

Iran's Green Activists Urge Strategy Change After 11 Feb

BBC Monitoring 22 Feb 10

The 11 February Revolution anniversary rallies have sparked off calls for a change of tactics within the Green opposition movement. These calls are predicated on the perceived failure of opposition supporters' tactics on that day. Opposition leaders, Mirhoseyn Musavi and Mehdi Karrubi, have promised the announcement of a new strategy. Some opposition commentators and bloggers have also called for a change towards a broader movement as part of this new strategy.

Failure of Trojan Horse tactic

Some Green bloggers blamed a tactic called the "Trojan horse" put forward by the self-exiled former official of the Islamic Republic, Ata'ollah Mohajerani, on this day.

Disguised as government supporters, the Greens would infiltrate the officially sanctioned rally routes then start chanting their own slogans. The Trojan Horse idea was not just a subterfuge but a response to the fierce security measures against the Green Movement, including hangings and dozens of arrests in the days leading up to 11 February.

The perceived sense of failure by some was captured by a blog note on 11 February entitled: "Mohajerani, [website] JARAS and [humorist] Ebrahim Nabavi and the ridiculous Trojan horse idea! This was a present to the regime".

This blogger appeared on the web-blog-sharing portal Balatarin claiming that as the Greens were absorbed inside the government rallies they were overwhelmed and their voices drowned out. The blogger further saw the Greens playing into the hands of the officials who had "stage-managed" the rallies.

Calls for change in strategy

The activist bloggers led with calls for a change of strategy; pro-Green JARAS news and analysis portal described the mood amongst the activists on 12 February: "A considerable number of supporters of this movement make fundamental criticisms of the showing of the Greens on 11 February. Appraising the events of this day, a section of the movement branded the performance of the Greens in face of the pro-government supporters a 'defeat'. Another group see the lack of proper organisation as resulting from heavy state suppression and the undeclared martial law in the country. Another section says that defective planning and putting forward impractical ideas have led to this lack of coordination. At the same time there are some analysts who have expressed satisfaction at the performance of the Greens on this day adding that the unprecedented presence of the security forces is testimony to the terror that the rulers have of the protestors".

On 14 February, one of the leaders of the Green movement, Mehdi Karrubi, told the *Sunday Telegraph* that a new strategy will be announced soon if the government continues to prevent the opposition from holding gatherings.

Leaders "who are remote from realities on the ground"

On 13 February, an article on the Persian *irangreenvoice* website said: "Judging from the sole-voice or multi-voiced communiques of some and the lofty remarks of others, this thought comes to mind that some people consider themselves as the vanguards of the Green movement. They have, somehow, distinguished themselves from the main leaders of this movement. Whether this distinction actually exists or not, we have to point to the adverse effects of this multi-voiced approach causing confusion amongst the people".

"As an example, when Mirhoseyn Musavi called for the people to come to the fore with what he described as their true colours", it continued: "this would have meant going to the rallies wearing Green. This was compatible with the political logic of the Green movement. But, due to the trial and effort of some people who are active in cyber-space but who are remote from realities on the ground, the Green crowds were absorbed within the rest of the demonstrators and their presence was not immediately apparent. This provided an opportunity to the pro-coup d'etat media groups to exploit it for their own political ends".

The article went on to call for allegiance to the three leaders of the Green movement, adding: "leaders who announce their positions do so being mindful of the present conditions of the country. This will help the objective-oriented survival of the movement. Others can divulge their views too, but what one has to be cautious of are claims to the leadership of the movement by its individual supporters".

Speaking to Deutsche Welle on 12 February, reformist politician and activist, Abbas Abdi, echoed these sentiments saying that the protestors lacked direction.

"Misappropriation"

Mainstream reformist parties and groups, the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, Militant Clerics Society and Islamic Iran Participation Front, did not see the opposition as having failed. They all claimed that the high turnout of the people at the anniversary compared to the previous years was due to the strong presence of the Greens (16 February communique of the Mojahedin, 13 February communique of the Militant Clerics and 13 February communique by the Participation Front).

The Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution wrote that this high turnout has been misappropriated by the government: "This organisation cannot hide its regret over narrow-minded reactions and opportunistic efforts immediately after the 11 February anniversary in order to distort the truth and misappropriate this meaningful participation [by the people]. It is only to be expected that those currents and groups that think about nothing other than their own power and position and who misappropriated your votes [REFERENCE to the results of the 12 June 2009 presidential election] would have no compunction in misappropriating the people's massive turnout [on 11 February]" (same communique).

In the course of a meeting that Karrubi and Musavi held on 17 February, they both condemned those who tried to "misappropriate the presence of various strata of society" (Sahamnews).

Call for a Broader Movement

Writing in the reformist *E'temad* newspaper on 18 February, reformist politician Alireza Raja'i echoed the need for a change of strategy: "Presently, the reformist current is facing circumstances where the adoption of specific strategies and tactics are essential for its political survival. Presently, within the current political climate the reformists have lost the ability to participate at official levels. When there is no possibility of participating at official levels, reformist currents must think of ways of making their participation at the civic level possible".

He later added: "One has to pursue ways of survival which do not lead to conservatism and passivity".

This call for change has been echoed by commentators and bloggers who constitute the mainstream of opposition activists.

On 17 February, blogger and journalist Mas'ud Safiri wrote: "No body has given any thoughts to the formation of the workers' movement. If we add the encroachment of religious propaganda into the thinking of the low-income classes we can then understand the difference in the [political] weight of the regime within this class and our weight [the Greens]".

Writing in the reformist *Asre-nou.net* on 17 February, another journalist, Deniz Ishji, wrote: "Our fundamental progressive ideology must be based upon the secular, federal, democratic republic".

He later added: "We can no longer define the popular movement within the framework of the 'Green Movement', The diversity of the democratic ideals of women, workers, youth and ethnic minorities requires that the colour of this movement transforms itself into the colours of the rainbow [as opposed to green]".

Similar views were put forward by Qasem Shirzadian in *Rooz-on-line* on 18 February: "Despite the widespread support that the Green movement enjoys within the middle classes, it enjoys less support of and participation by the ethnic minorities and lower strata of society".

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