

SIX CHAPTERS ON IRAN AND BUILDING ITS FUTURE

Political Activism

in the

Lion and Sun Movement

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THOUGHT AND EXPERIENCE ON THE PATH TO IRAN'S FUTURE

Political Activism in the Lion and Sun Movement

From lived experience to institution-building
and diplomacy

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Complete six-chapter edition
English translation · September 2026

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Author: Peyman Bakhshayesh

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Six chapters, biography and references

This is a complete English translation of the author's consolidated Persian edition. The chapter sequence, arguments, personal narrative, chapter-opening quotations and family photograph are retained. The design follows the original green, gold and cream palette and A5 format, with typography and reading direction adapted for English.

References are numbered independently within each chapter. Bibliographic details and public source links have been reviewed for this edition. Clarifications identify source types, dates, relevant passages and the limits of what a source establishes. The contents, in-text references and source links are clickable.

The family narrative and photograph caption are based on the author's writings. Private records and unpublished manuscripts are identified as such; they are not presented as independently authenticated public sources. Political judgements and proposals are the author's views.

Historical and current-affairs passages retain the Persian edition's time frame. Online references were reviewed on 14 September 2026. Iranian calendar dates are retained where meaningful, with Gregorian equivalents added. "Dey 1404" denotes the month spanning December 2025 and January 2026; the book's references concern the January protests.

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Preface

This book begins with a question: how can the desire for Iran's freedom be turned into the ability to build its future? For me, political activism becomes meaningful when it connects ideas with everyday responsibility, from supporting a person who has been harmed to building an institution capable of serving society for years.

My life has taken me from Abadan through revolution and war, into medicine and migration, and through different political experiences. Along the way, I have learnt both the power of hope and the costs of fragmentation, dogmatism and the absence of a plan. What remains with me is the need to learn and reconsider. The past should help us understand, and today's decisions must remain open to questions and criticism.

Across these six chapters, I first explain my political vision and then discuss my life and the transformation of my outlook. Institution-building, the urgency of historical opportunity, relations with Europe and the responsibilities of the architects of a new Iran continue the same journey. These subjects are connected: a shared vision gives cooperation direction; institutions make it last; and diplomacy can expand the country's opportunities to cooperate with the world.

I support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership during the transition, alongside the people's right to choose freely, power governed by law and equal citizenship. A future Iran must be a shared home for supporters and critics, believers and non-believers, and different political currents. The value of our historical legacy is also revealed in its capacity to inspire such a future.

This book invites us to accept responsibility. Everyone can contribute knowledge, time, experience and ability to a specific task. What makes hope for a free Iran credible is the quality of the relationships, institutions and work we begin building today.

Peyman Bakhshayesh
September 2026

About the Author

Peyman Bakhshayesh, a trauma and orthopaedic surgeon, was born in Abadan in Shahrivar 1350 (August-September 1971). His father, Mohammad Ali Bakhshayesh, was a naval officer, and his mother, Mahin Farahani, grew up in a family connected with the oil industry. In his family account, his roots stretch from Mashhad and Isfahan to Farahan, paths that eventually met in Abadan.

The revolution of 1357 (1979) and the Iran-Iraq War transformed family life. After displacement at the beginning of the war, the family settled in Bushehr in 1360 (1981-82). Bakhshayesh entered Shiraz University of Medical Sciences in 1368 (1989-90). After university and military service, his migration took him through Dubai and Turkey to Germany and then Sweden.

According to the professional account in Chapter Two, he obtained specialist recognition in trauma and orthopaedic surgery in Sweden in 2010. Advanced training in pelvic and acetabular surgery in Saarland and doctoral research at Karolinska Institutet, culminating in a PhD in 2020, were subsequent stages. At the time of this book's preparation, he works as a consultant trauma surgeon at Leeds Teaching Hospitals and has a teaching association with the University of Leeds.

His political life has taken him from membership and activity in the Worker-communist Party of Iran to support for a transition to secular democracy under Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership. Love of Iran, freedom of conscience, equal rights, institution-building and international cooperation are central themes in his writings. Chapter Two offers his detailed personal account of this evolution.

Biographical sources: Chapter Two, "My Life and the Making of a Political Outlook", and the autobiographical manuscript "Before My Beginning: From Farahan and Mashhad to Abadan", supplied by the author.

Roots in Abadan



Abadan, 1956. A photograph from Peyman Bakhshayesh's family archive. According to the author, his mother, Mahin, was two years old when it was taken. The image brings together generations of the family before the author's birth.

Photograph and dating: *Before My Beginning: From Farahan and Mashhad to Abadan*, the English manuscript supplied by the author.

CHAPTER 1

Political Activism in the Lion and Sun Movement

The vision of a national revolution and the responsibility to build Iran's future

Iran must once again become a country in which its citizens can build their future.

Iran must once again become a country in which its citizens can build their future. This aspiration is the starting point for political activism in the Lion and Sun movement. Anger at repression and discrimination generates the energy for action. Yet to succeed and preserve what we achieve, we must know what kind of government we want, how we will create wealth and what relationship we will have with the world. A revolution that has given no thought to the day after victory may transfer power while leaving freedom beyond reach.

In this chapter, I argue for a transition from the Islamic Republic to a national, secular and democratic government: one that links the country's independence to constructive international cooperation, and individual freedom to public well-being. In this process, I regard Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as a political asset capable of bringing patriotic forces together. This position looks to the future while drawing on the experience of the past. Our responsibility is to turn the hope of change into the capacity to govern a free Iran.

By the Lion and Sun movement, I mean in this book the national, freedom-seeking current that regards this historical emblem as a symbol of connection to Iran, a departure from religious rule and the reconstruction of the country. This definition is my political understanding of a diverse movement; it does not claim that everyone who carries this flag holds identical views. On that basis, this chapter brings historical evidence together with political argument and a proposed vision for the future.

The Pahlavi Legacy and a New Generation's Responsibility

For me, respect for the contributions of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi means recognising their role in Iran's modernisation. The establishment and expansion of modern industries, the strengthening of administrative capacity and the development of infrastructure are part of an experience that the Islamic Republic's propaganda cannot erase from national memory. Research in economic history has documented industrial expansion under Reza Shah and accelerated industrialisation under Mohammad Reza Shah, together with their limitations and dependencies. ^[1, 2]

Appreciation of this experience should lead us to today's questions. The Iran of the future needs universities where research is free, industries capable of competing in world markets and a government whose power is subject to citizens' oversight. A new generation has the right to draw inspiration from its predecessors' achievements while building institutions suited to its own needs. The memory of development becomes a political resource when it illuminates the path to further development.

Criticism of restrictions on political freedom under the Pahlavis is also part of this responsibility. The history of the repression of opponents and the narrowing of political competition must be studied so that a future Iran can learn from it. ^[3] A sustainable political system requires opportunities for criticism, competition,

reform and the transfer of power. One can remain committed to the Pahlavi legacy while insisting that no office or institution should be exempt from accountability.

In my view, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's value to the new generation lies in his potential to connect historical memory with a national programme for the future. In his official statements, he speaks of a transition to a national, secular and democratic government, the organisation of Iranians and economic reconstruction. ^[4] My support for his role rests on this direction. Turning that potential into effective leadership requires public trust, a clear programme, cooperation among diverse forces and acceptance of the people's judgement.

The Islamic Republic and the Appropriation of the Right to Life

From its inception, the Islamic Republic made the elimination of opponents an instrument for consolidating power. The execution of four commanders of the former government on the roof of Refah School on the night of 15 February 1979, following proceedings lasting only a few hours and without defence counsel, was an early example. The report by Iran Human Rights and Together Against the Death Penalty records this event in its discussion of the emergence of revolutionary courts. ^[5] That night offered a terrifying sign of an order seeking to replace fair trial with revolutionary will.

Repression was not confined to officials of the former government. After the crisis of Khordad 1360, in June 1981, the arrest, torture and execution of opponents expanded; the Mojahedin and various currents of the left were also targeted. Then, between July and September 1988, corresponding to the summer and beginning of autumn 1367, thousands of political prisoners were secretly executed. The victims included supporters of the Mojahedin and left-wing groups, among them members of the Tudeh Party and the Fadaian. Amnesty International has documented these massacres, the concealment of the victims' fate and the suffering inflicted on their families. ^[6]

This history imposes an ethical obligation on the Lion and Sun movement: the right to seek justice does not depend on a victim's political affiliation. We can disagree with a prisoner's ideas and still defend that person's right to life and a fair trial. If we make respect for human life conditional on political agreement, we reproduce the very rule that has enabled the machinery of repression to survive. A national movement for justice must give voice to families whose loved ones have been overlooked in partisan accounts.

Women and girls have also been central targets of the Islamic Republic's discriminatory order. Controlling their dress and restricting their individual choices have not been peripheral matters in its system of government. In March 2024, the independent UN fact-finding mission examined the repression of the Woman, Life, Freedom protests and structural discrimination against women and girls, finding that many of the documented violations

amounted to crimes against humanity. ^[7] For me, women's freedom is one of the principal measures of Iran's freedom. No political expediency should again defer their rights to an indefinite future.

The Eight-Year War and the Need for Historical Honesty

Criticism of the Islamic Republic must avoid distorting history. The eight-year war began with Iraq's invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980, or 31 Shahrivar 1359. ^[8] In his report of 9 December 1991, the UN Secretary-General also addressed Iraq's responsibility for initiating the conflict; that report is discussed in historical research on the Gulf War. ^[9] Responsibility for this aggression lay with Saddam Hussein's government. Our opposition to the Islamic Republic gives us no right to erase that fact.

Alongside this truth, the decisions of the Islamic Republic's leaders concerning the war's objectives, its continuation after the recapture of Khorramshahr in 1361 (1982), and the human and economic costs of those decisions must be open to scrutiny. Historical research records the changing military position and the entry of Iranian forces into Iraqi territory in the summer of 1982. ^[8] The people's defence of their homeland must be distinguished from holding rulers to account for their decisions. Respect for those killed or harmed in the war requires that their suffering never become a shield protecting any politician from scrutiny.

As a trauma surgeon, my ethical judgement of war begins with the value of human life. In political language, individual deaths sometimes disappear into casualty figures. In real life, every death transforms a family, and every lasting injury changes a future. A revolutionary activist must therefore be able both to argue for ending a system of repression and to demand clear answers about the human cost of any proposed course of action.

The Islamic Revolution and Iran's Changing Place in the World

The revolution of 1357 (1979) severed the Iranian government's strategic relationship with the United States. The occupation of the US embassy and the taking of diplomats as hostages deepened that rupture. ^[10] It does not follow, however, that the United States withdrew from the entire Middle East. Iran left the network of US allies and redefined its regional role on a different basis, while the American presence and American partnerships continued elsewhere in the region. The Gulf War of 1991 is itself clear evidence of this distinction. ^[9]

Relations between Iran and Israel likewise shifted from cooperation during the Pahlavi period to official hostility under the Islamic Republic. Yet even after the revolution, the history of that relationship was not entirely uniform. Covert arms dealings in the 1980s illustrate its complexity. Iranica's study of the two countries' relations emphasises the simultaneous influence of ideo-

logy and strategic calculation. ^[11] A rigorous analysis must recognise this complexity so that future policy is not built on a simplified picture of the past.

In my assessment, the religious government's hostility towards the West gradually narrowed Iran's choices and created conditions for greater dependence on partners whose interests did not necessarily coincide with Iran's development. For example, a Reuters report updated in March 2026, drawing on Kpler data, stated that China accounted for more than 80 per cent of Iran's shipped oil in 2025 and explained the incentive for independent Chinese refiners to buy discounted oil. ^[12] My inference is that such concentration limits the seller's bargaining power.

To explain this situation, however, we should not assume that all European governments, China and Russia have shared one fixed purpose throughout the past 47 years. Trade policy, security competition, sanctions and negotiations have operated alongside one another at different times. The European Union has also imposed sanctions on those responsible for human rights violations in Iran and has adopted restrictive measures in response to Iran's military support for Russia's war against Ukraine. ^[13, 14] Criticism of accommodating policies pursued by some governments becomes more effective when it rests on specific decisions and their consequences.

The Economics of Hostility and the Price Iran Has Paid

Regional hostility creates economic opportunities for some actors. Governments worried about security demand more weapons; intermediaries profit from obstacles to trade; and buyers in a restricted market press for discounts. Nevertheless, benefiting from a crisis does not in itself prove that the beneficiary originally engineered it. A national activist must examine the relationship between profit and power without substituting suspicion for evidence.

SIPRI data show that the Middle East accounted for approximately 27 per cent of global imports of major arms in 2020-2024. During the same period, the United States and several European countries were important suppliers to states in the region. ^[15] The economic interests arising from insecurity therefore cannot be attributed solely to the West's rivals. These figures measure the volume of arms transfers; they should not be confused with dollar revenues from arms sales or treated as proof of the cause of every war.

My central question is this: why should Iran remain trapped in an order in which national resources are devoted to confrontation, circumventing restrictions and sustaining tension? Even if others benefit, that does not remove the Iranian government's responsibility for its own policies. The national interest requires opportunities to sell energy competitively, attract technology, expand

trade and choose among a range of economic partners. Independence becomes stronger when a country has multiple options for doing business.

Nor can we claim that no industry, infrastructure or scientific capability has developed during the Islamic Republic. The work and knowledge of millions of Iranians must not be erased from history. My criticism concerns a system that, in my view, has constrained people's potential through discrimination, monopoly and ideological priorities. The issue is the gap between Iran's capabilities and the quality of life its citizens should enjoy. The country's future must be judged by that standard.

Ending Ideological Hostility and the Possibility of Peace with Israel

I do not regard permanent hostility towards Israel as Iran's historical destiny. Israel's existence and security are realities that a responsible foreign policy must recognise. A free Iran can establish diplomatic relations with Israel and cooperate in science, economics and technology. In my view, such a relationship would be part of Iran's return to a foreign policy based on national interests and regional coexistence.

This argument does not depend on the fact that many Iranians are not Arab. Iran is also home to Arab citizens, and no ethnic identity provides a reason for compulsory hostility or friendship towards another people. Without reliable evidence, we cannot

attribute a single outlook to all Iranians. What I defend is their right to choose foreign policy through accountable institutions, a right that must not remain captive to an ideological apparatus.

At the same time, Palestinians have the right to live in security and dignity and to have a political future. Supporting peace with Israel is compatible with defending the rights of Palestinian civilians. Any political movement that turns Palestinian suffering into a licence for attacks on civilians, hostage-taking or endless war harms their prospect of an ordinary life. The same standard applies to every government: lasting security cannot be built through indifference to the lives of others.

In the history of Iran's revolution, part of the left, particularly the Tudeh Party, supported Khomeini and the revolution's anti-imperialist direction. Other left-wing currents confronted the new government and were repressed. ^[3] My criticism concerns a logic that places opposition to the United States above human freedom. Calling a policy left-wing, nationalist or anti-colonial does not exempt it from accountability for its human consequences. The standard must be clear: what does this policy contribute to people's freedom, security and ability to build their lives?

Partnership with the West and National Independence

The political position I defend is a nationalism compatible with strategic cooperation with the West, particularly the United States, and normal, constructive relations with Israel. This direction should improve Iran's access to capital, knowledge, markets

and scientific networks. If international cooperation does not strengthen domestic capacity, simply changing the names of our allies will not deliver enough for the people.

Cooperation with the United States and Israel must rest on mutual interests and the preservation of national agency. No foreign government can replace the will of the Iranian people, and no friendship eliminates conflicts of interest for all time. Transparent contracts, competition among investors, knowledge transfer and public oversight are instruments for defending independence. Iran must be a capable partner, free to decide on its own contracts and commitments.

Europe is also part of the Western world and can play a useful role in Iran's reconstruction and development. Opposition to the past policies of some European governments is no reason to deny a future Iran access to their universities, technologies and markets. National interests and transparency must also be the standards governing relations with China and Russia. Ending political dependence does not necessarily mean prohibiting all trade. In discussing the present, we should refer to Russia: the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991.

I regard the growing influence of a nationally oriented Iran cooperating with the West as an important historical possibility. But we cannot announce the inevitable decline of Chinese, Russian or European influence, or the unavoidable emergence of a single new order, as facts about the future. Such outcomes depend on the course of war, the major powers' economic strength, the decisions of regional states and the quality of Iran's

future government. An activist who looks ahead must work towards favourable opportunities while also preparing politically for adverse outcomes.

The Current War: Distinguishing Iran from the Islamic Republic

At the time of writing, war and conflicts involving the Islamic Republic continue to affect regional security. A Reuters report of 9 September 2026 describes reciprocal Iranian and American attacks on shipping and rising tensions around the Strait of Hormuz. ^[16] This situation poses a difficult question for a national activist: how can we oppose the Islamic Republic while defending Iran and its people?

My answer begins with a fundamental distinction. Iran is our land, our people and our shared future; the Islamic Republic is a particular form of government. The survival of that government must not be equated with the survival of the country. One may believe that weakening the Islamic Republic's capacity for repression and for generating threats could create an opportunity for Iranian freedom. This is a political assessment whose possibility I defend; whether it materialises depends on the conduct of the warring parties and the capabilities of Iranian activists.

Distinguishing Iran from the Islamic Republic does not, by itself, establish that every attack serves the Iranian people. Each action must be judged by its purpose, consequences and costs. The desire for a change of government does not confer an unlimited licence to damage the country. International humanitarian law

exists to limit the effects of war and protect those not taking part in hostilities; its rules are distinct from the question of whether initiating a war is lawful. ^[17] Our political judgement must take that distinction seriously.

In my view, support for effective pressure on the government can go hand in hand with demands to protect civilians and essential infrastructure. A national activist must speak about the Islamic Republic's crimes and also criticise any action that harms the Iranian people. Friendship with a foreign government does not take away our capacity for ethical and political judgement. Loyalty to Iran is measured by the quality of our defence of Iranian lives and of the people's right to determine their future.

The proposition that reconstruction will follow destruction becomes a programme only when the conditions for reconstruction exist. They include an end to war, public security, the provision of essential services, transparent funding and institutions trusted by the public. As the World Development Report 2011 explains, countries' experiences after violence underline the importance of legitimate, capable institutions, security, justice and jobs. ^[18] No amount of political hope can substitute for that difficult work.

A Productive Economy and Well-Being after Transition

My desired future is an Iran that devotes its political energy to increasing productive capacity and improving quality of life. Start-ups, knowledge-based industries and modern services are

important within this vision. But a large economy is not built by a handful of successful companies. Factories, the electricity grid, railways, ports, roads and tunnels, clean water and an effective education system provide the foundations of life and production. A reconstruction programme must recognise these connections rather than separate the digital economy from the country's basic needs.

My defence of a market economy is a defence of competition and opportunities for individual initiative. An economy that distributes opportunities among those connected to power is incompatible with that goal. Entrepreneurs must be able to operate without political patronage; contracts must be reliable; and the government must remain accountable for corruption and monopoly. Productive investment acquires national value when it leaves behind knowledge, employment and competitive capacity within the country.

Growth in gross domestic product matters, but it does not by itself measure a society's success. Real wages, job security, the quality of healthcare, access to education, housing costs and equal opportunities for women must also be assessed. Workers, students and pensioners must be able to see the effects of change in their own lives. Public well-being is part of the national revolution's purpose; it must not become a secondary promise to be fulfilled after the owners of capital have prospered.

I also expect the democratic left to clarify its relationship with production, technology and global cooperation. Defending workers is incompatible with rejecting every investment or every rela-

tionship with the West in advance. Conversely, the economic right must explain how it distinguishes competition from privileged access and what guarantees it offers for labour rights and equal opportunity. Healthy competition in the future can concern ways to raise productivity and distribute opportunities more fairly. No political current must accept all my geopolitical preferences in order to have the right to participate. Commitment to democratic rules and citizens' rights is our common standard.

Revolutionary Activism and the Responsibility to Organise

Activism in the Lion and Sun movement must turn protest into trust and lasting cooperation. Every individual and group should be able to explain which problem they are addressing in the transition and to whom they are accountable. Raising funds for those harmed, providing legal support for victims, documenting rights violations, engaging with civil society and preparing expert proposals for running the country are examples of concrete work that can be evaluated.

Patriotism must earn the trust of Iran's diverse citizens. Language, religion, ethnicity, gender and political affiliation must not become measures of how fully someone belongs to the country. Defending territorial integrity is strengthened by treating all citizens as equals. The Lion and Sun flag can acquire a more inclusive role when those carrying it also recognise their opponents' rights and make clear provision for their free participation in the Iran of the future.

Support for political leadership also requires organisation, programmes and oversight. Reza Pahlavi's name can help bring forces together; his supporters are responsible for strengthening that possibility through trustworthy conduct. Financial transparency, avoiding personal attacks, accepting criticism and offering solutions increase the movement's capabilities. Every claim to representation must be made open to assessment and accountability.

During the transition, the machinery of repression must be held accountable and discriminatory structures dismantled. At the same time, public services must not collapse. Continuing health-care, water, electricity, education and essential payments requires cooperation from the staff and specialists who keep the country functioning. Individuals' criminal responsibility must be established through evidence and fair proceedings. Administrative or family connections alone cannot replace proof of an offence. Transitional justice must make both accountability and continued coexistence possible.

To be revolutionary in this sense means a determination to end the monopoly of religious power and return authority to the people. That determination takes practical form through civic organisation, social solidarity, insistence on rights and readiness to govern. The future needs people who, alongside protest, can accept responsibility and prepare answers to real problems.

Our Commitment to Iran's Future

The future I advocate is clear: an end to the Islamic Republic, the preservation of Iran's unity and the establishment of an order in which power originates with the people. A future constitution must provide for free competition, peaceful transfers of power and its own amendment. The final form of government must be determined through the people's free choice. My support for Reza Pahlavi's role in the transition belongs within this vision of national sovereignty.

This vision requires measurable commitments: legal equality between women and men; freedom of belief and lifestyle; an independent judiciary; public access to information; and an economy in which opportunities for work and advancement are not dependent on political connections. Its foreign policy must serve citizens' security and well-being and establish constructive relations with the United States, Israel, neighbouring countries and other international partners.

When I say that the Islamic Republic must go, I am expressing a responsibility for myself and those who share my views. To bring it to an end, we must build trust, cooperate and offer a programme worthy of the Iranian people. History's outcome is not written in advance. What gives our hope credibility is the quality of the work we do today for freedom and for the country's future.

The Lion and Sun movement can embody such resolve: the resolve of a people who want to regain control of their destiny and devote their capabilities to building. We have the right to seek a free and prosperous future, and the duty to prepare for it. Respect for the past acquires its full meaning when the next generation can live and advance in Iran, and decide how it is governed without fear. This is the responsibility of our revolutionary activism.

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CHAPTER 2

My Life and the Making of a Political Outlook

From Abadan and the war years to medicine and activism abroad

Between what I felt in those years and what I now understand of those experiences lies the distance of a lifetime.

When I speak of the need for a clear picture of the future, I also think about my own life: about a family that prepared to leave for America and instead found itself living through years of war; about a childhood spent between books and displacement; and about the journey that took me from studying medicine in Shiraz to migration and political activism. My present outlook developed along that path. To understand it, one must consider both what I learnt from my family and the experiences that led me to question, disagree and reconsider.

This chapter is my account of that journey. I recount childhood memories from the position of a child living through events far larger than himself, events whose meaning I often understood only later. Today's political judgements likewise reflect my present perspective. Between what I felt in those years and what I now understand of those experiences lies the distance of a lifetime.

Abadan: Beginning Life in a Military Family

I, Peyman Bakhshayesh, was born in Abadan in Shahrivar 1350, in August-September 1971. My father, Mohammad Ali Bakhshayesh, and my mother, Mahin Farahani, had married in 1349 (1970-71). My father was an officer in the Iranian Navy and my mother the daughter of an oil company employee. From the outset, our lives were connected to two important parts of Abadan: the armed forces and the oil industry.

My father was an officer loyal to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. He had made good professional progress under the monarchy and spoke of that system with respect and admiration. His loyalty was present in our home and shaped part of my earliest understanding of politics. For him, military service, Iran's standing and his respect for the Shah were connected.

Years later, my own political journey took me through the workers' left, far from many of my father's beliefs. Nevertheless, the meaning of service to the country remained with me. When I think of him today, I remember above all a man who wanted to be useful, to work and to remain faithful to his responsibilities. Subsequent events put that quality to a severe test.

Tehran, Thirty Thousand Dollars and a Journey Never Made

I was seven when we moved to Tehran. My father was due to go to the United States for training as part of the Navy's submarine programme. We had been told within the family that the stay would last six years, and the family was to accompany him. We had sold our belongings, setting aside the proceeds of our assets for this new beginning: thirty thousand dollars to cover our first months in America.

For us, the journey was no longer a distant dream. We had packed up our former home and life and were waiting for the next stage. But the protests and confrontations of 1357 (1978-79) were spreading, and the path mapped out for our family gradually slipped beyond reach.

I remember my father gathering a group of people each day to go out and confront those he regarded as rebels. I cannot reconstruct the details of their activities today from a child's memory, but his position was clear to me: he supported the Shah and did not hide it. Being known for this also affected our daily lives.

Our car was a brown Toyota Carina. It was easily recognised as belonging to a family that supported the Shah. We had to change where we were staying from time to time. Amid the many events of that period, I still remember the car's colour and model: an ordinary family possession that, in the atmosphere of revolution, had become a marker of our political position.

In the final weeks of Pahlavi rule, Shapour Bakhtiar became prime minister and the Shah then left Iran. Later, we were told that the assignments had been cancelled and that we had to return to Abadan. The journey to America never happened. A family that had converted its possessions into money to begin a life in another country now had to return to its own city and establish a home again.

Returning to a City in Transition

When we returned to Abadan, many Western residents were hurriedly selling their belongings and leaving Iran. This allowed us to buy household items again and put our lives back in order. On the surface, there was an opportunity to replace what we had sold before our planned departure. Yet the departure of those people filled me with a sense of danger.

In my child's mind, many of them were associated with modern life, connections with the world and a city bustling with people. Their departure made me feel that part of Abadan's future was leaving with them. I had no precise name for that anxiety then. I simply saw people whose presence had signified prosperity and openness wanting to get away as quickly as possible.

My father faced many difficulties because of his history of loyalty to the Shah. Eventually, after a reduction in rank and a declaration of loyalty under the new circumstances, he was able to continue working. He stressed that he was a patriot whose purpose was to serve his country. The rest of his life gave substance to that statement: when war began, the same officer who had been loyal to the former system remained in the Navy and worked to defend Iran.

This part of my father's life came to matter more to me later. It was possible to feel attached to one government, suffer from its fall, have little sympathy with the next, and still regard the country as one's responsibility. This family experience helped shape a distinction that is fundamental to me today: Iran, with its history and its people, continues beyond the lifespan of any government.

The Books and Debates of Abadan

In my memory, the interval between revolution and war was filled with political debate. In the circles I knew, Abadan was a strongly left-wing city, a 'red' city in the language of the time. People even called it 'Leningrad'. This is my impression of the

surroundings in which I moved: a city of varied outlooks and ways of life, with a prominent left-wing presence in parts of its public sphere.

My maternal uncle was politically involved, and through him I took part in these discussions. I was still a child, but political and philosophical conversations fascinated me. I read books, asked questions and enjoyed an atmosphere in which there was more room to speak. That brief opening, despite all its turmoil, increased my appetite for reading and understanding.

I entered reading and essay-writing competitions. Once, a man named Dariush awarded me a box of books. The prize stayed in my memory: both the books themselves and the feeling that someone had noticed my reading and writing. Years later, I found Dariush again in Germany. Between that box of books in Abadan and our reunion in exile lay revolution, war, university and departure from Iran.

My memories of Abadan are not confined to party politics. Freer relationships between women and men, friendships, concern for others and courage also stand out in my picture of the city. Later, when we had to live in different cities, I came to understand more fully how that environment had influenced me. I learnt something from every city, but Abadan remained my point of reference for social openness and courage in discussion.

War: Displacement and Then Bushehr

The beginning of the Iran-Iraq War disrupted our lives once again. Iraq's large-scale attack on 31 Shahrivar 1359, or 22 September 1980, began a period that took our family from one city to another. ^[1] My first experience of war came through this instability: moving home, leaving familiar surroundings and trying to find somewhere that ordinary life could begin again.

We spent nearly a year moving around before settling in Bushehr in 1360 (1981-82). My father began serving at the Bushehr naval base, and we spent the remaining war years in that region. Bushehr became the setting for much of my adolescence, years in which education and personal growth unfolded alongside the constant presence of war.

My father was a hardworking, energetic officer. His considerable energy earned him a good reputation in the Navy. After everything he had experienced during the revolution, he still worked with dedication. I could see that perseverance, even if I was not yet old enough to judge all its political and ethical dimensions.

Today, when I write about war and Iran's future, those years form part of my frame of reference. For me, war carries memories of family displacement and adolescence in a war zone. Every future I imagine must therefore lead ultimately to the possibility of ordinary life: a home in which one can stay, a school in which one can learn and a future for which a family can plan.

Shiraz: Medicine and the University's Restrictions

In 1368 (1989-90), I entered Shiraz University of Medical Sciences. After a childhood and adolescence overshadowed by revolution and war, university marked the beginning of a new stage. Medicine became my professional path, but my interest in politics and philosophy came with me.

From the moment I arrived, I was keenly aware of students admitted under the war-veterans quota and of their political influence. The figure I remember from that period is forty per cent; I give it as my recollection of the quota discussed at the time. What mattered in my daily experience was the dominance of one political current over university life and the unequal opportunities to express an opinion.

Over time, differences and divisions emerged among the Islamic Association's members: some tendencies were more hardline, while others wanted greater change and openness. These differences altered the atmosphere to some extent. But for someone with atheistic views like mine, they did not make free and equal political participation possible. There was a considerable distance between disagreements within accepted political currents and freedom for a person whose thinking lay outside that framework altogether.

I continued with medicine, but one question stayed with me: why was a university, supposedly a place for learning and testing ideas, so closed to certain fundamental questions? From that

time, my experience of political freedom became connected to the right to express an unpopular idea. Secularism also acquired a personal meaning: the possibility that a person's belief or lack of belief would not determine their right to study, work and participate.

Leaving Iran and Encountering the Opposition Abroad

After university, I completed my military service because I intended to leave Iran. Before reaching Germany, I spent some time in Dubai and Turkey. This interval was more than a geographical stage in migration. It gave me the opportunity to become better acquainted with Iranians living abroad, each with a particular picture of Iran and its future.

In Dubai, I stayed for a time with Manzar, one of our monarchist friends. Through these contacts, I became familiar with part of the monarchist milieu. The gatherings I attended contained political discussion and attachment to the past. Some participants owned restaurants or cabarets and were occupied with business and life abroad. Yet, in my experience at the time, I saw less of the discipline and sustained political work I had expected.

This impression arose from my encounters with those particular individuals and circles. What troubled me was the gap between having a political allegiance and turning it into collective work. Having experienced Abadan's debates and the restrictions at university, I did not regard opposition to the Islamic Republic

alone as an adequate response. I wanted to see who could bring people together, divide responsibilities and keep working until something was achieved.

What Attracted Me to the Workers' Left

Against that background, the activities of the Worker-communist Party greatly appealed to me. In that environment, I saw activism as daily, organised work: fundraising groups, radio and television activities, drafting proposals, public campaigns and sustained attention to specific issues. Activists worked for women, children, workers and Iranian migrants, seeking the means and resources to support their projects.

The issues were tangible: migrants' legal difficulties, women's rights, public awareness, support for children and opposition to the influence of political Islam in migrant communities. What attracted me was the connection between ideas and action. I could see how a political organisation could use media, funding and voluntary cooperation to address a problem in a real person's life.

This involvement led me to become a member and cadre of the Worker-communist Party of Iran, a history I have also discussed in other writings. ^[2] That period is a real part of my political life. It taught me the importance of organisation, continuity, division of labour and turning ethical concern into activity. Those lessons have not disappeared as my political positions have changed.

The lasting lesson of my experience in the workers' left was that a political movement cannot survive on declarations alone. It needs people who plan, gather resources, accept responsibility and remain connected to real people and their difficulties. That practical experience is still present in my mind when I write today about the need for activism in the Lion and Sun movement.

Moving Away from Earlier Answers

After Mansoor Hekmat's death in England, I gradually felt that part of that movement was moving away from the qualities that had attracted me. In my perception, its progressive, secular orientation towards the modern world was being overshadowed by familiar positions of the traditional left. I saw this change particularly in its approach to Israel, the Palestinian question and the West's place in global politics.

This assessment describes the evolution of my own perspective. Others from within the same movement may explain those years differently. For me, the question became increasingly clear: what relationship did our political activities bear to the freedom and well-being of the Iranian people? Did our positions open a path to their liberation, or keep us in hostilities with no clear end or outcome?

I had no objection to defending the Palestinian people's right to an ordinary, humane life. What I criticised was the priority given to hostility towards Israel and its use as a test of left-wing identity. While Iranians faced repression, discrimination and wide-

spread hardship, I could not accept their needs being pushed to the margins of an ideological alignment. For me, political responsibility towards Iran had to remain central.

From there, my distance from that intellectual framework grew. I still considered concern for workers, women, children and migrants essential, but no longer believed that such concern necessarily required confrontation with the United States, Israel or the market economy. I concluded that social justice needs productive capacity, knowledge, investment and effective institutions, and that foreign policy should improve access to those resources.

Today, I support a left that can participate in a national movement oriented towards cooperation with the West while remaining a defender of social rights. Such a left can fight for job security, education, health and equal opportunity while welcoming cooperation with the United States, Israel and other developed countries. That movement's organising experience is valuable for Iran's future if accompanied by a renewed understanding of national interests and global conditions.

Medicine, Research and Life in Europe

Alongside this political journey, my professional life continued. After Germany, a significant part of my training and work developed in Sweden. In 2010, I gained specialist recognition in trauma and orthopaedic surgery there and continued my clinical career. Teaching and research subsequently occupied a larger

place in my work, including advanced training in pelvic and acetabular surgery in Saarland, Germany, and doctoral research at Karolinska Institutet, which led to a PhD in 2020.

My professional path subsequently brought me to the United Kingdom. Today, I work as a consultant trauma surgeon at Leeds Teaching Hospitals, with clinical responsibilities in trauma and general orthopaedics and a teaching association with the University of Leeds. Medicine, research and management have become three connected parts of my professional life. This journey is documented in greater detail in my academic and clinical curriculum vitae. ^[3]

When I speak of effectiveness, responsibility and assessing results, my professional experience also lies behind those words. In specialist practice, good intentions are the beginning of responsibility. Knowledge, skill, coordination and the ability to revise decisions must also be present. These standards have influenced my approach to political activism. I expect a political movement to explain how it translates its aims into action and how it knows whether it is moving in the right direction.

Life in Europe has also meant living in societies where people can work, learn and participate in shared institutions despite differences of opinion. My interest in a future Iran open to the West is connected to this part of my life: I want Iranians to develop their abilities in a free, stable environment without having to leave their own country to do so.

Woman, Life, Freedom: Criticism and Reassessment

The Woman, Life, Freedom movement once again confronted us with the question of bringing the Islamic Republic's opponents together. Hopes of greater cooperation also grew abroad. The gathering of opposition figures at Georgetown University in February 2023 was one expression of that effort. ^[4] I took the possibility seriously because I had experienced how fragmentation exhausts political energy.

When that relative convergence failed to last, I criticised Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's activities and performance. Reports and analyses from the spring of 2023 also reflected the failure of that effort. ^[5] In my view, the issue was preserving an opportunity that could have led to practical cooperation. I expected the social support and standing of well-known figures to become a structure capable of advancing the struggle. The collapse of that cooperation was therefore disappointing to me.

My thinking did not stop there. The Crown Prince's visit to Israel in April 2023, during that same tense period, showed me another possibility in his political role. The official announcement emphasised a message of friendship and connections between the peoples of Iran and Israel. ^[6] Over time, I came to see the visit as a sign that one of the Islamic Republic's central ideological frameworks could be broken: its claim that hostility towards Israel must be Iran's permanent destiny.

That visit did not, on its own, eliminate all my criticisms, but it gave direction to my reassessment. I increasingly considered that leadership during a transition must be able to connect the domestic demand for freedom with opportunities for international cooperation. Public recognition, diplomatic access and the capacity for dialogue with influential powers matter for such a role, alongside public trust.

The twelve-day war of June 2025 marked another important point in this reassessment: a war between Israel and the Islamic Republic in which the United States also attacked Iranian nuclear facilities, followed by a ceasefire on 24 June. [7] That event made it more urgent for me to think about the balance of power, the government's future and political preparedness for major change. I could no longer postpone discussion of leadership and a transition programme to some indefinite opportunity.

For someone who experienced the war years as a child and adolescent, the meaning of such developments is bound up with people's fate and the possibility of reconstruction. There is a distance between weakening the Islamic Republic and creating a free, stable Iran, and that distance must be covered through organisation, planning and responsibility. It made the need for recognised leadership and a clear picture of the future more prominent in my assessment.

My Choice Today and the Future Ahead

Today, I support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as the leader of the transition. In my current assessment, he is the only figure among the available options who combines the necessary historical standing, international recognition and capacity to bring people together around a national vision open to the West. This choice is the result of my intellectual journey and reconsideration of my experiences, from my family home to the workers' left and from there to the question of how a future can actually be built.

I regard the possibility of cooperation with the United States, Israel and the wealthy Gulf states as an opportunity for Iran: an opportunity for security, investment, knowledge transfer and reconstruction. I hope that a national, secular and development-oriented Iran can use such relationships both to improve its people's lives and to contribute to stability in the Middle East. Realising this vision requires decisions and work by Iranians, and we must accept the responsibility ourselves.

In my recent writings on Pahlavism and secular democracy, I have tried to explain this understanding: political leadership derives its value from the capacity to establish institutions that make people's freedom and participation durable. ^[8] For me, support for the Crown Prince goes together with the people's right to vote, power governed by law and space for diverse political currents. The future must provide equal citizenship for someone who, like me, is an atheist, for a religious person, for left and right, and for supporters and critics alike.

I also regard intellectual independence as part of that commitment. In my essay 'Criticising an Idea or Attacking the Person Who Holds It?', I wrote that people's political pasts should not become instruments of exclusion and that political support should not extinguish the right to criticise. ^[2] My experience shows that people can change, learn from others and make new choices. A movement that allows room for that possibility can benefit from Iranians' varied experiences.

Looking back, I see my father continuing to serve Iran after the revolution. I remember Abadan, with its political discussions and the books that enlarged my world; Bushehr and the war years; university and the restrictions on expressing an opinion; migration and learning what organisation means. None of these experiences alone explains my present position. That position was formed through their combination.

What I want today is an Iran in which a child can imagine a future in their own country; a student need not fear expressing an idea; a woman has control over her life; a worker can earn a dignified living; and doctors, researchers and entrepreneurs have opportunities to develop and serve. It is to reach such an Iran that I speak of activism within the Lion and Sun movement.

Political activism needs a picture of the future because every step must connect to a meaningful destination. I follow this path with the memory of the past and the responsibility of the present. I now want to place what I have learnt from life, medicine and politics at the service of building that future.

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CHAPTER 3

Building Today's Institutions for Tomorrow's Secular Democracy

A shared vision and lasting cooperation in the Lion
and Sun movement

The credibility of the future we promise begins with the
experience others have of working with us now.

Political activism gains direction when it can offer a clear picture of the future and identify the responsibilities we must take on today to reach it. The future I want for Iran is a modern secular democracy: a country in which freedom of conscience, equal citizenship and the rule of law are connected to production, knowledge and public well-being. Building such an Iran requires people who begin cooperating, creating organisations and accepting shared responsibility today.

In the first chapter, I discussed the political vision of the Lion and Sun movement; in the second, I explained my life journey and the evolution of my outlook. The question now is how this vision becomes practical capacity. My answer is institution-building from the grassroots: the development of associations, councils, scientific bodies, community groups and political parties capable of sustained work and, together, of building the Iran of the future.

I support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership during the transition and understand that leadership in connection with organised public participation. He can give direction to national convergence and bring scattered capabilities towards a shared destination. Reaching it depends on thousands of groups and millions of people working in their cities, professions and communities. The stronger this social foundation becomes, the greater the possibility of achieving a transition and building a lasting order. ^[1]

A Clear Picture of Life in a Future Iran

Secular democracy must acquire a tangible meaning in people's daily lives. When we speak of it, we must be able to explain how a woman decides about her own life, how a student asks questions, how a worker defends their rights and how an entrepreneur plans an investment. Citizens must be able to pursue a dispute with the government in an independent court and know that a change of government will not abolish their fundamental rights.

Modernity is also evident in the quality of public administration. Universities must be able to generate knowledge; hospitals must be managed on the basis of professional competence; public budgets must be open to examination; and officials must explain their decisions. These are elements of the civilisation we want to build. Buildings and equipment become sources of lasting well-being when the institutions managing them are competent and accountable.

This picture gives us a standard for our conduct today. A group working for democracy must respect its members' votes and right to object in its own decisions. An association demanding government transparency must be able to present its own accounts clearly. A movement speaking of equality between women and men must distribute responsibility and authority on that basis. The credibility of the future we promise begins with the experience others have of working with us now.

From Individual Ability to the Strength of Cooperation

Iranians have demonstrated remarkable individual abilities in fields ranging from medicine and academia to business, art and technology. My concern is how to turn these abilities into lasting cooperation. A successful doctor, a capable businessperson and an outstanding researcher, when they agree on a common goal and divide responsibilities appropriately, create a capacity beyond the reach of any one of them alone.

To say that Iranians have never succeeded in collective work does not do justice to their many experiences of cooperation. Families, associations, professional groups and civic initiatives provide real examples of mutual support. We should focus on the difficulty of sustaining and expanding those experiences. Why do some groups fall apart when one person leaves? Why does disagreement over a decision end a relationship? Why do new resources sometimes intensify personal rivalry?

We should look for answers in the way groups are run. When responsibilities are unclear, agreements go unrecorded and no method exists for resolving disputes, even capable people may be unable to continue working together. A sense of national belonging is valuable for beginning cooperation, but sustaining it requires rules people can trust.

When we refer to solidarity among Japanese, Israelis, Kurds, Turks or Greeks, the useful question is how their associations and networks pass experience and resources from one generation to

the next. These communities are not uniform; each has its own disagreements and history. What I want us to learn from others is the possibility of creating a dependable relationship between individuals and their community, one in which one person's success can also create opportunities for others.

How Institutions Make Trust Last

Institution-building goes beyond choosing a name, designing a logo and opening a web page. A group becomes a dependable organisation when its purpose, membership, authority and responsibilities are clear. Members must know how decisions are made, who controls resources, when progress reports are presented and what procedures are available when disagreements arise.

In his work on institutions, Douglass North emphasises the formal rules and informal norms that structure political, economic and social relations and reduce uncertainty. ^[2] For our discussion, the significance of this perspective is that a constitution and everyday conduct must reinforce each other. If the constitution provides for elections but the founder refuses to accept an unwelcome result, the written rule will not generate trust.

A small organisation can begin with simple rules: a specific mission, a clear method for choosing its officers, defined terms of office, recorded decisions and regular financial reporting. As its work expands, those rules can become more developed. What

matters is establishing from the outset that nobody owns the organisation and that public responsibility comes with the possibility of questioning and scrutiny.

Continuity also requires the transfer of experience. Tasks must be documented and taught so that a new member can carry them on. If accounts, contacts and information remain in one person's hands, their absence can halt the entire activity. An institution that develops successors and shares knowledge with responsible members increases its ability to continue serving.

National Leadership and Grassroots Initiative

In my view, the Lion and Sun movement needs both national coordination and local initiative. Transitional leadership can strengthen a shared vision, common priorities and an inclusive political language. At the same time, a medical association, student group, professional council or local network must be able to make decisions and act within its own mission. Waiting for instructions on every small action leaves society's capabilities idle.

In my essay 'Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi: Architect of Secular Democracy', I also emphasised a role that makes the activity and competition of diverse political currents possible. ^[1] This understanding accompanies my support for the Crown Prince. I want national leadership to create conditions in which institutions can connect and to reassure them that their expertise, independence and right to express an opinion will have a place in the future.

Working side by side does not mean making every organisation identical. Groups can agree on freedom, Iran's territorial integrity, equal citizenship and a transition to accountable government while offering different views on taxation, welfare policy or the final form of the political system. The experience of such cooperation is part of preparing for democratic life. ^[3]

Wherever joint coordination is needed, group representatives should have specific, reviewable mandates. Clarity about whom a representative speaks for and on what issue prevents unsupported claims. This approach also gives national leadership more accurate information and more responsible partners.

The Institutions We Need to Build Today

Scientific bodies and expert councils can begin addressing Iran's real problems now: healthcare, education, water, energy, housing and infrastructure reconstruction. Their value lies in proposals that clarify the problem, costs, staffing and means of implementation. A short, precise report on a specific problem can provide a basis for discussion and revision, and can be developed further with the participation of specialists inside Iran.

Professional associations can connect expertise with social need. Doctors and nurses in healthcare, lawyers providing access to reliable advice, teachers in education and engineers assessing technical requirements have different roles. Each association must understand the limits of its competence and find suitable partners for work beyond its capacity. Recognising these limits makes professional cooperation more credible.

Community and local groups provide a place for people who may not have academic titles or substantial financial resources, but who have time, experience and the capacity to cooperate. Supporting a newcomer, organising a cultural gathering, teaching a language or connecting jobseekers with experienced people can form part of their work. Such activities demonstrate in everyday life that belonging to the Iranian community has practical meaning.

Political parties must also begin developing their capacity to formulate programmes, train people and compete responsibly. A party must have clear positions on the economy, public services and the administration of the country, and be able to assess its own officials' performance. Debate and competition among parties, when accompanied by acceptance of shared rights, prepare society to make informed choices.

Human rights and humanitarian organisations have their own independent place. The proposed establishment of the Civic Rights & Relief Alliance, or CRRA, whose draft documents envisage cooperation among doctors, lawyers and other professionals, is one attempt to turn professional capacity into a programme of service. ^[4] Such a proposal is judged by the quality of the help it provides, the competence of its administration and the trust it creates. The distinct missions of these institutions make wider participation possible.

Solidarity in Everyday Life

I want every Iranian, wherever they live, to feel that fellow Iranians stand beside them and can be approached in difficult times. That feeling begins with affection, kindness and friendship, and endures through the experience of receiving a real response. An unanswered call, a forgotten promise or a humiliating encounter can destroy trust; responsible follow-through can build it gradually.

A local network can provide a clear point of contact, refer requests to the appropriate person and follow up on the outcome. Every group need not solve every problem. It is enough to know what it can do and establish reliable contacts for other needs. Trust develops when promises correspond to real capacity.

This solidarity must preserve individual dignity. Someone needing help should not feel compelled to change their views, take part in a political display or expose their private life publicly in order to receive it. Humanitarian assistance rests on need; political membership rests on free choice. When people see that distinction in practice, the scope for cooperation expands.

Solidarity must also make room for different contributions. Some people can give money, others time, expertise or professional contacts. Each contribution has value. An organisation that notices only the loudest voices or the largest donors loses an important part of its social capacity.

Funding Based on Trust and Consent

Political activists must be able to explain their work's purpose clearly and invite others to participate. Part of that participation may be financial. Sustained activity costs money: training, communications, media, research and events all require resources. The ability to discuss those costs honestly is an essential skill of activism.

A request for support is responsible when a specific programme stands behind it. Donors should know which organisation receives their money, for what purpose, over what period and with what reporting arrangements. If the programme changes or does not proceed, the treatment of the funds must also be clear. A financial appeal gains credibility when its outcome can be followed up.

Membership subscriptions and small, regular donations can provide continuity. Large donations may also make important programmes possible, but the amount contributed must not confer unlimited control over collective decisions. Rules for accepting donations and examining conflicts of interest should be known to everyone. The organisation's social standing depends on members knowing how decisions are made.

Recording receipts and payments, issuing receipts, approving budgets and reviewing expenditure should be routine parts of the group's work. Significant payments can require approval by more than one officer and periodic reporting. Financial reports must also be understandable: how much was received, how

much went to each programme, what was achieved and what remains. Protecting donors' private information is compatible with accountability for the use of funds.

Requests for support must be voluntary and free from pressure. Someone who does not donate is not necessarily indifferent or less patriotic; they may lack the means or remain unconvinced by the programme. Answering their questions and respecting their decision are part of the democratic culture we want to develop. Our relationship with a fellow Iranian must remain humane and respectful after a financial request is declined.

Respecting Each Institution's Mission and Resources

Cooperation among institutions becomes durable when each remains faithful to its mission and commitments. Money raised to treat an injured person must be used within that purpose. Funds for a political organisation must likewise be requested under an explicit political description and aim. This precision allows people to make informed choices about the work they support and to ask about its results.

For example, guidance from the Charity Commission for England and Wales permits charities to undertake campaigning and political activity in furtherance of their charitable purposes, but does not permit a charity to be established for a political purpose or to support or fund a political party, candidate or politician. ^[5]

Humanitarian assistance and activity supporting a political leader must therefore each be managed through an appropriate structure.

The CRRRA founding note likewise proposes independent governance and funding for the founders' separate political activities. ^[6] One can support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi in a personal capacity and serve people in a humanitarian organisation according to need, without making political allegiance a condition. Clarity about these roles protects public trust and allows each activity to do its work properly.

Cultivating an Ethics of Cooperation

Institution-building also requires civic ethics. By ethical discipline in collective work, I mean practising conduct that makes cooperation possible: keeping promises, stating facts accurately, accepting responsibility for mistakes and respecting other people's time. A person who accepts and completes a task builds part of our shared trust. If they cannot continue, they should say so early and clearly, allowing someone else to take over.

Disagreements arise in every active group. An institution's quality becomes evident in how it handles them. The issue must be stated precisely, the parties must have an opportunity to explain themselves and decisions must follow known rules. Attributing hidden motives to people, or turning an operational disagreement into a judgement on their patriotism, makes the problem harder to solve.

Training new members, rotating responsibilities and creating opportunities for women and young people are part of renewing organisational capacity. Experienced officers should be able to pass on their knowledge and welcome others' growing independence. An institution that allows its members to develop prepares more people for the future.

In voluntary work, attention to people's capacity is also essential. If all activity rests on a few shoulders, continuity becomes difficult. A fair division of tasks, time for rest and recognition of less visible work help cooperation endure. Affection and friendship within an organisation are also expressed through such practical consideration.

From a Small Group to Wider Cooperation

A ninety-day pilot programme can provide a starting point. In the first month, a few people can agree on a specific, achievable problem, write down responsibilities and assess existing resources. Depending on the group's mission, this could be an educational programme, an expert report, a civic activity or a community service. The goal should be clear enough that members do not disagree over whether the task has been completed.

In the second month, the group can carry out its first programme and record the experience: what progressed, where delays occurred, what costs arose and what additional cooperation is needed. This stage can reveal which rules require revision and which responsibilities require more people. Organisational expansion should follow an understanding of actual capacity.

In the third month, the group can present the results and accounts to members and supporters and decide whether to continue. If the programme was effective, it can be repeated or expanded with another group. If the outcome was unsatisfactory, the reasons should be examined and the method revised. Accepting this possibility makes the organisation a place of learning.

Groups can then connect around shared interests. Two associations might organise joint training; a local group might seek advice from an expert council; several organisations might share the cost of a common activity. Clear agreements about authority, costs and reporting make such cooperation dependable. These relationships can form a network that preserves its members' independence while enabling them to undertake larger tasks.

Connecting Iranians at Home and Abroad

Iranians abroad can contribute knowledge, professional resources, funding and international contacts to national cooperation. Iranians inside the country have direct experience of society's needs, constraints and capabilities. A programme that neglects this knowledge may remain remote from people's real lives despite good intentions and substantial expenditure.

The relationship must therefore rest on listening and cooperation. Receiving assistance must not deprive people of the authority to identify local needs, nor should financial support become a claim to represent them. In sensitive communications, people's consent and the protection of their information matter. A net-

work's credibility depends on members feeling that their voices are heard and that they have a role in determining their own future.

These connections can also be made across generations. Younger generations of Iranians abroad may have different languages, experiences and contacts. Making room for their genuine participation brings fresh capabilities into collective work. Passing on experience is productive when accompanied by a willingness to hear new ideas.

How to Measure the Movement's Progress

To assess progress, we should ask what lasting capacities we have built. Do members continue cooperating? Are responsibilities completed on time? Are the accounts clear? Can a newcomer join and take on a meaningful role? Has the programme produced an outcome that can be explained and examined? The answers reveal the quality of the organisation.

Follower numbers or the size of a gathering may indicate public attention, but understanding durable capacity requires looking at what happens afterwards. How many supporters accepted a specific responsibility? What training, relationships or programmes remained? How did the group prepare for the next stage? Pursuing these questions helps turn the energy of an event into sustained activity.

I understand activism within the Lion and Sun movement as an effort to develop this national capacity. Within a shared vision of transition to secular democracy, and in support of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership, we must build institutions in which people can experience cooperation, responsibility and freedom. The future we seek depends on the quality of the relationships we establish with one another today.

I want Iranians to be able to tell one another with confidence that they stand together, and to have real organisations and practical means of doing so. When expertise becomes service, friendship becomes cooperation and trust becomes a lasting commitment, the foundations of a future society take shape. Building that Iran is work we must begin today.

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CHAPTER 4

A Historical Opening

The opportunity for transition, international friendship and activists' responsibilities

The value of that opportunity becomes apparent in the work we do while it lasts.

Moments arise in the history of nations when the possibility of change ceases to be a distant aspiration and becomes a practical question. The gap between people and government deepens, regional relationships change, and forces that were scattered yesterday begin to see a shared future. This is what I mean by a historical opening: a limited opportunity to connect the demand for freedom with organisation, leadership and international cooperation. The value of that opportunity becomes apparent in the work we do while it lasts.

For the Lion and Sun movement, recognising this opening is itself part of political activism. In Chapter Three, I discussed building today's institutions for tomorrow's secular democracy. The question now is why this work is urgent and how it can connect with developments around Iran. My answer rests on three foundations: recognising the domestic rupture, understanding regional changes and having a clear picture of the Iran we want to build.

The Historical Opening in the Crown Prince's Words

In his conversation at the Council on Foreign Relations on 3 October 2025, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi spoke of a window of opportunity that had opened before us and would not remain open indefinitely. He connected this discussion to supporting the Iranian people, encouraging defections from the government to the people's side, and preparing for transition and reconstruction. In

the same conversation, he made the future system dependent on Iranians' free choice and emphasised the people's role in bringing about change. [1]

My interpretation of these remarks is that a historical opportunity acquires meaning when pressure on an authoritarian structure is accompanied by an increase in society's capabilities. If people pay the price but have no network of support, the opportunity is eroded. If the world speaks of change but Iranians cannot demonstrate their ability to govern, doubt replaces solidarity. If political leadership exists but independent, responsible institutions do not emerge, the leadership's capacity remains limited too.

I support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership during the transition because I see in that role the possibility of bringing national forces together and connecting them with the world. For me, this support is consistent with the people's right to choose and the need for accountability. Secular democracy must be visible in the way we cooperate today: in our tolerance of criticism, institutional independence and acceptance that no individual or movement has exclusive ownership of Iran.

A historical opening is not a prediction of the date on which a government will fall. Change may accelerate, stall or encounter new crises. The activist's task is to strengthen society in each of these circumstances. Hope becomes a political force when people can see its effects in a trustworthy organisation, a clear programme and a commitment fulfilled.

From 11 September to 7 October

The attacks of 11 September 2001 and the US military intervention in Afghanistan made the fight against jihadism a central concern of global security policy. Yet weakening an organisation's leaders and centres did not automatically end its networks. Reuters' review on the attacks' twenty-fifth anniversary emphasises the transformation and dispersal of al Qaeda's network and the persistence of its branches. This experience reminds us of the distance between military victory and the creation of a lasting political order. [2]

In my view, a serious error in understanding the region is to imagine that every Islamist movement has the same command structure, objectives and methods. The Islamic Republic, Hamas, al Qaeda and other groups have real differences, just as Muslims around the world are not a homogeneous political bloc. My criticism concerns the form of political Islam that places ideological rule, discrimination and coercion above citizens' freedom and uses violence to gain or retain power.

The attacks of 7 October 2023 marked another turning point. Through killings and hostage-taking, the Hamas-led attack made the threat a direct and profoundly traumatic experience for Israeli society. Human Rights Watch's July 2024 report documented war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the attacking groups. Such an event cannot be dissolved into vague language about geopolitical rivalries while overlooking the perpetrators' responsibility. [3]

Precision is also necessary in examining the Islamic Republic's role. Tehran's support for Hamas and cooperation with allied armed forces are not the same as proof that it planned or had advance knowledge of a particular operation. The US intelligence community's public assessment in 2024 stated that Iran's leaders had neither orchestrated nor had foreknowledge of the 7 October attack. This is a dated assessment; on that basis, direct control of the attack by Tehran cannot be presented as an established fact. [4]

I believe that Israel's determination to confront armed threats after 7 October must be taken seriously. But that determination does not mean that all the consequences of war are controllable or that an end to violence is guaranteed. The future we seek must bring Israelis' security, Palestinians' lives and rights, and Iranians' liberation from despotism into a shared vision. A peace in which the region's people cannot lead ordinary lives will lack a lasting foundation.

Iran and the Possibility of Ending Hostility

In my political experience, one encouraging change has been the emergence of a national current that does not regard permanent hostility towards the United States and Israel as Iran's destiny. It asks why the country's foreign policy should serve an ideological antagonism, and why Iranians should not cooperate with other peoples on the basis of mutual respect. This description is my

understanding of a political tendency; assessing the views of all Iranians requires independent research and freedom to express opinions.

I understand nationalism as a commitment to people's lives, the country's integrity, citizens' freedom and Iran's capacity to build. From this perspective, relations with the United States and Israel can offer opportunities for scientific, economic and security cooperation. Public benefit, independent decision-making and accountability to Iranians must be the standards governing those relationships. Friendship between countries endures when it produces tangible results for society.

Drawing inspiration from Achaemenid history and the name of Cyrus reminds me of the possibility of tolerance and connections among peoples. That inspiration must be translated into contemporary terms: legal equality, respect for borders, freedom of conscience and cooperation among Iranians, Jews and Arabs. A future Iran can draw strength from its cultural achievements and strengthen its regional position through trust, knowledge and production.

Appreciation of the Pahlavi dynasty's achievements belongs within the same vision. The past provides experience and motivation; the responsibility for building the future rests on the present generation. What I expect of the Lion and Sun movement is to turn this historical connection into administrative capacity, economic growth and guarantees of equal rights. A national symbol remains alive when the people gathered under it feel secure, included and able to participate.

From the Abraham Accords to the Proposed Cyrus Accord

The Abraham Accords Declaration of September 2020 emphasised peace, interfaith dialogue and cooperation among nations. This framework formed part of the normalisation of relations between Israel and certain Arab countries. Its significance for our discussion lies in opening opportunities for cooperation in a region where much of politics had developed in the shadow of hostility. ^[5]

In his May 2025 speech 'A Path to the Cyrus Accord' and the vision published on his website, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi describes a future based on normal relations with the United States, recognition of Israel and the expansion of the Abraham Accords into a Cyrus Accord. In this picture, Iran, Israel and the Arab world can follow a path of cooperation. These sources set out a political proposal and vision for a future Iran, rather than a binding treaty signed by Iran. ^[6, 7]

My understanding of the Cyrus Accord is the possibility of changing Iran's regional role: a country placing its human capital, geographical position and economic capacity at the service of cooperation. Such a vision could connect universities, support cooperation in water and energy management and give substance to collaboration in medicine, industry and technology. Each possibility requires plans, contracts and effective institutions.

For political activism, the value of this picture is that it gives a constructive answer to the question: what happens after the Islamic Republic? We must be able to speak about schools, hospitals, jobs, investment and normal relations with the world. International support deepens when, alongside protesting against the present, we can explain and build a future in which people can live.

Europe: Criticising the Past and Recognising the Possibility of Change

I criticise policies in Europe that, in my view, have prioritised continuing relations with the Islamic Republic over listening to Iranians' demand for freedom. My central concern is becoming accustomed to despotism in the name of crisis management. When a government repeatedly answers society's demands with repression, we must ask what cost a policy of merely preserving the status quo imposes on the people.

Europe, however, cannot be treated as a uniform actor with an unchanging policy throughout these forty-seven years. Its governments, parliaments, media, universities and civic institutions have different capacities. On 29 January 2026, in response to the violent repression of protests, the Council of the European Union sanctioned a further fifteen individuals and six entities for serious human rights violations. This action shows that change and pressure are possible, even if its adequacy remains open to debate. ^[8]

My criticism of certain interpretations of cosmopolitanism begins here too. Shared life among people of different religions and backgrounds is a valuable ideal. The problem arises when respect for difference becomes a justification for coercion, or when an individual's freedom is disregarded in deference to a group's authority to avoid cultural sensitivities. Citizenship rights must be the common standard, including women's rights, the right to change or leave a religion and the right to criticise beliefs.

Migration from a Muslim-majority country does not indicate allegiance to political Islam. Many migrants are themselves victims of despotism, war or religious pressure. Equally, opposition to antisemitism and violence must not be made dependent on political calculations. Democratic Europe must be able to protect Muslims' freedom to live and worship while resisting religious coercion and threats to others. These two responsibilities arise from the same principle: equality before the law.

For me, Islam as faith and personal choice belongs within freedom of conscience. That freedom can include religious observance and voluntary social activity. The decisive boundary is reached when a belief seeks to use state power to rule over everyone. Iran's future secular democracy must make that boundary clear and guarantee the freedom of believers and non-believers equally.

Dey 1404: The Depth of the Rupture in Trust

The repression of Dey 1404, during the protests of January 2026, must stand at the centre of discussion about Iran's future. In its January 2026 decision, the Council of the European Union referred to violence, arbitrary detention and intimidation of demonstrators. Recognising this reality is the starting point for any responsible policy towards the Iranian people. ^[8]

I believe that killings and repression have created a deep rupture in trust between society and government. When I say that a return to the former relationship has become impossible, I am making a political and ethical judgement about the depth of that wound. We cannot declare the views of all ninety million Iranians identical without free choice. What we can unequivocally demand is the people's right to determine their future, independent investigation of crimes and an end to impunity for those responsible for repression.

Europe must take seriously the voices of families seeking justice, women, young people and other citizens demanding their rights. Diplomatic contact has value when human lives and rights do not disappear from it. I ask Europe to remain faithful to its democratic potential and to view Iran's future through more than the survival of the ruling apparatus.

Iranian activists must likewise express this demand honestly and with evidence. Names, accounts and supporting material must be recorded accurately and published with consent and attention to people's safety. The moral strength of the pursuit of justice

comes from fidelity to truth. Exaggerated statistics or unverified allegations damage the very trust we need to earn international solidarity.

International Friendship Must Become Practical Capacity

My vision of Iran's future is a secular democracy with strong relations with the United States and Israel, and constructive cooperation with Europe and its neighbours. Reaching that future requires learning the language of cooperation today. A meeting with a politician, scientist, doctor, engineer or interested citizen acquires lasting value when it leads to mutual understanding and a specific commitment.

I believe we can ask American, Israeli, European and other friends to stand alongside the Iranian people in humanitarian activities. Their contribution may include expertise, time, medical facilities, educational support or voluntary financial assistance. None of these resources should be assumed to be guaranteed in advance. Trust is built through sustained relationships and fulfilling responsibilities.

A good project must clarify the need, who is responsible, how resources will be used and how results will be assessed. Doctors should know where their expertise can help; donors should know which service their contribution makes possible; and those harmed should know which organisation they are dealing with and what it has committed to do. This clarity turns friendship from a passing feeling into dependable cooperation.

National cooperation can grow from these small experiences. A group working responsibly to support one family today learns how to build trust and divide tasks. A network connecting specialists today becomes better prepared for tomorrow's reconstruction. Through such concrete activities, the historical opening becomes a social force.

The Injured and the Displaced: Our Responsibility Today

For me as a trauma surgeon, discussion of the future cannot be separated from responsibility towards people who have been harmed. A movement speaking of freedom and dignity must be able to remain beside the wounded, the injured, the displaced and their families. Support must not end when the news moves on or public attention subsides. The meaning of solidarity becomes evident in staying the course.

My proposal is to build a professional network to identify needs with people's consent, arrange assessment by qualified specialists, coordinate services and follow up support. Iranian and international doctors and healthcare institutions can participate according to their actual resources. Medical care, rehabilitation and psychological and social support should be organised within the relevant areas of professional competence and according to each person's needs.

Human dignity and need must be the guiding principles. The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement place humanity and impartiality at the centre of relief work.

The same principle matters for our proposed initiative: receiving medical assistance must not depend on a declaration of political loyalty. Patients' privacy must be protected, and accounts of their suffering published only with their informed consent. [9]

As I emphasised in Chapter Three, the purpose and accounts of funds raised must be clear. Contributions allocated to treatment must be used for that purpose, with reports made available to supporters. Humanitarian institutions must preserve the independence of their mission. This financial and operational discipline is part of the respect we owe both to those harmed and to those who contribute.

Within such a framework, supporting people injured in the Lion and Sun movement can deepen human connections among Iranians. Those harmed should feel that their community has not forgotten them. That feeling becomes durable when compassion is supported by an accountable institution with the capacity to act. The nationalism I advocate finds meaning in this care for a fellow citizen.

Making Use of the Opening with Organisation and Courage

The historical opening demands speed, but speed must be accompanied by care. We need to understand existing capabilities, distribute responsibilities and avoid promises we cannot fulfil. A small, organised group completing a real project can generate more trust than a large network of unfinished commitments.

In politics, we must express the vision of secular democracy clearly and make it open to debate. In social life, we must build institutions that serve people. Internationally, we must turn friendship into mutual cooperation. These three areas can move forward together while each preserves its responsibilities and independence.

For me, courage is not confined to speaking loudly. It also lies in accepting responsibility, listening to criticism, correcting mistakes and remaining beside people who have been harmed. A movement cultivating these qualities begins shaping part of the future political culture today. Transitional leadership, too, will be better able to guide the country towards free choice with such an organised society alongside it.

I understand the historical opening as an invitation to build: to build a free, capable and peace-seeking Iran, able to maintain relations with the United States, Israel, the Arab world and Europe on the basis of respect and mutual benefit. This future becomes possible through Iranians' resolve, accountable institutions and the cooperation of our friends. Our task is to turn opportunity into work, friendship into support and hope into society's lasting capacity.

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CHAPTER 5

How Should Lion and Sun Activists Engage with Europe?

Human dignity, the people's right to choose and sustained diplomacy

The Iranian people are not a peripheral matter in the Middle East's security agenda; the country and its future belong to them.

The Lion and Sun movement's relationship with Europe should rest on sustained dialogue, the defence of human dignity and a credible picture of Iran's future. As monarchist activists and supporters of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, we have a responsibility to express our aspirations in clear, reasoned and contemporary language: language that places the suffering of the Iranian people, their right to choose their government and our country's capacity to contribute to peace and progress at its centre. Our anger at repression and injustice is understandable, but turning that anger into political achievement requires collective judgement, discipline and an understanding of the environment in which we work.

For many of us, encountering Europe's political and media environment is difficult and sometimes discouraging. We may feel that the Iranian people's voice is not sufficiently heard, that Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's standing is reduced to his family background, and that Iran's future is overshadowed by nuclear negotiations, security concerns and energy prices. This experience should be taken seriously. An effective strategy begins, however, with the ability to distinguish personal experience, political analysis and claims that require evidence.

Understanding Europe and Criticising Its Policies

Europe is a diverse collection of countries, parties, institutions and intellectual traditions. Governments are not universities; a newspaper's position is not the common policy of every

European country; and the voice of a student group cannot be attributed to an entire university. Even within one country, human rights institutions, the foreign ministry, parties and public opinion may have different priorities. Recognising these differences is essential to precise dialogue and to avoiding hasty judgements.

Criticism of American power, sensitivity to colonial legacies, support for the welfare state and opposition to certain Israeli policies are prominent in parts of European intellectual life. These positions do not in themselves indicate support for the Islamic Republic or hostility towards the Iranian people. We must show that Iranian freedom is connected to social justice, the pursuit of peace and the defence of human rights. Wherever a policy contributes to normalising repression, that policy and its consequences should be the subject of our evidence-based criticism.

Precision in describing Europe's actions is also essential. On 29 January 2026, the European Union imposed sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for suppressing protests, and added further sanctions on 16 March that year. ^[1, 2] A claim of complete European inaction is therefore inconsistent with official records. Our political questions should concern the adequacy of these measures, their effective enforcement and the extent of practical support for victims and the Iranian people's right to choose.

My principal criticism concerns an approach that looks for a solution to Iran's problems mainly through containing military tensions and reaching a security agreement. Reducing the risk of

war and protecting civilians are essential goals, but an external agreement cannot by itself resolve the crisis of legitimacy, domestic repression or people's exclusion from determining their own future. In my view, hoping that the Islamic Republic will automatically transform itself, without a clear mechanism for changing behaviour and making power accountable, is not a reliable foundation for Iran's future.

Similarly, in my assessment, expecting a simple return to conditions before Dey 1404 and the January 2026 protests underestimates the depth of the rupture between society and government. The suffering of bereaved families, prisoners' experiences and the demand for freedom do not disappear when foreign relations become less tense. If negotiations are to contribute to lasting stability, they must be assessed in the light of this social reality. The Iranian people are not a peripheral matter in the Middle East's security agenda; the country and its future belong to them.

Human Dignity and the Pursuit of Justice

In these circumstances, our starting point must be the human being. Before debating the form of government, we must defend the rights to life, security, healthcare, free expression and political participation. Women seeking freedom of choice, children who should grow up safely, older people needing support, families who have lost their breadwinner and citizens imprisoned for protesting must stand at the centre of our account.

In this approach, human rights are a genuine and universal commitment. Support for those harmed must not depend on accepting monarchy or backing a political figure. Republicans, monarchists, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Baha'is and non-religious people all possess human dignity and equal rights. A movement speaking of freedom also reveals its credibility in the way it defends the rights of its own political opponents. [3: Articles 2, 18 and 26]

Regarding the killings of Dey, our responsibility is to preserve public memory and pursue the truth. Testimony, documents and victims' accounts must be recorded accurately, with informed consent and attention to their families' safety. Statistics must distinguish confirmed cases from estimates. Any avoidable error can weaken an otherwise sound case. The pursuit of justice endures when it rests on truth, persistence and respect for those who have suffered.

The People's Choice and Accountable Power

I believe that Iran's civilisational memory and the historical Pahlavi legacy can provide identity and motivation. Our responsibility towards the future, however, requires us to explain the quality of governance we propose. Our audience has the right to know how government will be accountable in the Iran we envisage, how the judiciary will remain independent, how opponents' rights will be protected and how people will be able to replace those in power.

Democratic monarchism must offer clear answers. I defend the people's right to choose a parliamentary monarchy and recognise the same right to choose a republic. The legitimacy of the

form of government must arise from Iranians' free and informed choice. Accepting the result is a commitment that must be declared before voting and remain in force afterwards, even if our preferred option loses.

This commitment has specific requirements: freedom of political activity, genuine competition, access to information, voters' safety, transparent counting and a credible means of resolving complaints. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognises participation in public affairs and genuine, periodic elections with equal suffrage and a secret ballot. These principles must have a practical place in the design of the future order. [\[3: Article 25\]](#)

In the parliamentary monarchy I propose, government and executive authority should operate through elected, accountable institutions, while the monarch's constitutional position is clearly defined and limited. No family relationship, historical background or political popularity should authorise the exercise of power outside the law. The same standard applies to a president, prime minister, military commander or any other official. Trust in individuals must be accompanied by institutional guarantees.

A Constitution Open to Review

The future constitution must also be open to amendment and review. Every generation has the right to participate in deciding how its society is governed and to have access to a lawful path to change. This requires clear, predetermined rules, including rules concerning the form of government. Ordinary elections for gov-

ernment and parliament are not the same as constitutional amendment. Fundamental changes must proceed through public scrutiny, legitimate representation and, where prescribed, a free referendum.

Amendability must at the same time be accompanied by legal stability. A constitution cannot be transformed by every emotional wave or passing preference of those in power. The Venice Commission's Report on Constitutional Amendment also emphasises the importance of balancing stability with the possibility of change. ^[4] For Iran's future, we must design a mechanism that keeps genuine reform possible while limiting manipulation of the rules to entrench power.

Comparing a constitution to a learning system can be useful insofar as it accepts feedback and corrects errors. Political decisions nevertheless require human responsibility, public deliberation and democratic legitimacy. Technology can help us understand problems; the determination of citizens' rights and the limits of power must remain with accountable institutions. No law can anticipate every future crisis, but it can provide clear paths for resolving disputes, transferring power, dealing with emergencies and ensuring judicial oversight.

Majority rule must likewise be understood alongside fundamental rights and the possibility of future competition. Today's majority must not be able to deprive a minority of citizenship rights or close the door to a different choice tomorrow. The value

of a democratic order lies in political defeat not costing people their security and dignity. Such an order reassures Iranian citizens and signals the country's predictability to foreign partners.

Political Representation and Media Responsibility

The same standards should guide how Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi is presented. Media references to him as the son of Iran's last monarch are not, in themselves, a distortion of history. The problem arises when his presentation is confined to that relationship without examining his views, political activity and standing among his supporters. The appropriate response is to demand accurate coverage, provide evidence and participate in serious discussion. Claims of majority support must also be assessed through reliable evidence; the people's free choice will ultimately settle the matter.

Peace and the Rights of the Region's Peoples

Israel and Palestine are among the most difficult subjects of discussion in Europe. My proposed position rests on Israel's right to exist and to security, opposition to terrorism and antisemitism, and the necessity of regional coexistence. At the same time, the lives and dignity of Palestinian civilians and their political rights must be respected. Lasting peace requires recognition of the rights and security of all the peoples who are to live alongside one another.

For that reason, criticism of a government's policies must be distinguished from denying a country's existence or hostility towards a people. Supporting Palestinian rights is not, in itself, support for Islamism, just as defending Israel's security does not endorse every decision of its government. The European Union's official position, including at the meeting of 19 March 2026, emphasises Israel and Palestine living peacefully alongside one another and also calls for Hamas to be disarmed. ^[5] Attributing a desire to destroy Israel to Europe as a whole disregards these distinctions.

Nevertheless, wherever calls for Israel's destruction, justifications for attacks on civilians or antisemitism appear, they must be opposed clearly and with reasoned arguments. In criticising university environments, including debates connected with Oxford and Cambridge, we must examine the specific position of a group or individual. What we ask of universities is freedom of debate, scholarly rigour and consistent standards in addressing human suffering. This demand applies to Iran as well.

Freedom of Belief and Criticism of Islamism

The discussion of Muslims in Europe requires similar precision. Muslims' social integration, understood as equal access to education, employment, language learning and civic participation, can be part of a free society. Political Islamism that opposes legal equality, or the activities of groups justifying violence and coercion, is a different matter. Confusing the two is unjust and weakens the possibility of an accurate critique of extremism.

Our criticism should address conduct and structures of power: threatening opponents, imposing religious rules, justifying violence or depriving people of equal rights. A secular Muslim, a law-abiding migrant and a believer who respects others' freedom can be partners in defending democracy. Iran's future needs the same principle: freedom of belief and non-belief, alongside the separation of religious institutions from government.

Iran's Future and Cooperation with the World

Our picture of Iran's future must show how national strength will contribute to security and well-being. An Iran with accountable government, a productive economy and normal international relations can help reduce regional tensions. Cooperation with Arab countries, Israel, Turkey and other neighbours must rest on mutual respect, national sovereignty and shared interests. Responsible defence capabilities should also serve the protection of the country and the prevention of war.

In energy and trade, we can speak of a future Iran's commitment to maritime security, reliable contracts and regional cooperation. Routes connecting the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean with the Red Sea, Suez Canal and Mediterranean matter for this cooperation. Iran, however, does not control Bab al-Mandab, the Suez Canal or Port Said on its own. A credible promise is responsible participation in the security of these routes and refraining from threats to civilian trade. Lasting security depends on cooperation among several countries.

A constructive vision is also possible in migration. I hope for an Iran in which citizens can live with security and hope, Iranian emigrants have the possibility of returning voluntarily, and the country develops its capacity to offer humanitarian protection to asylum seekers. Achieving this requires economic reconstruction, education, housing, healthcare and transparent administration.

Receiving refugees must be proportionate to real capacity and accompanied by international cooperation. Language teaching, access to education, vocational training and opportunities for lawful employment can support social participation. Declaring a willingness to accept millions of people without assessing resources and operational capacity does not create a dependable commitment. Nor should a future Iran become a place to which other countries transfer their responsibilities towards vulnerable people. The desired relationship is a fair partnership that respects refugees' rights.

Sustained Diplomacy and a Culture of Cooperation

This vision requires sustained diplomacy. Engagement with European institutions must move beyond occasional activities and continue through accurate submissions, regular participation in public discussion and follow-up of responses. Activists must also state the limits of their representation clearly. Anyone may defend their own views; speaking for an organisation or for all the people of Iran requires a specific mandate.

The quality of our conduct is part of our political credibility. The ability to hear a difficult question, correct an error, tolerate criticism and remain respectful in disagreement reveals the political culture we want for the future. Anger arising from repression does not remove our responsibility for the accuracy of our claims or for other people's rights. A movement seeking accountable power must practise accountability in its internal relationships too.

Cooperation with Europe is ultimately intended to help Iranians achieve freedom and well-being. The decision about Iran's form of government belongs to the Iranian people; no foreign capital can take their place. What we expect from European partners is respect for that right, attention to society's diverse voices and practical support for human rights. In return, we must show that the Iran we envisage will be trustworthy, governed by law and ready to cooperate.

I see the future of the Lion and Sun movement in the connection between love of Iran, citizens' freedom and international responsibility. That future is built through daily work: defending a prisoner, supporting a family that has suffered, correcting an inaccurate report, drafting a legal proposal and sustaining a difficult conversation. The new history we want for Iran begins with that responsibility, with our ability to turn the experience of suffering into institutions that make the lives of future generations freer, safer and more humane.

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Read source · consilium.europa.eu

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CHAPTER 6

Architects of a New Iran's Future

From the experience of modernisation to institution-building and shared responsibility

Building a new Iran begins today.

Building a new Iran begins today. The clearer our picture of the country we want, the better we can bring people together, divide responsibilities and prepare for the difficulties of transition. The Iran I envisage is free, strong and prosperous, with stable economic, political, scientific and cultural relations with the world: a country whose citizens have opportunities to work, learn, think and choose their own way of life. Reaching that future requires political will and organised work.

In earlier chapters, I discussed activism, institution-building, historical opportunity and relations with Europe. Here, the central issue is the responsibility to build. Those of us who regard ourselves as architects of Iran's future must explain what we want to build, under what rules and with whose participation. In 'Does Time Solve a Problem?', I also argued that time passing, without decisions and institutional design, does not create solutions by itself. For activists, the practical meaning is that preparedness today can affect the quality of Iran's tomorrow. ^[1]

The Possibility Opened by the Pahlavi Experience

The Pahlavi monarchy, from 1304 to 1357 in the Solar Hijri calendar (1925-1979), spans more than half a century of modern Iranian history. In my reading, its significance lies in presenting society with the possibility of a different Iran: one with a more capable central state, new administrative and educational institutions, broader infrastructure and stronger connections to the world economy and global knowledge. M. Hashem Pesaran's

study of the Pahlavi economy examines administrative and legal reforms, the development of railways and industry, and the expansion of economic planning. ^[2]

Social reforms under Mohammad Reza Shah were also part of this transformation. Women's suffrage in 1963 and reforms concerning the family are important examples. The Family Protection Laws of 1346 and 1353, corresponding to 1967 and 1975, helped limit certain unilateral powers of men and expand judicial consideration of family disputes. These achievements should be viewed alongside the contributions of women, lawyers and other social forces of that period. ^[2, 3]

This experience was also accompanied by restrictions on political participation and the repression of opponents. ^[2] My belief in the value of Pahlavi-era modernisation makes examining these shortcomings a greater responsibility. Our generation's task is to connect state-building and development with political freedom, justice, public oversight and equal rights. A future Iran must preserve historical achievements while creating institutional guarantees against repeating past errors.

The names of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah remind me of Iranians' historical capacity to think on a large scale. That reminder is a source of confidence and responsibility. A model of governance for the twenty-first century must be judged against today's social needs and citizens' rights. History can give us the courage to build; designing future institutions is our work now. In my understanding, Pahlavism means

commitment to Iran and the responsibility of modernisation, which in our time must be completed by the rule of law, freedom and public participation.

When, in criticising the Islamic Republic, I speak of the return of certain old relationships, I mean the continuation of patterns such as political privilege based on religious status, discrimination and interference in private life. This comparison is a political judgement about relations of power. The Qajar period also contained the Constitutional Revolution and efforts at reform; it cannot be reduced to a uniform picture. Our criticism becomes more precise when it addresses institutions, rules and consequences that can be examined.

National Strength and Respect for the Citizen

The strong Iran I imagine has a state that enforces the law, protects borders and infrastructure, provides public services and can act against corruption and violence. That strength must come with accountability. Security in which citizens cannot bring a complaint against government, or laws that political officeholders can set aside, will not provide a dependable foundation for development.

I also see national strength in an independent judiciary, professional armed forces, transparent budgets, quality education and the capacity to resolve crises. The state must be reliable in providing water, electricity, healthcare and public security while

respecting privacy and freedom of choice. Forced conformity to a lifestyle is not a measure of a country's strength. The capacity to govern society fairly is a more important standard.

Order, punctuality, responsibility and respect for work must be present in our activities from today. These values cannot be judged from people's clothing, appearance or degree of religious observance. They can be assessed through work delivered on time, contracts honoured, responsibility accepted for mistakes and fair treatment of colleagues. Cultural renewal takes life through these observable behaviours.

Free Citizens and a Diverse Society

In my view, a deep gap exists between the lifestyle imposed by the government and the wishes of many Iranians. Choices about dress, women's participation in social life, interest in global connections and the desire for everyday freedom reveal part of this gap. But appearances are not sufficient to determine people's religious or political beliefs. The precise proportions of theists, agnostics, atheists or supporters of secular government require reliable research; these categories are neither identical nor necessarily mutually exclusive.

Iran's future must make room for all these citizens. Religious and non-religious people, women and men, and citizens of different languages and backgrounds must all enjoy equal rights. Freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of expression, political parti-

cipation and equality before the law are recognised in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These rights must become meaningful in people's real lives. [4]

Within this vision, secularism means separating religious institutions from governmental power and ending the legal privilege of a particular belief. Individuals must be able to hold a belief, change it, criticise it or have none. Religious freedom exists alongside the rights and freedoms of others and cannot authorise coercion or imposed discrimination.

A society's spiritual growth can also be sought in honesty, responsibility towards others, art, friendship, public service and respect for life. The state is not meant to impose a single meaning of life on everyone. Its task is to create conditions in which people can discover their own meaning in security and freedom. A new Iran must possess both the capacity to build and the capacity for empathy. Philosophy, the humanities and the arts belong alongside science and technology in cultivating inquiry and understanding our shared life.

Transitional Leadership and the People's Authority

I support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership during the transition and see in his position the possibility of connecting historical continuity with convergence among national forces. This support is my political choice and remains accompanied by a commitment to popular sovereignty. The proposed programme

of the Iranian National Cohesion Party likewise supports his convening role alongside the people's right to choose the final form of government. [5]

Leadership contributes to building when it brings different areas of expertise together, clarifies responsibilities, answers criticism and establishes a trustworthy path to handing power over to elected institutions. Popularity and public trust are important resources, but governing a country requires clear rules, divided authority and mechanisms of oversight. No transition proposal should remain silent about the limits of authority, terms of office or methods of accountability.

My preference is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy: a model in which government emerges through representation and the people's vote, and the Crown has a national, non-partisan position within constitutional limits. At the same time, people must also be able to choose a democratic republic. Before voting takes place, we must accept that Iranians' free choice determines the form of government, even when it differs from our personal preference.

This commitment is tested in difficult times. If transitional institutions consider themselves temporary, the end of their mandate must be clear. If a constitution is to be put to a public vote, there must be opportunities to criticise the text, present competing options and access information fairly. In my view, confidence in the future is built through these tangible guarantees.

Coming Together to Build, Competing to Govern

The Iran of the future needs a parliament representing society's real diversity. The democratic left, democratic right, liberals, conservatives, feminists, Greens and other currents committed to freedom must be able to compete over taxation, welfare, the environment, education and foreign policy. The proposed programme of the Iranian National Cohesion Party also emphasises cooperation among a range of these forces around shared principles. ^[5]

We cannot assume that opposing ideologies or radical tendencies will disappear automatically with a change of government. The durable approach is to establish rules that protect freedom of peaceful activity while resisting violence, coercion and violations of others' rights. Citizens must not be excluded from lawful competition because they hold left-wing, right-wing or religious views. The dividing line is conduct and commitment to democratic rules.

National convergence does not mean making all programmes identical. We can disagree over the form of government or economic policy while agreeing on territorial integrity, equal rights, separation of religion and government, and the people's free vote. This shared foundation must be clear enough to make cooperation possible and limited enough to preserve political pluralism.

Personal disputes and unsupported accusations exhaust our energy. Questions about financial transparency, limits of authority or the quality of a programme, however, are not distractions. Architects of the future must distinguish criticism that improves the work from conduct that merely disrupts discussion. The standard for making that distinction must be clear and defensible, rather than dependent on whether someone agrees with us.

Development Visible in People's Lives

The picture of a new Iran must be explainable through everyday life. Families must be able to plan ahead; young people must see paths to education, work and independence; and older people must be able to trust services and social support. Economic stability becomes meaningful when people's income and savings are not exposed to continual instability, and business rules are not transformed by unpredictable decisions.

I believe that economic reconstruction requires fiscal discipline, banking reform, reliable statistics, fair competition and the enforcement of contracts. Alongside protection for property and entrepreneurship, workers' rights, workplace safety and support for vulnerable households must have a clear place. Development that places the costs of reform on the weakest groups without support will lose the trust needed to sustain itself.

In industry and technology, buildings and equipment are not enough. The country needs connections between education, research, production, finance and access to markets. Universities must be able to undertake free research and scientific coopera-

tion; companies must be able to recruit skilled staff; and vocational education must provide opportunities for those who do not choose university. Iranians abroad can help transfer knowledge and professional networks while respecting the experience and priorities of colleagues inside Iran.

Sustainability must also be central to development. Water, agriculture, energy, transport and industrial policies cannot be designed separately from environmental limits. Technical progress must help reduce resource waste, improve air quality, increase safety and strengthen resilience to crises. In such an Iran, national strength is also measured by quality of life and future generations' ability to thrive.

A Strong Iran Cooperating with the World

The Iran I seek has normal, respectful and balanced relations with the world. Cooperation with Europe and North America, regional countries, India, China, Russia and others must rest on national interests, independent decision-making and mutual respect. Lasting relationships require enforceable contracts, trust and predictable conduct. A change of government alone does not create that trust; responsible performance does.

In the Middle East, Iran can use its cultural, economic and diplomatic capabilities to reduce tension. Relations with Arab countries, Israel, Turkey and other neighbours must take account of the security and rights of the region's people. Cooperation in water, energy, trade, health and environmental protection can

provide practical fields for building trust. Such a policy would be accompanied by professional defence capabilities and lawful oversight of the armed forces.

Maritime security is also part of this responsibility. A future Iran's commitment must be to protect lawful trade, refrain from threatening civilian vessels and participate in maritime cooperation. Shipments from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean may travel through the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, the Indian Ocean, Bab al-Mandab, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to Port Said. Shipments bound for Asia and other destinations follow different routes. Iran does not control all these passages, and their security depends on cooperation among many countries.

Constructive relations with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other financial institutions must involve examining the terms of cooperation, transparent agreements and public oversight. We must be able to explain reconstruction needs and repayment capacity realistically. Promises of immediate financing or the automatic removal of every restriction do not replace planning. These are objectives to pursue through diplomacy and institutional reform.

In the nuclear field, the precise terms are cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and compliance with the relevant legal non-proliferation obligations. Through safeguards and verification, the Agency examines the fulfilment of commitments concerning the peaceful use of nuclear materials and tech-

nology. ^[6] My proposed position for Iran's future is responsible use of knowledge and technology, transparency and credible cooperation within these obligations.

Transition Plans and Responsibility for Implementation

Alongside presenting a vision, we must speak accurately about published plans. The Iran Prosperity Project and its Emergency Phase booklet offer a proposed framework for administering the period after the Islamic Republic. The version examined focuses the emergency phase on the first 180 days. Its political section addresses a referendum on the form of government, election of a constituent assembly, drafting and holding a referendum on a constitution, and parliamentary elections. These are published proposals; their implementation depends on the actual conditions of transition, public acceptance and operational capacity. ^[7]

In my view, having such documents should mark the beginning of implementation work. Every proposal should be scrutinised by lawyers, administrators, specialists and citizens who will experience its consequences. It must be clear who is responsible for each task, what resources it requires, what risks threaten it and how progress will be reported. Revising a programme in response to criticism and evidence is a sign of seriousness about building.

In the proposed programme of the Iranian National Cohesion Party, maintaining essential services, paying salaries, supplying food and medicines, protecting infrastructure and preparing the

constitutional process are identified as tasks of the transition. [5] Their human meaning is clear to me: at the moment of political change, people's lives must continue. Hospitals, schools, the water network and emergency services must remain able to do their work.

Political restructuring must also preserve the country's knowledge and professional capabilities. A civil servant, teacher, doctor, engineer or public service worker cannot be treated as a criminal simply because they worked within a particular institution. Individual responsibility must be examined through conduct and evidence. Addressing crimes and corruption requires fair proceedings; maintaining public services requires rules that prevent collective revenge and indiscriminate exclusion.

A constituent assembly must be able to listen to society. The constitutional text must be accessible and understandable to the public, explaining clearly the government's powers, parliament's position, judicial independence, citizens' rights and the mechanism for constitutional amendment. Adoption of the text is not the end of the task. Implementation requires institutions, budgets, training and oversight. A country moves beyond transition when its accepted rules work in practice.

The Architects' Tasks Begin Today

I propose that we connect today's activities to specific outcomes. A group working on health should define a particular problem and offer a solution that can be examined. A legal group should clarify important disagreements in the design of the transition.

An economic group should answer questions about the costs, resources and social effects of its proposals. Each group's value lies in the quality of the work it delivers and the responsibility it accepts.

A network of specialists should be built with their consent, protection of their information and an understanding of their actual capacity. Declaring readiness is not, by itself, the same as being able to attend or carry out a responsibility. One person may be able to teach, another to offer limited advice and another to participate in a long-term project. Credible planning recognises these differences and avoids vague commitments, lists created for appearances and unnecessary disclosure of people's identities.

At the same time, political and civic education should be publicly available. People should be able to understand the differences between a provisional government, a constituent assembly, a parliament and a constitutional court, and ask questions about the options. Explaining programmes in plain language respects citizens' intelligence. No proposal should be exempt from questioning merely because of its author's name.

Care and solidarity must also be visible in the rules of cooperation: listening to newcomers, creating opportunities for women and young people, dividing responsibilities fairly and supporting people who disagree with us. National trust grows from repeated conduct. We cannot build a society founded on mutual respect if we cannot tolerate differences within our smallest groups.

I stand alongside Iranians who, in support of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership, are working towards a free political order and the building of a new Iran. Our responsibility is to turn hope into capacity: capacity visible in expertise, institutions, cooperation and public service. The historical legacy reminds us that a different Iran is possible. The quality of our work today determines how ready we are to build it.

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Companion Writings

Alongside the six chapters, the following writings from the author's supplied collection provide biographical background and develop the book's themes.

Before My Beginning

Peyman Bakhshayesh. *Before My Beginning: From Farahan and Mashhad to Abadan*. A family narrative in English, and the source of the 1956 photograph and the family-background section of the biography in this edition.

What Is Pahlavism?

Peyman Bakhshayesh. *What Is Pahlavism? The Genealogy, Principles and Limits of a Nationalist, Development-Oriented and Secular Current in Contemporary Iran*. August 2026. Distinguishes the historical dynasty, the experience of modernisation and contemporary political interpretations; related to Chapters One and Six.

From the Trough of the Wave to Iran's Resurgence

Peyman Bakhshayesh. *From the Trough of the Wave to Iran's Resurgence: A Wave Model for Understanding Historical Cycles of Civilisation, Crises of Legitimacy, the Redefinition of Ethics and the Possibility of National Renewal*. Author-supplied manuscript. An interpretative account of decline and reconstruction, related to historical opportunity and institution-building.

Historical Truth and Individual Responsibility

Iranian Patriotic Doctors. *Historical Truth, Individual Due Process, and the Ebtekar Family Case*. A response addressed to the editors of *The Nation*, 14 August 2026. The supplied text concerns individual due process, humane treatment and historical responsibility, themes connected to this book's discussion of human dignity and rejection of inherited liability.

The complete six chapters form the basis of this consolidated edition. These companion texts are identified as biographical sources or further reading; they are not additional chapters. English renderings of Persian manuscript titles are descriptive, not claims of separate English publication.

The future is built through responsibility today

How can hope for Iran's freedom become cooperation, institutions and a programme? Across six chapters, this book connects the author's personal experience to the questions of political activism: from historical legacy and the people's right to choose to institution-building, diplomacy and the making of a new Iran.

Writing as an Iranian surgeon and activist, Peyman Bakhshayesh presents his vision of a free, capable country ready to cooperate with the world: a country whose governance is founded on citizens' dignity and the possibility of criticism and reform.

Peyman Bakhshayesh

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