

From Monarchical Mobilisation to National Coalition: A Narrative Analysis of Pro-Pahlavi Slogans, Opposition Fragmentation, and Lessons for a Future Iranian Democratic Transition

Prepared in English from the author's oral and written reflections

Date: 27 April 2026

Analytical note: This document treats the author's account as a first-person political testimony and places it within a broader analysis of coalition-building, transitional leadership, rhetoric, and democratic legitimacy. It does not endorse any political faction. Claims about casualties and repression are presented with caution where public reporting remains contested or incomplete.

Executive Summary

This analysis examines a strategic contradiction at the centre of the recent pro-Pahlavi mobilisation: Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi has repeatedly presented himself as a transitional leader whose task is to help Iranians reach the ballot box, while parts of the street and diaspora movement around him have often used exclusionary slogans that sound like a pre-decision in favour of monarchy and against republicans, leftists, reformist dissidents, and the People's Mojahedin/Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK/PMOI).

The contradiction matters because successful transitions normally require two different forms of legitimacy. The first is mobilisation legitimacy: the ability to inspire people to take risks, organise, protest, strike, and believe change is possible. The second is settlement legitimacy: the ability to reassure rival constituencies that they will not be humiliated, erased, or politically exterminated after victory. The movement described here showed real strength in the first category but serious weakness in the second.

The slogans analysed in this paper created moral clarity against the Islamic Republic, but they also generated coalition costs. Phrases such as “Marg bar se fasad: Mullah, Chapi, Mojahed” and “Nasl-e kasif o fased: Mullah, Chapi, Mojahed” expressed anger toward political traditions associated by many monarchists with the 1979 revolution. Yet they also turned historical grievance into present-day exclusion. In practical terms, they made it harder for left-rooted, republican, human-rights, labour, women's-rights, and former reformist networks to cooperate publicly with a Pahlavi-led transitional project.

The core lesson is not that monarchists must abandon their identity, nor that republicans must pretend not to disagree with monarchy. The lesson is that a transitional movement is not the same as a royalist campaign. A royalist campaign seeks victory for one constitutional option. A transitional movement seeks enough trust across opposing constitutional options to defeat the

ruling regime, prevent civil collapse, organise lawful transition, and let the people decide the future system through credible procedures.

1. Background: From Criticism to Conditional Support

The author's political journey is important because it mirrors a wider dilemma among many Iranians in the diaspora and inside Iran: how to support a national movement against the Islamic Republic without surrendering one's own ideological biography or democratic concerns. The author describes a shift from criticism during and after the Woman, Life, Freedom movement to active support during the Lion and Sun movement and the later crisis surrounding war, external pressure, mass demonstrations, and state repression.

The move toward supporting Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi was not primarily described as ideological conversion to monarchism. It was described as a strategic decision: when external pressure, domestic anger, economic collapse, and Pahlavi's call for demonstrations appeared to converge, the movement seemed to become national rather than merely factional. In that moment, supporting Pahlavi meant supporting a possible vehicle for victory over the Islamic Republic.

This distinction is central. Many citizens and activists may support a transitional figure for instrumental reasons without endorsing monarchy as the predetermined final system. A mature transitional leadership must therefore hold together several constituencies: monarchists, republicans, secular liberals, leftists, labour activists, women's-rights activists, ethnic and linguistic minorities, religious minorities, former reformists who have abandoned reformism, and non-party citizens exhausted by repression and economic ruin.

Reza Pahlavi himself has often framed his role in terms of transition rather than personal rule. At the Council on Foreign Relations in October 2025, he stated that his role was "not to run for office," but to help compatriots decide through the ballot box and referendum what secular democratic system should replace the religious dictatorship. He also described his task as unifying the democratic opposition, mobilising the diaspora, and bringing support to people inside Iran. [1] In April 2025, he said he had stepped forward to lead the transition after the Islamic Republic. [2]

2. The Central Contradiction: Transitional Leader or Monarchist Standard-Bearer?

The symbolic power of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi comes from dynastic memory, national continuity, the Lion and Sun flag, and the association of Pahlavism with modernisation, statehood, secularism, and territorial integrity. For committed monarchists, this symbolic package is not merely tactical; it is existential. It represents historical justice after 1979.

Yet a transition requires a different grammar from restoration. Restoration language says: the answer is already known; the king is the solution. Transitional language says: the regime must go; then the people decide under free conditions. If the leader speaks the second language but the

movement chants the first, rival groups will suspect that the ballot box is ornamental rather than decisive.

This is why slogans such as “Ma jomhouri nemikhayim, ma shahemun ro mikhaim” — “We do not want a republic; we want our king” — are politically powerful but strategically risky. They energise royalist identity, but they also imply that the constitutional question has been settled before the national vote. When such slogans dominate rallies where the stated leader claims to be transitional, they create a credibility gap.

The same applies to slogans such as “Alternative baraye Iran: Shah Reza Pahlavi,” “Democracy baraye Iran: Shah Reza Pahlavi,” and “Human rights baraye Iran: Shah Reza Pahlavi.” These slogans merge three different concepts: the alternative to the Islamic Republic, democratic transition, and royal legitimacy. For supporters, the fusion is emotionally coherent. For non-monarchists, it may sound like absorption into a royalist project rather than participation in a common national front.

3. Slogans as Political Instruments: What They Do

Slogans are not just noise. They are compressed political theory. They tell participants who belongs, who is enemy, what future is imagined, and what emotional permission is granted. In authoritarian contexts, slogans also function as boundary markers: they separate courage from silence, loyalty from betrayal, and revolutionary identity from hesitation.

The slogans described by the author can be grouped into four categories. First, anti-regime slogans: those aimed at the Islamic Republic, clerical rule, the IRGC, and state violence. These usually have broad coalition potential because many opposition currents share the objective of ending religious dictatorship. Second, royalist affirmation slogans: “Javid Shah” and “King Reza Pahlavi.” These build internal enthusiasm among monarchists but narrow the coalition if treated as a loyalty test. Third, anti-rival slogans: “Mullah, Chapi, Mojahed” and similar formulations. These define leftists and MEK/PMOI supporters as equivalent to regime forces. Fourth, pre-constitutional slogans: anti-republic slogans that reject one possible future system before a referendum.

The most damaging category for coalition-building is the anti-rival slogan. It does not merely criticise rival ideologies; it morally contaminates entire categories of Iranians. This matters because many Iranians who have leftist roots, republican commitments, human-rights credentials, prison records, labour histories, or anti-regime credentials may nevertheless be grouped with the very regime they oppose. The result is humiliation, distrust, and withdrawal.

From the perspective of political psychology, these slogans reflect a trauma response. Many monarchists locate the catastrophe of 1979 in a coalition of clerics, leftists, Islamists, and revolutionary organisations. The slogans therefore express accumulated resentment. But a movement that seeks national victory must distinguish historical responsibility from present coalition architecture. A slogan may be historically satisfying and strategically counterproductive at the same time.

4. Why Exclusionary Slogans Weaken a Transitional Movement

The first cost is reputational. A movement that claims to represent all Iranians but chants against republicans, leftists, and MEK/PMOI supporters risks being portrayed as a factional revenge project. This gives the Islamic Republic propaganda material: the regime can tell undecided citizens that the alternative is not pluralistic democracy but a new purge.

The second cost is organisational. Leftist, labour, student, women's-rights, human-rights, and republican networks may have access to constituencies that monarchist networks cannot easily reach. If those groups fear humiliation after the fall of the regime, they may refuse to coordinate even when they oppose the Islamic Republic. The result is parallel opposition rather than national convergence.

The third cost is international. Western governments and international organisations are often cautious about recognising or engaging with opposition figures when opposition support is unclear or divided. Reuters reported in April 2026 that many Western governments remained cautious about endorsing Pahlavi because Iranian opposition movements are deeply divided and his support remains uncertain. [3] This does not negate his influence; it shows why coalition breadth matters for diplomatic credibility.

The fourth cost is procedural. A transitional leader must protect the legitimacy of the future referendum. If the movement's dominant slogans already declare monarchy as the only acceptable endpoint, republicans may suspect that a referendum will be pressured, symbolic, or unfair. A referendum requires not only ballots but trust in the conditions surrounding them.

The fifth cost is moral. The author's account shows how individuals who moved toward Pahlavi for national reasons could still be treated as suspicious because of their previous leftist affiliation. When a movement cannot absorb sincere converts, temporary allies, or strategic supporters, it becomes a closed identity group rather than a national coalition.

5. The Author's Position: A Case Study in Missed Coalition Work

The author defines his intended role as a bridge: someone with philosophical training, knowledge of Marxism, and contacts with leftist organisations who could help create unity around the urgent objective of ending the Islamic Republic. This role is exactly the type of bridging function that transitional movements often need. Yet the author reports that his intentions were questioned because he had previously been a member of the Worker-communist Party and had criticised Pahlavi during earlier phases.

This reveals a deeper problem: the movement confused ideological biography with current strategic contribution. In a national crisis, people change position because the situation changes. The question should not be whether a person has always been monarchist. The more important question is whether that person accepts democratic rules, opposes the Islamic Republic, rejects revenge politics, and can help bring new constituencies into the national front.

A movement that demands perfect historical loyalty will shrink. A movement that accepts democratic conversion, reconsideration, and tactical alliance can grow. The author's experience therefore illustrates a broader lesson: movements need gatekeeping against sabotage, but excessive purity tests can destroy coalition capacity.

6. The Wider Political Environment: Repression, War, and Mass Trauma

Any analysis of slogans must be placed within the severity of the Iranian situation. Public reporting describes a grave deterioration in human rights, including mass arrests, lethal force against protesters, escalating executions, and intensified repression following war and protest. Amnesty International reported that the 12-day armed conflict between Iran and Israel led to civilian deaths and that Iranian authorities used the conflict to intensify repression, with thousands arbitrarily detained, interrogated, harassed, or unjustly prosecuted. [4] Amnesty also reported that Iran had executed over 1,000 people by September 2025, surpassing the previous year's total and reaching the highest annual level Amnesty had recorded in at least fifteen years. [5]

The economic trigger for the December 2025 protests is also significant. Al Jazeera reported that protests began on 28 December 2025 after soaring prices and a plunge in the rial, beginning with shopkeepers in Tehran's Grand Bazaar and spreading across provinces. [6] Iran International later described how messages from foreign figures, including Donald Trump's warnings and Reza Pahlavi's calls for coordinated demonstrations, helped focus protest attention, while also noting that they did not create the underlying anger, which had been building for years. [7]

Casualty numbers remain politically and evidentially contested. The author refers to 50,000 deaths as part of the movement's moral memory. Public reporting reviewed for this document confirms very large-scale and lethal repression but does not uniformly verify that exact figure. The Guardian reported that Pahlavi claimed 12,000 protesters were killed over 48 hours, while human-rights groups had confirmed lower figures but still placed the death toll in the thousands. [8] The analysis therefore treats the exact number with caution while fully recognising the scale of trauma and state violence.

In such an environment, anger is not irrational. Families who have lost children, prisoners facing execution, and citizens living under armed coercion cannot be expected to speak in the language of academic moderation. But leadership exists precisely to transform anger into strategy. The more brutal the regime becomes, the more disciplined the opposition must be in defining who the enemy is and who must be brought into the national camp.

7. The Problem of "Finishing the Job"

The phrase "finish the job" captures a painful expectation. People who risk their lives after a leadership call may judge the leader not by speeches but by outcomes. If the regime survives and repression worsens, even sympathetic supporters may ask whether the strategy was adequate, whether alliances were broad enough, and whether international promises were reliable.

A fair analysis must distinguish responsibility. The primary responsibility for killing, imprisonment, torture, executions, and national ruin belongs to the Islamic Republic and its coercive institutions. Opposition leaders do not shoot protesters; the regime does. However, opposition leadership still carries strategic responsibility: how risks are framed, how expectations are managed, how alliances are built, and whether supporters are told the truth about uncertainty.

The unfinished outcome therefore creates a duty of reassessment. That reassessment should not become personal humiliation of Pahlavi, nor blind loyalty to him. It should ask: What did the movement gain? What did it lose? Which constituencies were alienated? Which slogans helped? Which slogans harmed? What organisational structures were missing? What international assumptions proved unreliable? How can the next phase avoid repeating the same weaknesses?

8. Lessons for Future Purposes: From Identity Movement to National Front

For future purposes, the first lesson is semantic discipline. A transitional movement needs slogans that match its stated constitutional procedure. If the future is to be decided by ballot box and referendum, then the movement's public language should protect the dignity of all constitutional options that accept secular democracy, territorial integrity, human rights, and non-violence.

The second lesson is coalition architecture. Instead of treating all leftists, republicans, former reformists, and MEK/PMOI supporters as one contaminated bloc, a transitional project would need to differentiate between democratic actors, authoritarian actors, violent actors, and regime collaborators. Political identity alone should not be the test; democratic conduct should be the test.

The third lesson is role clarity. Pahlavi can be framed in two very different ways: as the king-in-waiting or as a convener of the transition. These roles cannot be merged without cost. If he is the convener, he must visibly stand above factional slogans. If he is the monarchist candidate, then he becomes one faction among others. The strategic advantage of Pahlavi lies precisely in his ability to be more than a factional candidate; that advantage is damaged when the movement treats "Javid Shah" as a condition of belonging.

The fourth lesson is reconciliation without amnesia. It is legitimate to debate the role of leftists, Islamists, MEK/PMOI, and other revolutionary forces in 1979. It is also legitimate for monarchists to remember betrayal, imprisonment, exile, confiscation, and historical loss. But the transition cannot be built on collective punishment of political descendants. A democratic future requires accountability for crimes, not inherited guilt for ideological ancestry.

The fifth lesson is internal code of conduct. Movements need norms. Public rallies, diaspora events, and media appearances should separate anti-regime slogans from anti-opposition insults. Criticism of rival programmes should be allowed; dehumanising labels should be discouraged. A code of conduct would not silence monarchists; it would protect the movement's claim to be national.

9. A Possible Framework for Inclusive Transitional Messaging

A more inclusive slogan ecology would keep the movement's moral focus on the Islamic Republic while leaving the constitutional settlement open. Examples of safer formulas include: "Free Iran, democratic Iran"; "Referendum for Iran"; "Secular democracy for Iran"; "No to the Islamic Republic"; "Iran belongs to all Iranians"; "Ballot box, not bullets"; "National unity against tyranny"; and "Justice without revenge." These formulations do not erase monarchists; they create space for non-monarchists to stand beside them.

The movement could also distinguish between campaign slogans and transition slogans. Before a referendum, monarchists are entitled to campaign for constitutional monarchy. Republicans are entitled to campaign for a republic. But the umbrella movement against the Islamic Republic should use transition slogans, not factional victory slogans. This distinction allows ideological competition after regime collapse while preserving unity before it.

The key principle is: no democratic faction should be asked to surrender its future vote as the price of present cooperation. If republicans believe they must chant “Javid Shah” to belong, they will not join honestly. If monarchists believe they must hide the Lion and Sun to be accepted, they will also feel humiliated. The solution is not symbolic erasure; it is layered messaging: shared national slogans for the front, factional slogans for lawful campaigning at the proper stage.

10. Relationship with Other Opposition Actors

The most difficult question is engagement with rival opposition actors: MEK/PMOI, republicans, leftists, former reformists, women’s-rights activists, labour activists, and figures such as Narges Mohammadi and Nasrin Sotoudeh. The strategic answer cannot be emotional inclusion of everyone without criteria. A serious transition must have red lines: rejection of the Islamic Republic, rejection of political violence against civilians, commitment to secular democracy, territorial integrity, equal citizenship, due process, and acceptance of a free vote.

Within those red lines, the transitional camp would benefit from a broad consultative assembly or national convention. The purpose would not be to force ideological agreement. The purpose would be to define a minimum programme: how to protect life, prevent civil war, dismantle repressive institutions lawfully, maintain basic services, organise a referendum, and prepare a constituent assembly.

This is where Pahlavi’s position could be most consequential. If he places himself in the centre as convener rather than only as the symbol of monarchist restoration, he can invite groups that distrust one another into a controlled political process. Reuters reported that opposition divisions remain a central obstacle to external recognition and confidence. [3] NCRI-linked sources, for example, continue to reject both clerical rule and the former monarchy and promote a republican transition. [9] These disagreements will not disappear, but they can be managed if the transition is built around procedure rather than pre-victory domination.

11. How to Address the Damaging Slogans Directly

The slogans “Marg bar se fasad: Mullah, Chapi, Mojahed” and “Nasl-e kasif o fased: Mullah, Chapi, Mojahed” should be analysed as boundary-policing slogans. They create a moral universe in which three political categories are treated as equally corrupt: clerical rulers, leftists, and MEK/PMOI. For many monarchists, this reflects the remembered coalition of 1979. For coalition-building, however, it is disastrous because it collapses current democratic dissidents into the same category as the ruling theocracy.

A transitional leader could address this without insulting his own base. The message could be: historical debates will continue, and every ideology must answer for its record, but today the national front is open to every Iranian who accepts secular democracy, territorial integrity,

human rights, and the verdict of the ballot box. The enemy is not every leftist, every republican, or every former revolutionary family; the enemy is the machinery of dictatorship and repression.

The anti-republic slogan “Ma jomhouri nemikhayim, ma shahemun ro mikhaim” requires a different response. It is legitimate as a monarchist campaign slogan, but it is not appropriate as the organising slogan of a transitional umbrella if the umbrella claims to respect a future referendum. A simple distinction can solve the problem: monarchists may campaign for monarchy, but the national transition front should not pre-judge the referendum.

The loyalty-test use of “Javid Shah” is also problematic. It should be celebrated by those who believe it, but it should not be used to exclude those who support transition for democratic, nationalist, liberal, leftist, or humanitarian reasons. A movement that demands the same emotional vocabulary from everyone becomes smaller than the nation it claims to represent.

12. Conclusion: The National Movement Must Become Larger Than Its Loudest Slogans

The pro-Pahlavi movement has shown symbolic strength, emotional power, and mobilisation capacity. It has also revealed a severe weakness: the inability, so far, to convert monarchist enthusiasm into a broad national coalition. The movement’s slogans explain much of this problem. They have given courage to some and fear to others. They have created belonging for loyal monarchists and suspicion for potential allies.

Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi’s most valuable possible role is not merely to embody royal memory. It is to convene a democratic transition wide enough to include people who do not want monarchy but do want the end of the Islamic Republic. If he is to be a transitional leader, his supporters’ public language must be brought into alignment with that role. The ballot box cannot be sacred in speeches and pre-empted in slogans.

The future task is therefore not to suppress monarchist identity, nor to flatter every rival opposition group. The task is to build a disciplined national front: anti-Islamic Republic, anti-revenge, pro-secular democracy, pro-referendum, pro-human rights, and open to every Iranian willing to accept democratic rules. In the present catastrophe, Iran cannot afford a movement that wins slogans but loses allies. It needs a movement that can transform grief into organisation, anger into discipline, and historical memory into democratic transition.

Appendix A: Slogan Analysis Table

Slogan / Formula	Literal Meaning	Political Function	Coalition Risk
Javid Shah	Long live the king	Royalist affirmation; emotional continuity with monarchy	Becomes exclusionary if treated as proof of loyalty to the anti-regime movement

Slogan / Formula	Literal Meaning	Political Function	Coalition Risk
Ma jomhouri nemikhayim, ma shahemun ro mikhaim	We do not want a republic; we want our king	Pre-constitutional monarchist preference	Contradicts a referendum-first transitional message if used as umbrella slogan
Marg bar se fasad: Mullah, Chapi, Mojahed	Death to three corruptions: mullah, leftist, Mojahed	Defines historical enemies of monarchist memory	Equates non-regime left/republican actors with the ruling theocracy
Nasl-e kasif o fased: Mullah, Chapi, Mojahed	Dirty/corrupt generation: mullah, leftist, Mojahed	Humiliation and moral exclusion	Discourages bridge-builders and prevents broad opposition alliance
Democracy for Iran: King Reza Pahlavi	Democracy through/with King Reza Pahlavi	Fuses democracy with royal leadership	May reassure monarchists but alarm republicans and neutral democrats
Referendum for Iran / Ballot box, not bullets	Open constitutional choice	Transitional-democratic framing	Lower risk; allows ideological competition under shared rules

References

- [1] Council on Foreign Relations, “A Conversation With Reza Pahlavi,” 3 October 2025. Key passages: Pahlavi describes his role as not running for office but helping Iranians decide through ballot box and referendum, and as unifying the democratic opposition. <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-reza-pahlavi>
- [2] Reza Pahlavi official website, “Iran Prosperity Project (IPP) Keynote Remarks,” 30 April 2025. Key passage: Pahlavi says he has stepped forward to lead the transition after the Islamic Republic. <https://rezapahlavi.org/en/statements/iran-prosperity-project-ipp-keynote-remarks>
- [3] Reuters, “Son of former Shah of Iran appeals to Western countries for support,” 23 April 2026. Key passages: opposition divisions and Western caution over endorsement. <https://www.reuters.com/world/son-former-shah-iran-appeals-western-countries-support-2026-04-23/>
- [4] Amnesty International, “Human rights in Iran.” Key passage: the 12-day conflict and intensified repression, including arbitrary detention and lethal force against protests. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/iran/>

- [5] Amnesty International, “Iran: Over 1,000 people executed as authorities step up horrifying assault on right to life,” 26 September 2025. Key passages: over 1,000 executions by September 2025 and use of death penalty as repression.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/09/iran-over-1000-people-executed-as-authorities-step-up-horrifying-assault-on-right-to-life/>
- [6] Al Jazeera, “What we know about the protests sweeping Iran,” 12 January 2026. Key passages: protests began on 28 December 2025 over prices and rial collapse, beginning with Tehran Grand Bazaar shopkeepers. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/12/what-we-know-about-the-protests-sweeping-iran>
- [7] Iran International, “100 days on: why Iran’s January protests spread across social classes,” 20 April 2026. Key passages: Pahlavi’s call helped focus protest moments but did not create the underlying anger. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202604203428>
- [8] The Guardian, “Son of former shah says he is ‘uniquely positioned’ to lead Iran as he predicts end of regime,” 16 January 2026. Key passages: Pahlavi’s claims, casualty figures, and disputes over support. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/16/son-of-former-iranian-monarch-calls-for-targeted-intervention-to-hasten-regimes-collapse>
- [9] NCRI, “UK MPs and Legal Experts Endorse NCRI’s Provisional Government and Ten-Point Plan for Future Iran,” 5 March 2026. Key passages: rejection of both clerical rule and former monarchy; republican transition framing.
<https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-resistance/uk-mps-and-legal-experts-endorse-ncris-provisional-government-and-ten-point-plan-for-future-iran/>