

Degenerative and Regenerative Powers Within the Lion and Sun Movement

Historical background, psychosocial analysis and perspectives for the future

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The vision is a modern, prosperous Iran. Our responsibility is to keep that vision clear enough that people can see it, understand it and continue to work towards it.

Constitutional monarchy, secular democracy and the rule of law

Vision under pressure

Within any movement, there are powers that are more resilient. With time and pressure, they become more solidified. They can see the vision. They have a goal in their mind, and this is why they are less likely to be sidetracked or dragged into issues that do not matter for the bigger picture and a holistic vision.

However, there are also powers that lose their direction under pressure. The reasons may be personal: psychological strain, short-distance goals, the need for instant reward, or the absence of a clear vision for the bigger picture. They lose their power, their aim and their goal, and find it increasingly difficult to withstand the pressure.

I want to analyse these two responses within the Lion and Sun movement: the powers that regenerate commitment and the powers through which commitment degenerates. My perspective is that of a supporter of constitutional monarchy, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and the rule of law. The question is how we keep our vision, our political direction and our capacity to build a modern, prosperous Iran.

A historical background: from Qajar to Pahlavi

In the modern history of Iran, we have had the Qajar dynasty, followed by the Pahlavi dynasty, followed by the Islamic Republic. During the Qajar period, Iran was predominantly a traditional society under monarchical rule. The Constitutional Revolution challenged that arrangement. Mozaffar al-Din Shah authorised the establishment of the Majles in 1906 and signed the constitutional charter in December of that year. ^[1]

The constitutional project faced serious setbacks, political conflict, foreign intervention and instability. These conditions helped pave the way for the rise of Reza Khan after the 1921 coup and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925. Reza Shah was a self-made human being with a passion for a new Iran. He consolidated the country, sometimes through pressure and coercion, and developed the organisation and institutions of a modern state. ^[2,3]

For me, his historical significance lies in that determination to turn a fragmented political order towards government, national organisation, education, infrastructure and modernisation. Iran already possessed a nation, a history and national symbols; his project was to consolidate and reorganise the modern state.

During the Second World War, the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941 led to Reza Shah's abdication and exile. His son, Mohammad Reza Shah, succeeded

him. Educated in Switzerland, he developed a vision of a modern, Western-oriented and prosperous Iran. ^[3,4]

His reign was marked by conflicts, including the confrontation with Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and the 1953 coup, supported by Britain and the United States. Other opposition came, at different times, from nationalist currents, conservative clerics, Islamists and Soviet-aligned leftist and communist currents. These were different political forces, rather than a single body with identical goals. ^[4]

He managed to show the Iranian people a glimpse of future prosperity. Yet the monarchy could not withstand the revolutionary coalition and the crisis of 1978-79. It fell in February 1979 and was replaced by the Islamic Republic. ^[4]

My reading of this history is that the Pahlavi project gave modern Iran a powerful direction towards Iranian nationalism, secular institutions, engagement with the West, society building and modernisation. I see the loss of that project as a turning point towards political Islam and the reversal of important opportunities for progress.

Pahlavi Plus: a vision for the future

During the Islamic Republic's era, with Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi living in the United States, the Pahlavi idea has acquired a further dimension. I call this Pahlavi Plus: the inheritance of national organisation and modernisation, with democracy, human rights and the ballot box brought explicitly into the vision for the future.

In my interpretation, this rests on four fundamentals: national and territorial integrity; secularism; the rule of law; and the rule of the ballot box. The Crown Prince has publicly articulated national integrity, equality under the law, separation of religion from government, and the right of Iranians to determine their future through free elections and a constitutional process. ^[5]

For me, he is a defining advocate of secular democracy for contemporary Iran. The vision I support demands that public authority, from top to bottom, derives its legitimacy from a constitution accepted by the people. Government must be accountable, and the future constitutional form must be decided through the ballot box.

I am a constitutional monarchist. I support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi because I believe he can guide Iran towards a modern, prosperous and secular democratic future. My support for constitutional monarchy includes respect for the Iranian people's free decision about their political system.

Defensive nationalism and Iranian identity

The Iranian nationalism I defend is nationally distinct in its identity and in its determination to defend the country. It is a defensive nationalism, grounded in territorial integrity, citizenship and the dignity of Iranians. Fascism, aggressive nationalism and the denial of other people's rights have no place in the Iran I want to help build.

For many supporters, Javid Shah means 'Long live the King', and Payandeh Iran expresses the wish that Iran endure and remain strong. In my understanding, these words defend Iranian identity against its subordination to political Islam or an ideology that places another cause above the country.

Soviet-aligned internationalism and political Islam's concept of the ummah have, in different ways, competed with an Iran-centred national vision. My criticism concerns political doctrines and their consequences. Equal citizenship must include Iranians of every faith, ethnicity and political opinion.

If our nationalism is to defend Iranian integrity and identity, it must also defend the rights of Iranian citizens. Territorial integrity, secularism, the rule of law and the ballot box belong together in that vision.

A difficult political time: the weight of repression

It is a very difficult time to keep the spirit up and withstand the pressure. The Islamic Republic's history of repression began with the executions of senior officers at Refah School in February 1979. It continued through the repression and executions of political opponents in the early 1980s and the mass prison executions of 1988. ^[6,7]

The later history includes the Mashhad unrest of 1992; the student movement of 1999; the Green Movement of 2009; the Dey protests of December 2017 and January 2018; the Aban protests of November 2019; and the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising following the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022. ^[8,9,10]

The protests of December 2025 and January 2026, which I discuss within the Lion and Sun movement, form another painful chapter. Amnesty International documents their beginning on 28 December 2025 and the mass killings of protesters in January 2026. ^[10]

The pressure is also personal. Threats against families and relatives, fear for property in Iran, and intimidation of people living abroad can weigh heavily on supporters. Human Rights Watch has documented the intimidation of relatives in Iran as part of transnational repression. ^[11]

We cannot understand political endurance without understanding this pressure. People may believe deeply in a future prosperous Iran and still find the personal cost increasingly difficult to bear.

Two groups, two responses to pressure

The first group wants constitutional monarchy and supports Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi within a broader vision. These people have an aim and a goal. They understand what they are supporting and where they want Iran to go. With time and pressure, their commitment can become more solidified because their support is connected to a picture of the future.

The second group also supports Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and believes that Pahlavi has been good for Iran. Some may have traditional roots in royal support. Others may hold a strong emotional attachment to the name and the history. Yet they may lack the physical, psychological or philosophical endurance needed to withstand prolonged pressure.

These are two different forms of commitment. One connects support to a constitutional and democratic destination. The other may begin with sincere loyalty, but its longer-term vision can be less developed or its capacity to endure more heavily strained.

There are people who are willing to withstand the pressure and who believe in a future prosperous Iran without having the entire philosophy or the vision fully formed in their mind. They need a clearer picture of the future. There are also people whose vision is clear but whose families, circumstances or health make continued public involvement difficult.

I use regenerative and degenerative to describe these patterns of commitment, rather than fixed categories of human beings. The same person can lose direction under one set of pressures and recover it with understanding, support and a clearer goal.

Research on resilience distinguishes sustained functioning from recovery after adversity and describes more than one route through difficult experiences. I draw on that distinction as a background to this political interpretation; a person's political loyalty alone does not tell us their psychological resilience.
[12]

The practical question for our movement is whether we help people regain their direction. A movement with a vision must be able to explain its purpose to those who are tired, uncertain or losing hope.

The dynamic of the current political time

As more time passes, these groups can become divided and develop different ideas about the future. A person who expects an immediate result can become disillusioned when the pressure continues. A person with a long-term vision is more able to distinguish a difficult period from the loss of the ultimate goal.

The need for instant reward can drag people into issues that do not matter for the bigger picture. Personal conflicts, displays of loyalty and arguments over short-distance goals can consume the energy that should be directed towards Iran's future.

The regenerative power of a movement lies in keeping that future visible. Commitment becomes stronger when people understand the relationship between what they do today and the country they want to build tomorrow.

History will be shaped by those who remain capable of carrying their vision into action. Endurance needs a direction: a modern, prosperous Iran with national integrity, secular government, the rule of law and the people's vote.

Taking the Crown Prince's vision seriously

Those who want to remain supporters of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi should listen carefully to every word he says, especially his commitment to the ballot box and to the Iranian people's right to decide. His public account of his role places the choice of the future system with the Iranian people. ^[5]

In my reading of that vision, republicans, the liberal left, people on the right, conservatives and nationalists need to come together around a common democratic transition. I see the Crown Prince's role at the centre: to guide Iran towards a modern, prosperous country and help finish the unfinished work started by his father and grandfather.

Supporting that mission means being calm, polite and guided by a vision. A constitutional monarchist must be able to work with people who prefer a republic, provided that we share national integrity, secular democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

There have, of course, been human-rights issues in the Pahlavi past. Historians should make contextual judgments, taking account of the time, the circumstances and the wider world. Context should deepen our understanding, while the rights and experiences of those who suffered remain part of that history.

The future requires us to carry forward what we believe was constructive in that history and to secure democratic guarantees for the next generation. Pahlavi Plus, as I understand it, is a forward-looking commitment to that task.

Our intellectual responsibility: a picture of future Iran

Our job as intellectual people supporting Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi is ultimately to create that vision and give a picture of future Iran. We must help people see what constitutional monarchy, secular democracy, the rule of law and the ballot box would mean in their lives.

That picture should include a country able to defend itself and preserve its territorial integrity; institutions that serve its citizens; government subject to law; freedom of belief; and political disagreement expressed through lawful, democratic competition.

We support the Crown Prince because we believe in his mission and his vision. We should express that support with the calmness, politeness and clarity that the vision itself requires.

Some powers become more solidified with time and pressure. Others lose their power, their aim and their goal. The future of the Lion and Sun movement depends on whether we can sustain the first and help regenerate the second.

I remain a supporter of constitutional monarchy, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and the rule of law. The vision is a modern, prosperous Iran. Our responsibility is to keep that vision clear enough that people can see it, understand it and continue to work towards it.

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