed this sentiment, saying:

I believe we writers can write more freely in Iran and publish our books if there is peace in the world. During a war, all conditions are compulsory, and in fact the government finds excuses to prevent cultural activities. I believe that with a war, the conditions for writers and artists not only do not improve; they get a lot worse.

Abbas Ghaffari, a theater director and actor, drawing on his experience during the Iran-Iraq war, said:

We, in theater, have the fresh experience of the Iran-Iraq war. We saw that during those years, because of the militarization, the cultural space was further closed. I think even if after a war, the environment were to open up, for theater it will not, and will remain closed. We don’t wish to repeat the same bitter experiences.

Alireza Behnam, a journalist, noted that even the threat of war would provoke the government to further subdue the activity of pro-democracy intellectuals and activists:

In my opinion, a foreign military intervention would have very negative consequences and will bring to a halt the gradual and natural movement and development [towards democratization]. It will bring to a halt democratic aspirations within the society. Even discussions of an American military strike will lead to [the government] preventing the

³ Interviewees identified by a first name and last initial were given pseudonyms to conceal their identities upon their request due to security concerns.

activities of intellectuals and civil society activists. It will be the activists who will pay the price for foreign threats.

Since the ruling class and traditional segments of society accuse [pro-democracy intellectuals] of having such beliefs that make them supporters of foreigners, with the onset of a war, they will experience the most pressure. I believe, under the present circumstances, it is best to drop any discussions or threats of war.

Political Violence

Other interviewees noted that a strike on Iran would likely lead to an increase in political violence and arbitrary executions, likely endangering the lives of hundreds of prisoners of conscience and opposition figures.

Ramin G., a lawyer and political activist involved in the Green Movement, explains:

Under a military situation, violence and its consequences would spread throughout society, but its implementation would remain hidden from the public eye. The government could use the situation to settle political scores on a wide scale to eliminate its opposition. In parallel to violence unleashed during a war, the rule of law and a minimum respect for its standards and people's rights would be completely ignored.

Hassan B., a student activist, specifically feared that state violence would be aimed at the opposition. He warned:

If war breaks out, democracy, human rights, and civil society will be the main losers. The Iranian government would militarize and such a militaristic government has the potential to carry out widespread killings of its opponents, such as what happened in Iraqi Kurdistan or against Shi'as in the South of Iraq [under Saddam's rule]. Human rights crimes will be at their zenith.

Keyvan P. expressed a similar worry. As a journalist, he is specifically concerned about the ability of domestic media to challenge the government's attacks on its opponents. He noted that from 1980-1988, during the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian government used the fog of war to execute thousands of its perceived enemies.

He warned that even in today's modern media environment such crimes could again take place without getting public notice:

During [the Iran-Iraq War], the press had no ability to reflect what was happening inside prisons, either domestically or on the international level. This scenario could very well be repeated if a new military situation arises. Many prisoners who hold on to their beliefs in opposing the Islamic Republic could be executed.

Today there are many forms of alternative media, such as those empowered by the Internet, but due to government control, they won't have much impact inside the country and may only inform the outside world in a limited way. The bulk of the population would be under the grip of government propaganda and would not know of large numbers of executions or widespread torture inside prisons. Under a military crisis, all security-

related sentences would be expedited and no form of civil action or movement would be tolerated. This has been demonstrated in a limited way during the post-election events of the last couple of years.

State Consolidation and Public Attitudes Toward the United States

Some of the strongest proponents of a military strike on Iran have maintained that a US bombing campaign would be welcomed by some segments of Iranian society. Moreover, these analysts and policymakers have called for a military campaign with the goal of toppling the regime in Tehran. Such regime change arguments rest on the presumption that an air and sea military strike by the United States would trigger action by anti-regime elements in Iran. As US Senator Lindsey Graham explained in November 2010:

So my view of military force would be not to just neutralize their nuclear program, which is dispersed and hardened, but to sink their navy and destroy their air force, and deliver a decisive blow to the Revolutionary Guard. In other words, neuter that regime. Destroy their ability to fight back, and hope that people inside of Iran would have the chance to take back their government ...⁴

Proponents of military action have long held that divisions within Iranian society could be used to affect regime change. For example, the influential think tank Project for a New American Century drafted a memorandum in 2004 to “opinion makers” on the subject of regime change. The memo cited an Iranian-American academic’s view that “Iranian society is organized, hostile to the regime, pro-democratic and pro-American.”⁵

In January 2011, former US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton repeated this argument, saying, “A strike accompanied by effective public diplomacy could well turn Iran’s diverse population against an oppressive regime.”⁶

Many of the civil society actors who spoke to the Campaign argued, however, that a military strike against Iran would strengthen the regime, even bringing many detractors to its side.

As Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, a prominent human rights lawyer and a co-founder of the Defenders of Human Rights Center said, “Iranian society’s attitude towards anyone who would advocate war under the guise of human rights and democracy would be terribly negative.”

Playwright Pedram Z. simply explained, “Any foreign intervention would lead to unity and opposition to the United States.”

⁴ Senator Lindsey Graham on Iran, The Halifax International Security Forum, November 7, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AavprfIIow> (accessed July 14, 2011).

⁵ Memorandum from Gary Schmitt, Senior Fellow, Project for the New American Century to Opinion Leaders, February 24, 2004, <http://www.newamericancentury.org/iran-20040224.htm> (accessed July 14, 2011).

⁶ John R. Bolton, “What if Israel Strikes Iran?” The Wall Street Journal, June 12, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124467678369503997.html> (accessed July 14, 2011).

Rallying Around the Flag

Several of the interviewees explained that—beyond facilitating militarization of the state and repression of government critics and the opposition—an attack on Iran would give the government a set of ideological tools that would likely be used to justify human rights violations, repress activists, divide the opposition, and stoke nationalist and religious sentiments. These interviewees highlight the natural tendency of Iranians to “rally around the flag” at times of foreign aggression and forgo opposition to the government. As theater director Behrouz Gharibpour said, “In my opinion, if any Iranian loves their country, they would seriously oppose an attack, and I belong to this group.”

Ramin G., a lawyer, believes the government of Iran would take advantage of a US attack to repress its opponents and solidify its grip on power. Moreover, he stressed that the regime would ideologically exploit an attack to garner and consolidate public support:

Standing up to America has been instrumentally used to whip up the emotions of [the regime’s] base and bring them into the streets for years. They publicly state that [the United States] is the country’s main concern and this idea has become an unconscious belief for many people, both supporting and opposing the state. In event of a war, such sloganeering would move into the realm of reality. Any opposition to the government would be considered siding with [US] imperialism. In practice, many opposition sympathizers could end up in the government’s camp, leaving the remaining opposition forces few and inactive. They will be seen as taking the foreign aggressor’s side, making it easy to label them the enemy’s fifth column and providing a justification for their repression.

The crisis stemming from a military confrontation would significantly lower the level of people’s expectations from the state because the people would have to choose between a “bad” situation, meaning the rule of a dictatorial system and related hardships, versus a “worse” situation, that would entail losing national independence and sovereignty. The majority would prefer to choose the “bad” option over the “worse.”

War is a good instrument for whipping up the society’s nationalistic emotions and abusing them for the purpose of covering up the failings of the state.

It is the people who will carry the burden, both in the short and long-term. And the ruling class, by increasing its repression and pressures, will preserve itself. Ultimately a military attack does not impact the government’s grip on power.

The emergence of a foreign military confrontation, more than being a necessity for the United States and the West, would be in line with the desires of the ruling class because the government can use the situation to unify its fragmented forces and solidify itself.

Journalist Hamid R. points out that Iranians share a collective memory of the 1953 coup, when the elected government of Prime Minister Mossadeq was toppled by American machinations. “The memory is quite alive among Iranians, and the government will [in the case of an attack by the United States] invest in resurrecting it to its own advantage through propaganda.” Hamid R. continues to explain how such an environment would divide the opposition and bolster the government:

The foremost impact of such an attack, given the level of dissent and the government’s

instability, would be to create serious divisions within the Green Movement. The movement has paid a heavy price through the loss of hundreds of lives and many more political prisoners. But a foreign military attack would lead to many of the movement's rank-and-file shifting their support to the same government that they currently oppose.

This is the foremost desire of the current government, because they know that the survival of their rule rests upon igniting nationalist and religious feelings within the population.

Any foreign military intervention would play an important and decisive role in consolidating the present regime.

Ahmad Ghabel, a prominent religious scholar and a critic of the government, believes that even if an attack led to regime change, the new government would not have public support. He warned:

A military attack will be tremendously harmful to the people's aspirations because our hearts and minds are not with foreign intervention. Assuming that a political change would follow an attack and the current system is replaced as a result, the new system would automatically be condemned because it had been empowered by foreign intervention. The time required for any new government to build trust with the people would be valuable time lost. Iranians have a historical memory of foreign interventions.

The only interviewee who acknowledged that a segment of the reformist camp might not oppose a military strike was journalist Alireza K. He ultimately concluded, however, that the vast majority of Iranians would back the government against a US strike. He said:

Before the 2009 election, most reformists and moderates feared a military confrontation with the United States and considered it not only against the interests of the general public, but also against the interests of the reformist camp who wanted to bring about fundamental changes from within the system.

But today, many reformists and moderates are of the belief that the Islamic Republic is not amenable to gradual change and engaging it on a reformist path is not possible. Thus, if they previously opposed a limited military strike, today, if not welcoming it, they may not oppose it.

But is this option in the interests of the population? No. [In the case of a military strike] people will gravitate towards unifying behind the government. All means of communication are in the hands of the government. They utilize religion and religious principles effectively to guarantee the survival of the regime, and strengthen the opposition against the United States.

Sapping Goodwill Between the United States and Iranian Society

In the minds of many Iranians, the memory of the US-backed 1953 coup and the ensuing anti-Americanism appears fresh and relevant to today's threats of military force. Several interviewees told the Campaign that, like the 1953 coup, a military strike would strain relations between the United States and the Iranian public, which unlike the regime includes a large segment of people with attitudes either favorable or not hostile to the United States. In recent years, many analysts have seen Iranian society's openness to the United States as a key

element in ending official US-Iran tensions, but interviewees for this report warned that military aggression would prolong tensions.

Behrouz Gharibpour, a film and theater director, also believes that a strike would invoke anti-American feelings similar to the 1953 coup and inflict long-term damage between Iranian society and the United States:

I am absolutely opposed to a military strike and foreign intervention. Any foreign power launching a strike will be the main loser because Iranians love their country and even if the conditions are not to our liking, we will not allow any foreign invasion. The United States caused many negative consequences with its support of the 1953 military coup and an attack today would have a lasting negative impact for decades to come.

Shadmehr Rastin, a screenwriter, shared this view and said, “On the off-chance that the Americans were to make such an unwise decision and attack Iran, a situation similar to the American-led coup 50 years ago [in 1953] will happen in Iran again and the United States’ image will be more tarnished than ever for Iranians.”

Legendary poet Mohammad Ali Sepanlou expands on the notion that the United States currently has goodwill amongst most Iranians that would be squandered with an attack. He explains:

A war would not serve US interests, as Iranians are the only people among the Islamic countries of the Middle East who have a favorable view of Americans. Unlike the Shah’s time when Iranians were against the United States, they have no animosity toward the United States right now. If any blood were shed between the two countries, it would be to both countries’ disadvantage.

Poet, women’s rights advocate, and renowned cultural figure Simin Behbahani expressed a similar sentiment, saying, “I expect the United States, a very powerful country in the world and one with a good name, to act against war, because war does not solve anything.”

Rejecting Human Rights and Democracy Rationales

Some who have threatened a military strike against Iran suggest that the Islamic Republic’s dismal human rights record and anti-democratic polices justify a more interventionist response by the United States. For example, US Senator Joseph Lieberman told the Council on Foreign Relations in September 2010 that the United States and its allies should pursue a “much more robust engagement and support for opposition forces inside Iran...helping the people of Iran overcome their government’s electronic monitoring and censorship, to secure the universal human rights with which all of us have been endowed by our creator.”⁷

Policymakers like Lieberman usually do not invoke the Iranian government’s human rights record and democratic repression as a justification for an attack *per se*, but use those issues to bolster more aggressive economic sanctions on Iran and other policies designed to put pressure on the regime. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize many of the strongest proponents for military force against Iran also continuously reference human rights abuses and democracy promotion in Iran. These calls for human rights promotion by advocates of the military option come partly from a hope that Iranians, discontent with their government, will

⁷ Transcript of Senator Joseph Lieberman discussing US Power in the Middle East, address at Council on Foreign Relations in New York, September, 29, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/israel/sen-lieberman-addresses-us-power-middle-east/p23056> (accessed July 14, 2011).

overthrow the regime before the US has to intervene. Moreover, in the case of the US-led war on Iraq, the Baath regime's violations of human rights were bundled with a range of other rationales to mobilize support for an invasion.

So, while Senator Lieberman demonstrated clear support for human rights and democracy in his 2010 speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, his speech's primary emphasis was:

It is time for us to take steps that make clear that if diplomatic and economic strategies continue to fail to change Iran's nuclear policies, a military strike is not just a remote possibility in the abstract, but a real and credible alternative policy that we, and our allies, are ready to exercise if necessary.⁸

Many Iranian civil society actors strongly believe that the United States and its allies will employ pro-human rights or democratization rationales, possibly even sincerely, to help strengthen the case for a strike on Iran. While many Iranian human rights defenders and civil society activists recognize the need for the international community to proactively support human rights in Iran, they often warn against coupling human rights promotion with calls for a military strike. Several of the Campaign's interviewees rebuffed the idea that human rights or democratization rationales could justify a strike on Iran.

"As someone who is engaged in the protection and promotion of human rights, I don't believe a military attack would resolve any of our current concerns," said human rights lawyer Mohammad Dadkhah.

Student activist Pooya E. shared Dadkhah's observations and said:

Even if we believe in the sincerity of right wing and pro-war elements in the West claiming to support democracy and human rights, we must realize that an attack will not lead to democratic changes. In general, any effect in Iran caused by foreign intervention will not be lasting in terms of leading to democracy or respect for human rights.

Environmental activist Shirin F. also stressed that:

Those [countries] who advocate war in today's political climate, are those who consider themselves the flag bearers of democracy and human rights. What kind of human rights framework allows countries to decide war or peace for the people of another nation? They will cause war, then assign reconstruction budgets, build local armies, all for bringing peace to another nation. No lasting peace is achieved through foreign intervention.

Lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan

Mohammad Dadkhah, like many Iranians featured in this report, referred to recent US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan when rejecting the notion that human rights motives could or should justify an attack. He concludes:

If we look at the experiences of countries such as Iraq or Afghanistan, or any other country where legitimate human rights concerns were exploited for justifying military

⁸ Ibid.

intervention, we see that there is no peace in such countries. We must believe in the fact that our need is to promote dialogue and rational interactions to solve our problems. The bitter experience of war should not be repeated. We should learn our lessons and plan accordingly.

Author Lili Golestan shares Dadkhah's concern and told the Campaign, "I don't believe problems regarding Iran can be solved with a military attack at all. Look at Iraq. The United States wanted to solve its problems with war, but has that been achieved? Unfortunately, the United States has failed in this effort and regarding Iran, the military option must be completely discarded."

Student activist Majid H. said that based on experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, he believes that any democratizing effect that could come from military intervention would not be worth the toll in terms of subsequent negative consequences. He explained that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan "not only did not achieve their stated goals, but resulted in further destruction. It is particularly heart-wrenching to witness the developments in Afghanistan. In Iraq, although the country was freed from [Saddam Hussein's] dictatorship, following the American attack, the daily cost of it is not acceptable. Any rational mind would seek a less costly and surer way of achieving democracy."

Only one interviewee, student activist Kamran L., sympathized with the idea that Western powers might feel obligated some time in the future to use military force against Iran to prevent human rights atrocities, as well as stopping Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon or destabilizing the region. He said:

At the point where the threat of Iran having nuclear weapons becomes very serious, or at the point when the Iranian regime commits human rights atrocities within its borders, or exerts negative influence in the region, at that point if all peaceful means to stop Iran fail, then a crippling attack with the permission of the UN and under the supervision of relevant international organizations, as a way to permanently end such problems, may be the last defensible option.

However, Kamran L. quickly concluded that such an action would be fruitless and ill-advised, and stressed:

However, right now it doesn't seem, at least from the nuclear weapons perspective, that Iran's nuclear activities pose an imminent threat. A limited strike will not resolve anything, rather it will start an era of intricate crisis and destruction. Iran's response and retaliation would result in further conflict, instability, and war in the region, and ordinary Iranians will be the main victims of these conditions. In addition, a military strike would also likely result in Iran pulling out of the [Non-Proliferation Treaty] and speed up its nuclear program, which could make Iran into another North Korea or Iraq under Saddam, and that would truly be a disaster.

Democratization from Within

Many civil society actors interviewed in this report stressed the need for social change to come from within Iranian society. They argue that democracy and respect for human rights are only sustainable when emerging as a result of domestic efforts.

"An attack by foreign forces will harm everything. It is better that Iranians be allowed to solve their problems," said Mohammad Maleki, former Chancellor of Tehran University. "They [the Iranian public] are well aware and

conscious of what they need to do and there is no need for resorting to violence because it will not lead to any positive developments. If Iranians are seeking liberty, justice, and equality, they should develop their own means for achieving them.”

Fakhralsadat Mohtashamipour, who is serving a prison sentence at the time of writing, is a prominent reformist-activist and wife of the imprisoned reformist politician Mostafa Tajzadeh. She noted that, “When we have a democratic movement and the ability for mass participation to bring about positive change, then war is certainly not the answer.” Mohtashamipour added, “International actors should focus on negotiations and not military confrontation.”

Student activist Majid H. sees the historical movement for freedom and democracy in Iran at a critical juncture, arguing that a military strike would gamble away an opportunity. He explains:

Our people today are closer than ever in achieving historical goals such as a broad understanding of rights and freedoms, and an understanding that having opposing views is possible. Respect for one’s opinions and creed and tolerance of differences are concepts that are widely taking root among the young generation. This is providing the grounds for united actions to demand respect for these from the state too, such as in the form of protests in the last couple of years. It is a manifestation of a collective consciousness and spirit.

Having paid a heavy price standing up and fighting religious fundamentalism, reactionary thoughts, and monarchic dictatorship to reach this point, would it not be ironic to welcome war and provide further opportunity for enemies of human rights and democracy? To provide for an uncertain and complicated situation?

Filmmaker Kambozia Partovi believes that Iran, like Egypt during the recent Arab spring, has the potential to achieve democratization through internal development. He noted, “We must come to a common understanding ourselves [for achieving democracy] and believe in it. We will then find the way for it, like the people of Egypt and other places.”

Humanitarian, Economic, and Environmental Concerns

Several of the interviewees expressed serious concern that a US military strike on Iran will have ruinous humanitarian, economic, and environmental consequences. While in many ways these are common concerns about any military campaign, the anxieties of Iranians are particularly acute because of their experiences with the Iran-Iraq war. Having seen the death and destruction from that war, and the long road to economic recovery, makes many Iranians especially troubled by the prospect of another military conflict. Moreover, and most importantly from a US perspective, these concerns intensify objections to a US military strike in a manner that would translate into heightened rejection of the United States should it carry out a strike.

Religious scholar Ahmad Ghabel expressed the basic concern that civilian casualties are an inevitable outcome of any military attack and added that even the deaths of military personnel, most of whom are conscripts, would not be welcomed by most Iranians. He expressed that, “Bombs cannot always distinguish between military targets and the civilian population. Also, the military personnel are Iranians who have families. The fact that the government doesn’t treat its population well doesn’t justify foreigners dropping bombs.”

Shahram Mokri, a young Iranian filmmaker, explains how his experiences during the Iran-Iraq war contributed

greatly to his deep concern over civilian casualties and his objection to another military conflict. He explains:

I was raised in the border city of Kermanshah, and I may have touched war closer than many other Iranians. I have seen how deep and destructive my generation's fear of war is. My view of war is not a tourist's view, nor an idealistic one. I didn't read about war in magazines or watch it in films. I had to take shelter from bombs many times, my school was shut down because of it on many days, and I had a collection of shrapnel and missile pieces in my home. I say touching the war up close is a very terrifying thing, and I don't wish it repeated.

Tahmineh Milani, internationally-recognized filmmaker and advocate of women's rights, shared Mokri's sentiment, explaining how the loss of loved ones suffered by Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war intensifies their antagonism to another military strike and a rejection of the country that would lead such a strike:

We must not forget that Iranians are nationalistic and will not give even one molecule of their soil to foreigners. I lost a brother to the Iraq war, something I have never talked about and no one knows about. He was a soldier doing his compulsory military service. He suffered spinal injuries during the war and was paralyzed for ten years, and then he died. My mother died the following year. What did they die for, really? Sometimes people lose their lives to natural catastrophes, but sometimes we throw bombs and kill people. But why? Foreign governments may see us as inconsequential, but they have no right to think this way. We are a decent and good nation.

Religious scholar Ahmad Ghabel also expressed similar concern about the destruction of Iran's infrastructure during a bombing campaign. Recalling the experiences of the former Yugoslavia and Iraq, he said:

During all these wars the countries' economic infrastructure and social services were destroyed. These are part of a nation's backbone. If Iran cannot rebuild and restore its infrastructure for decades to come, it will obviously be a huge setback. I don't think any rational mind would accept such an outcome.

Adding to the worries for casualties and destruction of infrastructure, student activist Kamran L. cautions against the likely health and environmental ramifications, which have been supported by studies such as a 2005 analysis by the Union of Concerned Scientists.⁹ Kamran L. explains:

A military strike against Iran's nuclear installations will have negative consequences both in the short and long term. One issue is the resulting environmental and safety disaster. Iran's nuclear facilities contain radioactive materials and a military attack would result in the release of these dangerous materials throughout the region.

Several Iranians featured in this report warned of the disastrous economic outcome in the event of a military attack. For example, lawyer Kambiz Nowruzzi said, "The economic structure will fall apart and poverty will become widespread; a crisis of security that will affect everyone. In one word, war will seriously endanger the entire Iranian society."

Pooya E. added that "the economic impact of a war will be most felt by the middle class and the poor."

⁹ Union of Concerned Scientists, "The Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP)," May 2005, http://www.ucsusa.org/nuclear_weapons_and_global_security/nuclear_weapons/technical_issues/the-robust-nuclear-earth.html#4 (accessed July 14, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The results of this survey of diverse Iranian civil society actors show a strong consensus against a military attack on Iran, which from their perspectives would drag further down the human rights situation, the level of human security, and prospects for positive change toward freedom, democracy, and accountability.

These interviews were conducted nearly two years into the government's ongoing violent crackdown on civil and political rights which aims at crushing the diffuse movement for human rights and democracy that was given impetus following the disputed 2009 presidential election. Despite this human rights crisis, which has directly affected the interviewees, they were largely united in their view that an attack would not diminish the repression, and would instead prove fatal to civil society and the pro-democracy movement.

While it is difficult to demonstrate, given the obstacles that stand in the way of accurately assessing public opinion in Iran, the Campaign would like to stress that these reflections and conclusions have significance far beyond the small group interviewed. Individuals were chosen for inclusion in the survey group in part on the basis of their considerable influence over the thinking of a notable share of the population.

Iran's diverse and engaged civil society has been at the forefront of human rights and democracy promotion. While having paid a heavy price for these efforts, Iranian civil society remains the best avenue for mitigating the state's authoritarian excesses, and with that, promoting human rights, normalizing relations with the international community, and ending the tension and isolation that haunt Iranian dealings with the West. In effect, the views of Iranian civil society leaders, including those interviewed, must be recognized if one wants to fully evaluate the short and long term consequences of military action against Iran.

Many of the interviewees emphasized their rejection of any justification for war with Iran being built on the country's dire human rights situation and a theory that a military strike would lead to positive change. Indeed, while the Islamic Republic has used the threat of war to justify intensified repression since 2009, the government's security agencies were able to build on a specter of war with the United States, to which American policies and political figures have made exploitable contributions.

The prospect of a military strike by the United States or Israel against the Islamic Republic is, in the final analysis, one to which both the United States and Iran have contributed, resulting in a dangerous syndrome that has had a pronounced negative impact on the people of Iran. The conflation of principled and legitimate concerns about human rights and freedoms with threats of military intervention, which has characterized the views of a number of US policymakers and advocates, worries members of Iranian civil society because of the association and infection of their highest ideals with the prospect of an attack. Such an attack is seen as likely to bring terrible destruction and ruin prospects for future realization of those ideals in concrete institutional change.

The *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* shares the concerns of the civil society leaders featured in this report. The threat of military conflict between the United States and Iran has dramatic ramifications not only for the human rights of Iranians, but for the integrity of human rights principles themselves. This destructive threat can be avoided, and can recede from the international stage, if both parties focus on their international legal obligations, including, inter alia, compliance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the United Nations Charter and the principle of *Jus ad bellum*, and international human rights and humanitarian law.

PART II: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

This section features the extended comments and biographies of the 35 individuals interviewed for this report. Their views on the ramifications of a military strike against Iran are shaped by their personal and professional experiences with the Iran-Iraq war and Iran's history of political turmoil. Collectively, these interviewees represent some of the most respected and influential activists and cultural leaders in Iranian society and thereby offer valuable insights into the perspectives of Iranian civil society regarding the military option.



MOHAMMAD SEIFZADEH | Lawyer

Seifzadeh is a prominent human rights lawyer and a founding member of the Defenders of Human Rights Center, along with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. He has represented numerous political activists, human rights defenders, and journalists accused primarily of national security crimes. Seifzadeh's persistence in drawing attention to the failures of Iran's judiciary has led to his own prosecution. In November 2010, he was sentenced to nine years in prison and a ten-year ban on practicing law on the charge of "acting against national security." An appeals court reduced his sentence to two years in June 2011. He is currently being held in Tehran's Evin Prison.

"We have the experiences of World Wars I and II and experienced the Iran-Iraq war up close. We know that the events following these wars eliminated any social progress or political achievements. After the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, all the dedication and lives that were given for democracy and freedom resulted in Reza Shah's dictatorship and World War II, and Iran lost so much. Generations of intellectuals are killed or imprisoned in the middle of these wars and democracy becomes barren."

"We also saw that the Iran-Iraq war led to what happened in the 1980s. Violent crimes rose and a revolution whose main slogan was 'freedom' and 'independence,' and had chosen the Islamic Republic in order to realize these goals, instead reached a point where it killed and oppressed its opponents. Supporters of human rights like us, who established the Defenders of Human Rights Center, were persecuted and imprisoned. In the end, the goals of the 1979 revolution were not realized. The social atmosphere we experienced immediately after the revolution was more open. All political activists and different groups could speak and be active and have their rights relatively respected. But as the war started, the atmosphere abruptly closed and society faced turmoil, violence, and assassinations, and groups were eliminated. Universities were shut down and their environments became restricted. Limitations were imposed on students, faculty, and staff. Generally, a new war would take us to a very bad environment. We are still paying for the violence that past wars forced on us."

"If a war were to take place right now, the atmosphere would definitely become more restricted and more limitations would be imposed upon intellectuals, human rights activists, social elites and students. If the West wishes to realize democracy, freedom, and human rights worldwide it should consider options other than war."

"Through [our Center], my colleagues and I established the National Peace Council (NPC). For a while during former US President Bush's term, war fever soared and a military attack on our country appeared probable. With the NPC we were able to encourage social elites to speak out against war. There were also anti-war demonstrations all over Europe, organized by my colleague [Nobel Peace Prize Laureate] Shirin Ebadi."



SIMIN BEHBAHANI | Poet

Born in 1927, Simin Behbahani is amongst Iran's most celebrated living poets and important figures in Iran's women's rights movement. She won the Carl von Ossietzky Medal by the International League for Human Rights in 1999. Government authorities have targeted Behbahani for her outspoken advocacy on behalf of Iranian women. In March 2010, authorities stopped her while she was attempting to board a plane to Paris to deliver a speech on the occasion of International Women's Day and forbade her from traveling.

"We have a very bad experience with war. We endured eight years of war with Iraq which was all a loss and not a penny of benefit. We fell down for years, the energy of our youth and our national wealth was wasted. Our youth were killed. Now, even if they give us millions in gold, I will never agree with war."

"If the rulers are cruel people themselves should rise against them and change the conditions of their country, just as we see in other countries these days. Generally, I don't like wars and I expect the United States, a very powerful country in the world and one with a good name, to act against war, because war does not solve anything."

"Conditions for writers do not improve after a war. What a bad person would I need to be to wish a war, so that my [banned] books could be published. Even if I am buried under a ton of dirt and not even one line of my writings remain I would never agree to a war, not only in my own country, but in any corner of the world."

TAHMINEH MILANI | Filmmaker

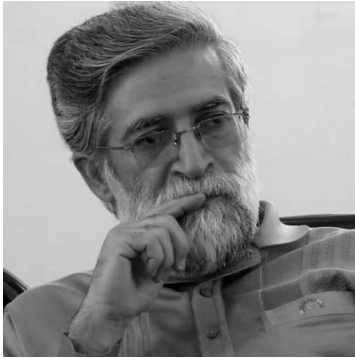
Born in 1960, Tahmineh Milani is an internationally acclaimed screenwriter and filmmaker. As a feminist, Milani's films explore the many struggles of women in Iran. Her first film, *"Bache Haya Talaagh,"* received the top award at Fajr Film Festival in 1989. In 1994, her film *"Do Zan,"* won the award for best screenplay at the Fajr Film Festival. Milani was arrested in 2000, after her film *"Nimeh Penhan"* was released and charged with "acting against national security," "enmity with God," and "creating public anxiety through artistic expression." She made the film *"Tasviah Hessab"* after her detention in the General Ward of Evin Prison about inmates she met there.



"We must not forget that Iranians are nationalistic and will not give even one molecule of their soil to foreigners. I lost a brother to the Iraq war, something I have never talked about and no one knows about. He was a soldier doing his compulsory military service. He suffered spinal injuries during the war and was paralyzed for ten years, and then he died. My mother died the following year. What did they die for, really? Sometimes people lose their lives to natural catastrophes, but sometimes we throw bombs and kill people. But why? Foreign governments may see us as inconsequential, but they have no right to think this way. We are a decent and good nation."

"I don't believe any country is authorized to take military action against Iran. As people experience cultural growth, they can do better things and find ways to reach democracy."

"Under the current circumstances, I believe there is a probability that the Iranian government would use a war to establish its own political power, just as this happened during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq. The government can use the war as an excuse and delay people's demands. It is easier to control and suppress people under war conditions."



AHMAD GHABEL | Theologian

Ahmad Ghabel is a well-known theologian and a student of the late dissident cleric Grand Ayatollah Hosseinali Montazeri. He has written numerous widely circulated open letters to Iran's Supreme Leader criticizing the country's social and political conditions. Over the last decade, Ghabel has been arrested numerous times, most recently in December 2009 on his way from Mashad to Qom to participate in the funeral of Ayatollah Montazeri. He has spent 170 days in prison.

"Any group who may take power following a violent change of political order would also resort to violence to suppress the population. This has been a historical problem for Iranians; that any group who reaches political power resorts to violence to suppress its opposition. If we want to put an end to this process, we must seek change through non-violent means."

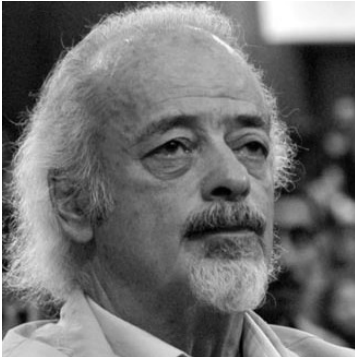
"Bombs cannot always distinguish between military targets and the civilian population. Also, the military personnel are Iranians who have families. The fact that the government doesn't treat its population well doesn't justify foreigners dropping bombs."

"A military attack will be tremendously harmful to the people's aspirations because our hearts and minds are not with foreign intervention. Assuming that a political change would follow an attack and the current system is replaced as a result, the new system would automatically be condemned because it had been empowered by foreign intervention. The time required for any new government to build trust with the people would be valuable time lost. Iranians have a historical memory of foreign interventions."

"This country doesn't belong to the Iranian government but to the Iranian people. We have no right to endanger the lives of a people."

"When foreign forces want to fight for our rights it won't be costless. They will impose heavy costs on the nation. However, in 1991 [during the Gulf War] the Iraqi infrastructure was bombed under the assumption that they were bolstering the Iraqi regime. I recall, they even bombarded powder milk factories in Baghdad. Or for example in Serbia, even bridges were bombarded. In all of these wars, industrial centers and infrastructure was destroyed despite being part of a nation's wealth. During all these wars the countries' economic infrastructure and social services were destroyed. These are part of a nation's backbone. If Iran cannot rebuild and restore its infrastructure for decades to come, it will obviously be a huge setback. I don't think any rational mind would accept such an outcome."

"Considering the regime's lack of mercy towards its opponents and the continuous accusation that opponents are foreign agents, if there is a military strike, the biggest damage will fall on national and religious opposition groups in Iran. It is even possible that their lives will be threatened."

**MOHAMMAD MALEKI** | Academic

Born in 1934, Maleki is a pro-democracy activist, academic, and former Chancellor of Tehran University. He was active during the 1979 revolution and immediately afterward became Chancellor of Tehran University and professor of Health and Food Industries. On 12 July 1981, authorities arrested Maleki after he criticized the closure of Iran's universities in the early 1980s. He spent five years in prison under harsh conditions. After the 2009 presidential election, Maleki criticized the government's crackdown and security forces arrested him on 22 August 2009. He spent 191 days in prison before being released on bail. Maleki is bedridden at home suffering from prostate cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

"An attack by foreign forces will harm everything. It is better that Iranians be allowed to solve their problems. They are well aware and conscious of what they need to do and there is no need for resorting to violence because it will not lead to any positive developments. If Iranians are seeking liberty, justice, and equality, they should develop their own means for achieving them."

"A military intervention will undoubtedly lead to a much more closed environment inside the country and give the regime the perfect excuse to oppress the people even more."

FAKHRALSADAT MOHTASHAMIPOUR | Activist

Fakhralsadat Mohtashamipour is a member of the Islamic Participation Front, a reformist political party. She previously served as the General Director of Women's Affairs at the Interior Ministry and was Chair of the Board of Directors of the NGO, *Women History Scholars*. Mohtashamipour is married to Mostafa Tajzadeh, who was Deputy Minister of the Interior during Khatami's presidency and was imprisoned after the 2009 presidential election. She has been a vocal advocate of the rights of her husband and other political prisoners. On 1 March 2011, she was arrested during a peaceful protest and still in prison as of this writing. She was hospitalized after going on hunger strike in prison to protest her husband's detention.



"International actors should focus on negotiations and not military confrontation. It is unimaginable that a military strike could resolve Iran's problems or create a more open atmosphere. When we have a democratic movement and the ability for mass participation to bring about positive change, then war is certainly not the answer. We believe that with some patience and resistance the people can take society in a direction away from this militarized and coup-like atmosphere."

"When you speak of freedom of opinion and free elections, these values are in opposition to the beliefs of the coup leaders [current government]. This does not mean that efforts [for reform] will be unsuccessful, however, it requires patience, persistence, attention, and enlightenment in society. Everyday people become more informed in regards to their society and their problems."

"If there is a military strike against Iran it will certainly create a security state. Using war chatter [government officials] try to pressure the society, and to hinder civil society's activities by accusing them of aiding the United States to attack Iran and helping the enemy. [In the case of war] there may be life threats made against civil society activists, and thus increased pressure on them. These are serious issues. In today's atmosphere they are waiting for any sort of excuse. This is because war is the regime's lifeline. They depend on it. They can thrive in a war environment."



MOHAMMAD ALI DADKHAH | Lawyer

Mohammad Ali Dadkhah is a prominent human rights lawyer and a founding member of the Defenders of Human Right Center, along with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. Dadkhah has represented numerous prisoners of conscience, including Gonabadi Dervishes, a persecuted religious minority, and opposition activists. On 8 July 2009, security forces detained Dadkhah as part of a crackdown on human rights lawyers following the disputed 2009 presidential election. On 3 July 2011, a lower court sentenced him to eight years in prison for “propaganda against the regime,” and “cooperation for soft overthrow of the regime,” among other charges.

“Human rights advocacy aims to promote peace, stability, and prosperity of human beings. In contrast, a military attack means the killing of innocent human beings for no fault of their own. What kind of rationality could justify and accept such an action?”

“As someone who is engaged in the protection and promotion of human rights, I don’t believe a military attack would resolve any of our current concerns. Indeed, Iranian society’s attitude towards anyone who would advocate war under the guise of human rights and democracy would be terribly negative.”

“If we look at the experiences of countries such as Iraq or Afghanistan, or any other country where legitimate human rights concerns were exploited for justifying military intervention, we see that there is no peace in such countries. We must believe in the fact that our need is to promote dialogue and rational interactions to solve our problems. The bitter experience of war should not be repeated. We should learn our lessons and plan accordingly.”

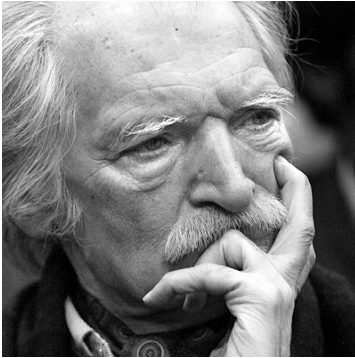
HAMID R. | Journalist

Hamid R. is a respected reformist journalist and editor. Several of the publications he has worked for have been banned by authorities. In his writings, he has been critical of the Iranian government and has been summoned by judicial authorities on numerous occasions for questioning.

“The foremost impact of such an attack, given the level of dissent and the government’s instability, is to cause serious divisions among the Green Movement that has come to existence during the past two years. The movement has paid a heavy price through hundreds of lives and many more political prisoners. But a foreign military attack would cause many in the movement’s rank-and-file to react to such development. This is the foremost desire of the current government, because they know that the survival of their rule rests upon igniting nationalist and religious feelings within the population. Any foreign military intervention would play an important and decisive role in consolidation of the present regime. The memory [of the US-led 1953 coup] is quite alive among Iranians, and the government will [in the case of an attack by the United States] invest in resurrecting it to its own advantage through propaganda.”

“Without doubt, attacking any country would lead to violations of human rights. It is inevitable that any aggression would result in unacceptable crimes. Although international law forbids attacking civilians, which is a major concern for the human rights community, there are no guarantees that innocent lives will not be lost.”

“Iran is a mosaic of ethnicities and because of the general discontent with the central government, each region could be influenced by separatist tendencies. A foreign military attack would set on fire such tendencies and could lead to an uncontrollable chaos.”



MAHMOUD DOWLATABADI | Author

Born in 1940, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi is among the most celebrated authors in Iran. His works include the ten-volume epic *"Kalidar,"* *"Ja-ye Khali-ye Solooch,"* and *"Roozegar-e Separi Shodeye Marde Salkhordeh."* Dowlatabadi began his artistic work as a theater actor and playwright. He is active in Iranian politics, having supported Mir Hossein Moussavi during his 2009 election campaign. Dowlatabadi's most recent novel, *"Colonel,"* was published in Germany last year but has not yet received a publication permit in Iran.

"I believe that war is one of the maladies of the human community; in the case of a potential war between Iran and the US, I believe the relations between the two countries will be ruined forever."

"I witnessed eight years of war with Iraq, which had no good coming out of it. Many writers were forced to leave Iran or became depressed and isolated. I don't have a good experience from war."

"I believe we writers can write more freely in Iran and publish our books if there is peace in the world. During a war, all conditions are compulsory, and in fact the government finds excuses to prevent cultural activities. I believe that with a war, the conditions for writers and artists not only do not improve; they get a lot worse."

"I hope that the reforms in Iran continue to move forward and create change in conditions, so that our country is not constantly in a state of contradiction with the rest of the world. This is my personal wish."

MAJID H. | Student Activist

Majid H. is a student activist who was arrested after the 2009 presidential election and spent several months in prison. He is a member of the nationwide reformist and pro-Green Movement student organization, *Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat*. After receiving repeated summonses to appear at the Ministry of Intelligence, he has gone into hiding. He interviewed with the Campaign on condition of anonymity due to security concerns and fear of reprisal from judicial authorities.

"[An attack] would result in destruction of the country's infrastructure and would be a huge setback for the people, a bitter experience that would destroy any present achievements. [The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan] not only did not achieve their stated goals, but resulted in further destruction. It is particularly heart-wrenching to witness the developments in Afghanistan. In Iraq, although the country was freed from [Saddam Hussein's] dictatorship, following the American attack, the daily cost of it is not acceptable. Any rational mind would seek a less costly and surer way of achieving democracy. Any war takes the humanity out of humans. [A conflict] would change the social and political environment of the country in the worst possible manner."

"Our people today are closer than ever in achieving historical goals such as a broad understanding of rights and freedoms, and an understanding that having opposing views is possible. Respect for one's opinions and creed and tolerance of differences are concepts that are widely taking root among the young generation. This is providing the grounds for united actions to demand respect for these from the state too, such as in the form of protests in the last couple of years. It is a manifestation of a collective consciousness and spirit. Having paid a heavy price standing up and fighting religious fundamentalism, reactionary thoughts, and monarchic dictatorship to reach this point, would it not be ironic to welcome war and provide further opportunity for enemies of human rights and democracy? To provide for an uncertain and complicated situation?"



SADEQ ZIBAKALAM | Professor

Born in 1948, Sadeq Zibakalam is a researcher, political analyst, and a faculty member at Tehran University. Zibakalam holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Bradford University in the United Kingdom. He has published dozens of books, some of which are used as textbooks in Iranian universities. Zibakalam is one of Iran's leading public intellectuals known for his cutting analysis and opinions on Iran's domestic and international affairs. Consequently, broadcast media outlets consistently seek him out as an expert in the field.

"First of all, a military strike will not help the democracy and reformist movement at all because it will cause militarization of the country. The military and Revolutionary Guards will increase their power and radical elements on the conservative right will be strengthened. All of these will seriously harm the movement for greater freedoms. An attack will seriously harm the reformist and democracy movements in Iran, providing a pretext for the government to increase its pressure on them."

"On the other hand, chaos and instability following a military strike, could lead to occupation of certain parts of the country and cause a civil war and even disintegration. If Arab countries become the allies of Western powers and the United States in such a confrontation, we can see serious problems in border provinces such as Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchistan, Kurdistan, and Azerbaijan. Furthermore, attacking nuclear installations will certainly cause a chain reaction. Most importantly is that Iran's reaction will be to attack American military bases in the region, regardless of how successful it might be. If an attack is initiated by Israel, Iran will order (Lebanese) Hizbollah to attack Israel and then Israelis will expand their military campaign (into Lebanon)."

"If the US attacks Iran, an implicit alliance between Iran, Al-Qaeda, and the Taliban will be formed based on the logic that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend.'"

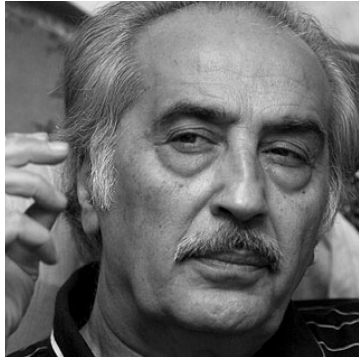
SHIRIN F. | Environmental Activist

Shirin F. is an Iranian civil society and environmental activist. Over the past 13 years she has been active in the Iranian civil society and participated in environmentalist projects carried out by various NGOs. With the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and increasing governmental hostility towards NGOs, her organization lost a number of its projects. Intelligence officials interrogated her consistently after she returns from international conferences on environmental issues. Shirin F. agreed to be interviewed on condition of anonymity.

"As someone who spent much of my childhood and adolescence during [the Iran-Iraq] war, I can never be favorable towards a war scenario. During the war, people struggled just to stay alive. This may strengthen social solidarity but it also results in a depressed society when no one thinks of building anything."

"If someone was involved in social activism [during the Iran-Iraq war], they would be called 'comfortable' and 'without pain.' It took many years for such activists to find and legitimize their work and concerns throughout towns, cities, and institutions. A new war would be a great setback. It will remove us much further from democracy, civil society, and social activism. People will be the main losers of such a war."

"Those [countries] who advocate war in today's political climate, are those who consider themselves the flag bearers of democracy and human rights. What kind of human rights framework allows countries to decide war or peace for the people of another nation? They will cause war, then assign reconstruction budgets, build local armies, all for bringing peace to another nation. No lasting peace is achieved through foreign intervention."

**MOHAMMAD ALI SEPANLOU** | Poet

Born in 1940, Sepanlou is a poet, translator, and literary critic and one of the most renowned contemporary poets in Iran. He has translated the works of world famous writers into Persian, including Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre. He began writing in the 1960s and was a founding member of the Iranian Writers' Association. In the past 20 years, Sepanlou has been among a handful of poets who have participated in conferences in Europe and the United States and whose work has been translated into multiple languages, including English, German, French, and Arabic. Several of Sepanlou's poetry collections have been denied publication permits by Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

"I thought a lot about war with Iran, and every time I opposed it because more than anything else it will hurt the people of Iran. First of all, any war that could take place would not be a short-term war, and secondly, the instinct to defend and the nationalism of the Iranian people would come into play, and assuming that the country's rule changes, it will be followed by a civil war which would also hurt the people of Iran."

"A war would not serve US interests, as Iranians are the only people among the Islamic countries of the Middle East who have a favorable view of Americans. Unlike the Shah's time when Iranians were against the United States, they have no animosity toward the United States right now. If any blood were shed between the two countries, it would be to both countries' disadvantage. We do not wish to see another Iraq here, where everyday a car bomb could go off. Nobody can predict the results of a war and say what would happen after a war; therefore I oppose a war one hundred percent."

"Even the situation of literature is unpredictable during a war and following a war. War casualties would lead poets into becoming the elegy writers of their country."

KEYVAN P. | Journalist

Keyvan P. is a journalist and blogger for ten years. He was arrested during the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election. He lost his job after the 2009 election when authorities shut down many reformist newspapers. He interviewed on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

"During [the Iran-Iraq war], the press had no ability to reflect what was happening inside prisons, either domestically or on the international level. This scenario could very well be repeated if a new military situation arises. Many prisoners who hold on to their beliefs in opposing the Islamic Republic could be executed."

"Today there are many forms of alternative media, such as those empowered by the Internet, but due to government control, they won't have much impact inside the country and may only inform the outside world in a limited way. The bulk of the population would be under the grip of government propaganda and will not know of large numbers of executions or widespread torture inside prisons. Under a military crisis, all security-related sentences would urgently be implemented and no form of civil action or movement be tolerated. This has been demonstrated in a limited way during the post-election events of the last couple of years."

"In general, [war] will be disadvantageous because the government will increase censorship in order to preserve itself. It's even possible that they will set up a system to filter all sources of information. For example, it's possible that domestic media outlets will be required to be checked by a government agent before going to publication. [War] will increase censorship in Iran and create a tool for repressing journalists."



LILI GOLESTAN | Author

Born on 14 July 1944, Lili Golestan is a literary translator, author and owner and artistic director of the well-known Golestan Art Gallery. She is the daughter of the renowned Iranian filmmaker and writer, Ebrahim Golestan. In 1981, Golestan opened a bookstore in the garage of her home, which soon became a well-known meeting place of great writers and poets of the era, such as Ahmad Shamlou, Mohammad Zohari, Ahmad Mahmoud, Ali-Akbar Sa'idi Sirjani, and Abdolhossein Navaei. In 1988, she converted the bookstore into the visual arts gallery, Golestan Art Gallery, which has showcased the works of some of the most celebrated Iranian and international artists.

“When civilized nations can engage in dialogue to address their differences, there is no justification for barbaric actions such as war. It would not result in any positive developments and will bring about the deaths of many innocent civilians as well as chaos and anarchy.”

“I don't believe problems regarding Iran can be solved with a military attack at all. Look at Iraq. The United States wanted to solve its problems with war, but has that been achieved? Unfortunately, the United States has failed in this effort and regarding Iran, the military option must be completely discarded.”

NATASHA AMIRI | Author

Amiri is a writer, literary critic, and the author of several novels such as *“Eshgh Rooye Chakraye Dovvom,”* and *“Hoola...Hoola.”* She has received several literary awards, including Sokhan.com's award for Best Popular Story for *“Aan Keh Shabih-e to Nist,”* on the occasion of famed author Sadegh Hedayat's 100th birthday. She has also received numerous awards in Iran, including first prize from the literary magazine *Asr-e Panjshanbeh* and the Iranian People's Prize for her debut novel *“House of Stories”*.



“I believe that we who live inside of Iran have a more accurate view of Iranian society. In my opinion, discussing the military option, given Iran's current regional situation, is odd; especially after the sanctions imposed on Iran. Meaning, it is unlikely that immediately after imposing sanctions that the military option will be chosen. As a writer who hears outsiders' criticism, I feel that their analysis is far from reality because they have no contact with the Iranian people. Being inside the country, I believe that our people are not ready for war and view war as foreign intervention. Maybe in three months the situation will change.”

“A lot of people inside Iran may be unsatisfied, but they are not willing to choose just any option to change their situation. They are much more aware than the pre-revolution era. After all, we have been through a revolution. My question is: after a war will our situation be like Iraq? I went to Iraq after the Iraq war and their condition was not desirable. I would not want that for my country.”

RAMIN G. | Lawyer

Ramin G. is an active human rights lawyer. Last year, authorities arrested and sentenced him to prison after he represented a number of human rights abuse victims. Despite pressure from authorities to stop his activities, Ramin G. continues to speak to national and international media about his cases in order to raise public awareness and mobilize support for his clients. He continues his work under very difficult circumstances, repeatedly receiving threats from judicial authorities. Ramin G. interviewed with the Campaign on condition of anonymity.

“Standing up to America has been instrumentally used to whip up the emotions of [the regime’s] base and bring them into the streets for years. They publicly state that [the United States] is the country’s main concern and this idea has become an unconscious belief for many people, both supporting and opposing the state. In event of a war, such sloganeering would move into the realm of reality. Any opposition to the government would be considered siding with [US] imperialism. In practice, many opposition sympathizers could end up in the government’s camp, leaving the remaining opposition forces few and inactive. They will be seen as taking the foreign aggressor’s side, making it easy to label them the enemy’s fifth column and providing a justification for their repression.”

“The crisis stemming from a military confrontation would significantly lower the level of people’s expectations from the state because the people would have to choose between a ‘bad’ situation, meaning the rule of a dictatorial system and related hardships, versus a ‘worse’ situation, that would entail losing national independence and sovereignty. The majority would prefer to choose the ‘bad’ option over the ‘worse.’ Under a military situation, violence and its consequences would spread throughout society, but its implementation would remain hidden from the public eye. The government could use the situation to settle political scores on a wide scale to eliminate its opposition. In parallel to violence unleashed during a war, the rule of law and a minimum respect for its standards and people’s rights would be completely ignored. War is a good instrument for whipping up the society’s nationalistic emotions and abusing them for the purpose of covering up the failings of the state.”

“Religious rulers, in general, would portray any military confrontation with their enemies as a sacred battle of the Righteous and struggle against the Infidels and would propagate it as such. Under such views, there is no doubt that that the State’s attempts to develop nuclear arms would become a clear strategic goal. Such thinking would unfortunately be strengthened even in event of a military failure and setback for it, and would result in suicidal movements and widespread assassinations of dissidents inside the country and especially abroad. It is under such circumstances that the international community would be hard pressed with regard to options available to it. Because such a political system, in addition to the usual tools at their disposal, also enjoy a cultural, religious, and populist base amongst certain layers of the society and would use it to whip up religious emotions and abuse religious beliefs as a weapon and defensive shield, which will not be limited to the Iranian people and could spark a broad crisis throughout the Muslim populations of the region.”

“As the freedom-seeking movement inside the country continues to develop and grow and the State’s weakness in confronting it reveals itself, as well as the inherit contradictions of the system. The emergence of a foreign military confrontation, more than being a necessity for the United States and the West, would be in line with the desires of the ruling class because the government can use the situation to unify its fragmented forces and solidify itself.”

“It is the people who will carry the burden, both in the short and long-term. And the ruling class, by increasing its repression and pressures, will preserve itself. Ultimately a military attack does not impact the government’s grip on power.”

HASSAN B. | Student Activist

Hassan B. is a student rights activist who was arrested after the 2009 presidential election. The Campaign conducted the interview while he was released on a short furlough from prison. Hassan B. is one of the most vocal student activists advocating against the violence used towards Iranian citizens in the aftermath of the 2009 election. He agreed to be interviewed on condition of anonymity.

“If war breaks out, democracy, human rights, and civil society will be the main losers. The Iranian government would militarize and such a militaristic government has the potential to carry out widespread killings of its opponents, such as what happened in Iraqi Kurdistan or against Shi’as in the South of Iraq [under Saddam’s rule]. Human rights crimes will be at their zenith.”

“The only way forward is through negotiations. So far we haven’t seen any serious negotiations in the region that benefits the people. We have witnessed a series of wars, such as in Afghanistan or Iraq, or crippling sanctions against Iraq under Saddam that led to the Oil for Food program.”

“Economic sanctions will harm the people most because the government has oil revenues. For example, the Revolutionary Guard controls as many as 1000 companies that are based in the UAE and carry out their business from there. Sanctions will bring a crisis for the people and not them.”

SHADMEHR RASTIN | Screenwriter

Born in 1964, Shadmehr Rastin is one of Iran’s most famous screenwriters having written the scripts for *“Be Hamin Sadeghi”* directed by Reza Mirkarimi, and *“Offside!”* directed by Jafar Panahi. *“Be Hamin Sadeghi”* won the award for Best Script at the 26th Fajr Film Festival. The film was shown at film festivals in Chicago, Moscow, Hamburg, and Portland, receiving the award for Best Film at the Moscow International Film Festival.



“On the off-chance that the Americans were to make such an unwise decision and attack Iran, a situation similar to the American-led coup 50 years ago [in 1953] will happen in Iran again and the United States’ image will be more tarnished than ever for Iranians. Iran has a civil society, something that didn’t exist in any of the other countries where US attacked. The US attack may have helped the people of those countries to reach their civil demands, but in Iran people express their demands in modern ways.”

“Any government anywhere in the world that does not have regard for its people needs an external enemy for unity. This is the case all over the world. Maybe for the US government, this is space aliens, and for the Iranian government, it is the US. Many politicians use this alternative. It appears that under the present circumstances, our politicians think about the war a lot, and it seems that this is their number one alternative now. I am very concerned that under the existing circumstances, in order to bring unity between the nation and the government, this alternative may be chosen. I hope that this lack of wisdom does not develop in Iran.”

ALIREZA K. | Journalist

Alireza K. is a well-known political journalist who has previously written for reformist newspapers. Due to his activism he has been imprisoned, arrested, and interrogated by security forces. During his 15 years of work as a journalist, on a number of occasions he has been forced to change jobs due to the government banning reformist newspapers. He agrees to speak to the Campaign on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

“Before the 2009 election, most reformists and moderates feared a military confrontation with the United States and considered it not only against the interests of the general public, but also against the interests of the reformist camp who wanted to bring about fundamental changes from within the system. But today, many reformists and moderates are of the belief that the Islamic Republic is not amenable to gradual change and engaging it on a reformist path is not possible. Thus, if they previously opposed a limited military strike, today, if not welcoming it, they may not oppose it. But is this option in the interests of the population? No. The Iranian people have a collective culture. They try to depict an image of a cohesive society so when tragedy strikes they can become united and overcome the obstacles. The people of Iran are like a field of wheat. They stand together, and when a powerful wind blows they bend. They even bend to the point of hitting the ground, but they do not break. They take refuge in one another until the storm passes, and then they regain composure and live on. This is why foreign government’s pressures have not worked on them. Not only have they not worked, but rather they have strengthened their bonds. We should distinguish between the Iranian people and their government. [In the case of a military strike] people will gravitate towards unifying behind the government. All means of communication are in the hands of the government. They utilize religion and religious principles effectively to guarantee the survival of the regime, and strengthen the opposition against the United States. They create a duality of good and evil. They portray the survival of the country as being tied to the survival of the regime.”

KAMBIZ NOWROUZI | Lawyer

Nowruzi, a lawyer, was the legal secretary of the Iranian Press Association until it was banned in 2009. Security forces detained him outside a mosque on Sunday, 28 June 2009 during the crackdown that followed the disputed 2009 election. Nowruzi spent two weeks in detention and was sentenced by the Revolutionary Court to two years in prison and 76 lashes on charges of “propagating against the regime,” and “disrupting public order.”



“Any attack will have no legal justification and it will surely be a transgression.”

“If the United States, by itself or in cooperation with its allies, attacks Iran, we will witness severe and widespread violations of human rights. No doubt all social layers will be harmed by such an action. During wartime, civil, social, and political freedoms will be extremely constrained.”

“The economic structure will fall apart and poverty will become widespread; a crisis of security that will affect everyone. In one word, war will seriously endanger the entire Iranian society.”

PAYAM D. | Journalist

Payam D. is a prominent Iranian journalist. On numerous occasions, authorities have summoned and interrogated him about articles he wrote in reformist newspapers discussing domestic politics. He has been instrumental in providing support to the families of journalists arrested in the aftermath of the 2009 disputed election. Editors of the publication Payam D. worked for were told after the election that his continued employment would lead to the closure of the newspaper. He was forced to leave his job several months later.

“Even if movements towards [social and political] goals are slowed down and under serious attack, in the instance of a military attack they would come to a complete halt for a very long term.”

“In reality, among Iran’s ruling strata, there is a group that is deeply and wholeheartedly open to the idea of military action against Iran. It is evident that welcoming military action does not stem from their wish for improvement in the civil society or human rights situation in Iran. Rather, military action against Iran from their perspective provides the excuse of an external threat and feeds already existing propaganda that the political opposition is instigated by outside forces. This propaganda is aimed at the lower class that is the logistical backbone of the regime. Thus, using these excuses the government will prepare the grounds for the oppression of political opposition, human rights defenders, and civil society activists.”

BAHMAN KESHAVARZ | Lawyer

Bahman Keshavarz is a prominent defense lawyer and head of the Iranian Bar Association. He became a household name during the high profile case of Gholamhossein Karbaschi, the former mayor of Tehran. For many Iranians, his defense of Karbaschi remains one of the more memorable events in Iranian legal history. Keshavarz has also authored several books on different legal topics including a legal dictionary and one focusing on commercial law.



“Military action, in very rare cases, may be utilized to defend another countries’ security. It requires serious justification that isn’t present in the case of Iran. Thus, any mention of such an attack is irrelevant [under UN standards]. In my opinion discussing a military attack is absurd and baseless, and it would only be discussed by those who have ulterior motives.”

“When we don’t clearly know what the problem is, how can military strike be chosen as a form of prevention? The extent of Iran’s nuclear technology and its use for creation of nuclear weapons and threatening other countries is unclear. The fact that countries have a right to nuclear energy is not a mystery and no one questions it; especially a country that is part of [the NPT] and has permitted inspection of its nuclear activities [by the IAEA]. When no one has been able to prove with certainty Iran’s military use of nuclear technology, how can there be talk about a military strike? There can be no discussions on this topic unless someone just wants to start a war, and that can be done using just about any excuse.”

**KAMBOZIA PARTOVI** | Filmmaker

Born in 1955, Partovi is a prominent screenwriter and director. He has written scripts for several famous Iranian films including, “*Man, Taraneh, 15 Saal Daram*” and “*Dishab Babato Didam, Aida*.” In 2005, Partovi received the award for Best Script at the Ninth Annual Cinema House Awards for “*Café Transit*”. Partovi also received the award for Best Script for “*Man, Taraneh, 15 Saal Daram*” at the 20th Fajr Film Festival. Partovi also authored the Oscar-nominated screenplay for the Iranian film classic “*The Circle*”, directed by Jafar Panahi.

“Eight years of war with Iraq showed that nothing positive comes from war. Right now we can see the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. The ones who are most affected are the people.”

“I think the war with Iraq caused the Islamic state to become stronger than before. The regime used the war excuse and involved all social forces to establish itself. While we defended our country, the regime established itself. I have thought a lot about your question of ‘What would I do if a war breaks out?’ and I think it’s clear that I will defend, because I care about my country and my people.”

“Even so, we must come to a common understanding ourselves [for achieving democracy] and believe in it. We will then find the way for it, like the people of Egypt and other places.”

POOYA E. | Student Activist

Pooya E. is a human rights and student activist responsible for revealing various human rights violations in a number of provinces in Iran. At the time of this writing, he had been summoned to the local Intelligence Office of his town regarding his participation in several student gatherings and interviews with the media. Given the potential consequences of this interview, he agreed to speak with the Campaign on condition of anonymity.

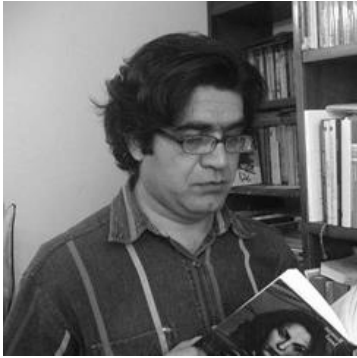
“First and foremost, a military intervention over the nuclear crisis, or any other issue, will undoubtedly have a negative impact on human rights and democracy in Iran.”

“Increasing international discourse on violence and force will translate domestically to a discourse of violence by the government against the people. Whereas enhancing a discourse of negotiations on the international level will result in opening the political space and security inside Iran.”

“Iran’s contemporary social and political history demonstrates that foreign intervention for bringing about a desired environment has never succeeded, and in the long run has produced outcomes to the contrary.”

“Even if we believe in the sincerity of right wing and pro-war elements in the West claiming to support democracy and human rights, we must realize that an attack will not lead to democratic changes. In general, any effect in Iran caused by foreign intervention will not be lasting in terms of leading to democracy or respect for human rights.”

“The economic impact of a war will be most felt by the middle class and the poor. It will weaken respect for human rights and will do much harm to a fragile civil society.”



ALI ABDOLLAHI | Poet

Abdollahi was born in 1968 in Birjand, Khorasan. He is a poet and translator of German literature. He has translated collections of German poets including Nietzsche, Erich Fried, and Martin Heidegger. He has also published three of his own poetry collections including “*Hey Raah Miravam dar Taariki*.” Abdollahi teaches German and German translation in Azad Universities in Tehran and Isfahan.

“I categorically oppose any war. It will destroy the economic and cultural infrastructure and make the situation much worse.”

“The truth is that under the present circumstances, life for writers and artists has been very difficult, but in the case of war it will be much more uncertain.”

KAMRAN L. | Student Activist

Kamran L. is a former member of the Central Council of *Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat* (Office for Strengthening Unity), a nationwide student organization. He was arrested following the 2009 presidential election and spent several months in prison. Prior to his arrest, he was considered to be one of the most influential and effective members of the organization’s leadership. Due to his activism, the Ministry of Intelligence barred him from pursuing a graduate degree even though Kamran L. passed the Graduate Entrance Exam. Kamran L. spoke with the Campaign on condition of anonymity.

“A military strike against Iran’s nuclear installations will have negative consequences both in the short and long term. One issue is the resulting environmental and safety disaster. Iran’s nuclear facilities contain radioactive materials and a military attack would result in the release of these dangerous materials throughout the region. The second issue is Iran’s response and retaliation would result in further conflict, instability, and war in the region, and ordinary Iranians will be the main victims of these conditions.”

“A military strike would also likely result in Iran pulling out of the [Non-Proliferation Treaty] and speed up its nuclear program, which could make Iran into another North Korea or Iraq under Saddam, and that would truly be a disaster.”

“The government will considerably intensify its attack on dissidents and attempt to uproot them and this could even expand to targeting those in the diaspora outside of Iran. International security and the human rights of [Iranian] citizens are intertwined and the international community should not separate them. The regime has the potential to carry out a widespread massacre of its citizens.”

“At the point where the threat of Iran having nuclear weapons becomes very serious, or at the point when the Iranian regime commits human rights atrocities within its borders, or exerts negative influence in the region, at that point if all peaceful means to stop Iran fail, then a crippling attack with the permission of the UN and under the supervision of relevant international organizations, as a way to permanently end such problems, may be the last defensible option. However, right now it doesn’t seem, at least from the nuclear weapons perspective, that Iran’s nuclear activities pose an imminent threat. A limited strike will not resolve anything, rather it will start an era of intricate crisis and destruction.”

NIMA R. | Author

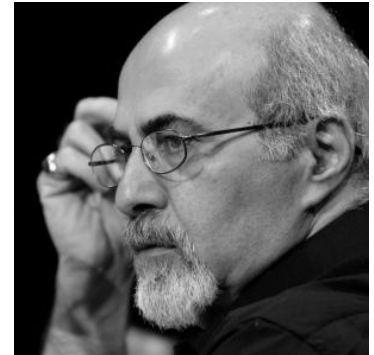
Nima R. is a journalist with a state-owned national newspaper specializing in social affairs. He has more than 20 years of experience as a reporter and publication manager. Nima R. is one of the few Green Movement supporters that has been able to resist the increasing pressure from authorities to quit his position in state media. Over the past few years, many of his colleagues and friends have been imprisoned or have lost their jobs as a result of political persecution. Authorities also arrested some of his family members during post-election events. He interviewed with the Campaign on condition of anonymity.

“[Today] as soon as newspaper editors and staff start their daily meetings to choose the headlines, a fax arrives from the press officers of the Intelligence Ministry. It outlines the topics allowed to be discussed in detail and those that are off limits. The justification given by them is from a security-minded framework that ‘we should not strengthen the views of enemies and cause uncertainties and in general aid the enemy’s soft-war.’ The newspaper staff has learned to implement such restrictions through self-censorship as well. Now, imagine if a foreign power were to attack Iran, then, with or without reason, any kind of activity by civil society and democracy advocates will come under complete attack and become the perfect excuse for repressing any critical thoughts.”

“Thus, I am of the belief that a war or military intervention would provide an opportunity for the state to finish off all civil society, social and political activists, journalists, academics, students, and [others]. It will certainly give more power to military men to take over the helm of the state, more than before, and to confront democracy advocates even more brazenly.”

BEHROUZ GHARIBPOUR | Author

Born in 1959, Gharibpour is an author and director of theater and puppet opera at the House of Artists of Iran and Bahman Cultural Center. In 1997, he was forced to resign as the head of the House of Artists of Iran after Kayhan Newspaper vilified him as an organizer of the velvet revolution. So far he has written numerous plays including, “*Rostam and Sohrab Puppet Opera*,” “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” “*2342 Bad Days*,” and “*Qajar-style Puppet Show*.” Most of his plays have entered prestigious international theater festivals around the world, such as the Avington Theater Festival.



“I am absolutely opposed to a military strike and foreign intervention. Any foreign power launching a strike will be the main loser because Iranians love their country and even if the conditions are not to our liking, we will not allow any foreign invasion. The United States caused many negative consequences with its support of the 1953 military coup and an attack today would have a lasting negative impact for decades to come.”

“A foreign attack or invasion will not solve any of the problems we face in the cultural domains of theatre and cinema. We have always tried to solve these issues through peaceful means. In my opinion, if any Iranian loves their country, they would seriously oppose an attack, and I belong to this group.”



ALIREZA BEHNAM | Poet

Alireza Behnam is a poet, translator, and a journalist who has worked with the cultural desks of several newspapers and publications since 1993. He currently works at *Roozan* newspaper. Behnam has published four collections of poems and two translated collections of poetry. His books include *"Nim-e Man ast keh Misoozad,"* and *"Aghrabeh ha dor-e Gerdbad."* In August 2002, he received the Blur Pen Prize for criticism at the International Library of Poetry. In 2008, he was selected as one of three Iranian poets at the Joint Literary Workshop of Iran and Germany held in Berlin.

"In order to accept a war for bringing about democracy, we must be persuaded that the system has no potential for reform and that civil society activists have no ability to promote or advocate for change. I believe in some countries where the United States has intervened, these conditions were in place and there was no other option than a military attack, but it is not true in the case of Iran. We have not yet explored all of the Constitution's potentials for ensuring basic freedoms are respected and this can happen by pressures from civil society. Iranian civil society is not yet completely defunct."

"In my opinion, a foreign military intervention would have very negative consequences and will bring to a halt the gradual and natural movement and development [towards democratization]. It will bring to a halt democratic aspirations within the society. Even discussions of an American military strike will lead to [the government] preventing the activities of intellectuals and civil society activists. It will be the activists who will pay the price for foreign threats. Since the ruling class and traditional segments of society accuse [pro-democracy intellectuals] of having such beliefs that make them supporters of foreigners, with the onset of a war, they will experience the most pressure. I believe, under the present circumstances, it is best to drop any discussions or threats of war."

ABBAS GHAFFARI | Actor & Director

Abbas Ghaffari is a theater director, actor, and critic who has staged plays such as *"Khaab-e Bivaghte Houriyeh,"* *"Aab mara Ghesseh Kard,"* and *"Najvahaye Shabaneh."* Ghaffari has also appeared in several plays including *"Kadoo Tanbal,"* *"Shazdeh Koochooloo,"* and *"Yek Zan, Yek Mard."*



"No freedom loving person can support war anywhere in the world. War has always shown it cannot bring about democracy and liberty. During and after a war, the society will become much more closed and move towards destruction."

"Particularly in the past few years we have seen that the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have not ushered in democratic societies in these countries."

"We, in theater, have the fresh experience of the Iran-Iraq war. We saw that during those years, because of the militarization, the cultural space was further closed. I think even if after a war, the environment were to open up, for theater it will not, and will remain closed. We don't wish to repeat the same bitter experiences."

**SHAHRAM MOKRI | Filmmaker**

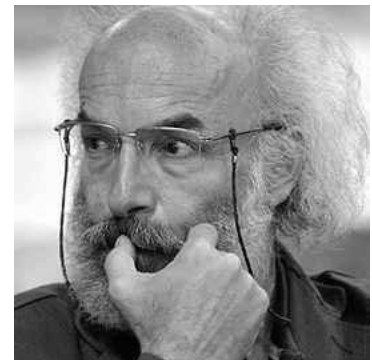
Born in 1977, Shahram Mokri is one of Iran's most famous short film directors and a screenwriter, film editor, lecturer. Mokri first achieved fame with his short film *"Toofan-e Sanjaaghak"*. Later, his short film *"Mahdood-e Dayereh"* won the award for Best Short Film at the 25th Fajr Film Festival. Mokri made his first feature film, *"Ashkan, Angoshtar-e Motebarek, va Chand Daastan-e Digar"* in 2008, which was met with critical acclaim. He has also lectured at Iran's Young Cinema Society.

"I was raised in the border city of Kermanshah, and I may have touched war closer than many other Iranians. I have seen how deep and destructive my generation's fear of war is. My view of war is not a tourist's view, nor an idealistic one. I didn't read about war in magazines or watch it in films. I had to take shelter from bombs many times, my school was shut down because of it on many days, and I had a collection of shrapnel and missile pieces in my home. I say touching the war up close is a very terrifying thing, and I don't wish it repeated."

"A society is not comprised of only its leaders; a society has different layers such as students, businessmen, city dwellers, etc. I believe the only thing war does is to take the top layer and replace it with another layer. Every society must change from within, and not from the outside."

KIANOUSH AYARI | Filmmaker

Kianoush Ayari is a writer and filmmaker who has won several awards at the Fajr Film Festival. He started his career in 1970 with the Ahvaz Chapter of the Free Cinema Group and made a name for himself in experimental cinema. Ayari's socially analytic viewpoint has allowed him to portray the lives of people who are lost in different layers of society. His films include *"Bidar sho Arezoo," "Boodan ya Naboodan,"* and *"Shaakh-e Gaav."*



"Just like all other people, even if I am facing repression, I cannot be in favor of a war. To be sure, there are those in our country who may be freed of some of their problems if there is a war. But as wars bring with them violence and bloodshed, I am not in favor of them. A war also means interference in the affairs of another country which could have very frightening consequences -- bloodshed, repression, insecurity, and a severe drop in quality of life, none of which I favor."

"We had the experience of eight years of war with Iraq and incidentally, our filmmakers had a very good presence in international circles during the war. The truth is that artists and human beings as a whole try to continue their lives to the extent possible and to cope with their conditions. Coping is a human trait. Artists can work both during times of heavy restrictions and times of relative freedom."

"The problems imposed upon society during a war will include artists who will have to continue their work under difficult and unfavorable circumstances. I don't believe the Iranian government wishes a war. Whatever angle you consider, a war is not in the best interest of anyone. Even if some wish to continue their existence through a war, they will not benefit from it as wars are no joke."



FATHOLLAH BINIAZ | **Writer**

Biniáz is an Iranian writer and literary critic who has published several novels and short story collections, including *“Quartet-e Marg o Dokhtar,”* and *“Molaghat ba Massih”*. His literary critique pieces have been published in many newspapers and magazines.

“The people of Iran have created a movement that if it is respected, recognized and supported by the Iranian government, there will be no need for a war; a war with unknown consequences and undetermined extent. The people of Iran are capable of demanding their rights, and perhaps they will even improve in this respect. Therefore, in my opinion, there is no need for foreign intervention. Also, we are neither Iraq nor Afghanistan, and we are not in the same conditions as Libya. Qaddafi warned that he will use tanks to kill his own people; this has not yet happened in Iran.”

“We cannot predict that after a war the situation will get better or worse. War does not have an immediate effect on arts and literature. We cannot say from now that after a war the quality of writing and arts will improve or get worse. However, it could firmly be said that the losses of war will encompass a wide arena and will damage our national interests. Maybe a few military bases will get blown up; however, innocent civilians will suffer and be killed too. For example, in Libya maybe no one is writing novels or book reviews, but that’s because cities are getting bombed left and right.”

YARALI POURMOGHADAM | **Writer**

Born in 1950, Yarali Pourmoghadam is a playwright, writer, and owner of the famous Shouka Café in Tehran. His café is one of the favorite gathering places for many Iranian artists and intellectuals. He also manages a popular annual photography competition in his café. Pourmoghadam’s published works include *“Havaal-e Café Shouka,”* *“Aah, Esfandiar-e maghmoom,”* and *“Yaddasht Haye Yek Ghahvehchi.”*

“I oppose any foreign military strike under all circumstances. Domestic affairs must be addressed by people themselves. Any foreign intervention would lead to unity and opposition to the United States. War would certainly have a very negative impact on the cultural and literary environments and those who work in this milieu. It will make their space much more constrained.”

Raising Their Voices

Iranian Civil Society Reflections on the Military Option

The possibility of a US military strike against Iran has been debated for almost a decade, since Iran's nuclear program first gave rise to concerns about the possible development of a nuclear weapon and calls for exercising a "military option" to stop it. Some have also suggested an attack to change the government of Iran, citing its abusive human rights policies in addition to conflicts with US regional interests.

What do Iranians, who would be most affected by an attack, think about its likely impact on their society and their political aspirations? How would an attack on Iran impact human rights, the movement for a more open society, and on the future of civil society there? Debates in Western policy circles have not, in general, taken these views into account.

This report by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran is based on interviews with 35 leading and influential Iranian civil society activists, lawyers, intellectuals and artistic and cultural figures, all of whom live in Iran.

Almost unanimously, they say an attack on Iran would make the human rights situation even more grave. They warn that it would lead to a total militarization of the society, the destruction of the country's pro-democracy and human rights movements, and would also perhaps permanently damage future relations with the United States.

These authentic perspectives on the likely consequences of an attack on Iran should be of interest to policy-makers and all who have an interest in a rational, long-term approach to relations with Iran aimed at achieving justice, human rights and peace.

Other reports by the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran



Punishing Stars:
Systematic
Discrimination and
Exclusion in Iranian
Higher Education



Official Distortion and Disinformation:
A Guide to Iran's
Human Rights Crisis



Reporters' Guide:
How to Interview
Iranian Officials
on Human Rights
Issues



Men of Violence:
Perpetrators of
the Post-Election
Countdown