



Iran v. The Islamic Republic

March 19, 2025

Featuring Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

PAHLAVI: When you have a corrupt regime with a paramilitary mafia running the show, intimidating the world by taking hostages, threatening the existence of a country by trying to wage nuclear war against them, and all of that and you still think that the solution is to negotiate with them? Seriously?

DUBOWITZ: Welcome to *The Iran Breakdown*. I'm your host, Mark Dubowitz. There's a truth we'll coming back to again and again on the show: The Iranian people are extraordinary. Whether in Tehran or Los Angeles, Berlin or Toronto, Iranians are known for their brilliance, their resilience and drive. But here's the tragedy. Only Iranians living outside the Islamic Republic are free to thrive and prosper. Inside Iran under the grip of this brutal regime, that potential is crushed. But it wasn't always this way. Just a few decades ago, Iran was a very different place. Women walked the streets in high fashion. Tehran's vibrant nightlife rivaled Paris. And yes, Iran's vineyards produced world renowned wines that you could enjoy in the open. Hard to imagine? Yes. Heartbreaking? Absolutely.

The people of Iran used to be free before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 turned their lives and their country upside down. Before we dive into today's regime, its nuclear ambitions, its terror networks and its stranglehold on the Iranian people we need to understand how we got here. Joining me to tell that story is Reza Pahlavi, the Crown Prince of Iran. As the son of the last Shah, he was raised to one day take the throne. But history took a brutal turn when the 1979 revolution forced him and his family into exile. Since then, he's become a leading voice for freedom, calling for an end to the Islamic Republic and the birth of a secular, democratic Iran. In this episode, we'll explore the regime's relentless crackdown on dissent, the courage of Iran's opposition, and the critical role the free world plays in standing with the Iranian people in their fight for liberty.

I'm Mark Dubowitz and this is *The Iran Breakdown*. Let's break it down.

Your Highness, thank you so much for joining *The Iran Breakdown*. It's really wonderful to have you.

PAHLAVI: Thank you so much.

DUBOWITZ: And so, let's break it down. I want to start with – for many of our listeners, they know you, many of them are supporters of yours, but for those who aren't, tell us a little bit about your background, the story, how you came to America, your life in Iran. Really interested to know the man behind the myth.

PAHLAVI: Well, first of all, thank you for having me on your program. I will start by saying that I was pretty much getting groomed to be the successor to my father as a Crown Prince. So my life in my early years of childhood and my teen years was, apart from going through the same educational process that every other Iranian would go through in school, I was also getting prepared for the role and, therefore, would have separate briefings by representatives of various branches of government, civil and military. Also participate in some more official ceremonies by, for instance, presiding over the sport event or giving prizes to workers or visiting factories, things of that nature, which is pretty much what, in most royal families, you see is being played by...

DUBOWITZ: And you became Crown Prince at a very young age.

PAHLAVI: Well, I was officially nominated when I was almost seven years old. That was in 1967. My father delayed the whole coronation ceremony of himself by many years, because when he assumed power, as a result of when my grandfather had to abdicate and went into exile in the middle of the Second World War, that's where my father took over. And that was back in 1943, if I'm not mistaken. So, it was not until 1967 that he deemed it appropriate then to say, "Okay, at least the country's now on track. We're beginning to move forward." And then, he said, you know, "I finally will have the coronation ceremony." And it was during that ceremony where I was officially proclaimed the Crown Prince. Even though, at birth, it was established, but it was a way to officialize it.



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So, it was back in 1967. At the time, I was like six or seven years old. And so, I stayed in Iran until the summer of 1978, which is when I graduated from high school. And the plan was for me to travel to the United States to formally undergo pilot training program in Reese Air Force Base. This is six months before my parents had to leave Iran for the last time. So, it was six months before the revolution.

DUBOWITZ: And you were about 17 at the time?

PAHLAVI: I was 17 and a half at the time, yes. So basically, I left Iran with the idea that I would be returning to it a year later, after my training would be over. So, I did arrive in the United States. I went to a short orientation visit at Colorado Springs, the Air Force Academy, and I started my training in Reese Air Force Base in Lubbock, Texas, back towards the end of August of 1978. And that pretty much was the plan. And then, in the meantime, we started seeing more and more upheavals in Iran, the revolutionary fervor and all of that led to, ultimately, my father leaving Iran in January 16th, of 1970. So that's practically about six months after I left Iran for the last time.

And then, from there on, the exile period started. Meaning that, about a month after my father left Iran, Khomeini returned to Iran. The new revolutionary government was put in place, and in the meantime, my family was moving from country to country during this whole exile period. So that pretty much changed the whole, you know, process from where it was supposed to lead to now a completely different set of circumstances.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, that's incredible upheaval in your life. And so, you've gone to Cairo, and then, you went to a number of different countries and then, ended up in the United States. What was the trajectory?

PAHLAVI: Well, the way it started is that, when my parents left, they first stopped in Aswan in Egypt for about six days when President Sadat welcomed them. From there, they moved to Morocco. That was in January of 1979. I was still in Reese Air Force Base. I left Texas to come and visit with them, first time I saw them again since I had left Iran, you know, six months prior. Stayed with them shortly in Morocco, went back to Texas to continue finish my training. At the time, the revolutionary government had started exerting pressure to terminate the training of all military pilots, Iranian Air Force pilots, training in the United States bases. And I remember, at the time, the decision was made to expedite my graduation. They knew I knew how to fly already. Before I came to the States, I was flying F-5s in Iran. I was 16 when I soloed on an F-5 in Iran. So, it's not that I didn't know how to fly a plane. It was just to go through the formal training.

So they expedited the training, so I could get my US Air Force pilot wings before the cutoff point of terminating the training program for Iranian pilots was to take place. So instead of graduating in June of 1979, I finished my training at the beginning of March, right about this time of the year, back at that time, which is when I then left to join with my parents.

We were still in Morocco. And I would go quickly through the various phases: from Morocco, we went to The Bahamas. We were in The Bahamas for about a couple of months. From there, in Mexico. My father had his operation in New York. That's where the hostages were taken in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. We couldn't go back to Mexico. We ended up in Panama. Finally, from Panama, the last stage of my father's exile was back in Cairo, where he went there and then, ultimately, passed away in July of 1980. So probably about a year and a half since he left Iran was the period from where he left Iran to...

DUBOWITZ: And when did you come to the United States?



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PAHLAVI: I was – after my father passed away, I was in Cairo for almost about a year, together with my mother and my siblings. At that time, I moved to Morocco. I lived in Rabat, Morocco for about three years, between 1981 and 1984. At that point, at some point in 1984, I moved to the United States. We figured that, strategically, the location made more sense, in terms of, back then, you didn't have smartphones and be able to connect with everyone on the planet. It was hard to get an outside line.

DUBOWITZ: I'm old enough to remember those days.

PAHLAVI: There was no such thing as social media or anything like that. And so, the West Coast of the United States, I mean the East Coast of the United States was somewhere between Europe and the Iranian diaspora in Europe, the East Coast diaspora, and of course, the West Coast diaspora was kind of a logical move. And also, from a security standpoint, it made much more sense for me to be in the States, which was more protected than the situation in Europe, where was far less secure. And as you may recall, a lot of the regime's successful assassination attempts against dissidents and their opponents took place on European soil.

DUBOWITZ: I was going to ask you about that actually, because obviously, it's 46 years later, the trajectory of your life completely changed because of the Islamic Revolution. You've been in the US now, you say, since the eighties.

PAHLAVI: Since '84.

DUBOWITZ: And have become very popular. You've got huge support, huge social media following. For somebody who, like me, didn't grow up in the internet age or the social media age, you've certainly mastered it. And I think that it's remarkable the level of support that you have outside of Iran and seemingly inside Iran. And the regime has been brutal against its opponents.

I was digging up, in my research, some names of people that I know you were very close to. And recently, Mohsen Rafighdoost, who was a former Minister of the IRGC, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, in Mousavi's government, and he was Head of the Mostazafan Foundation, he talked about his role in the assassination of people, I think, who you knew very well: Shahriar Shafiq, General [Arteshbod Gholam-Ali] Oveissi, Bakhtiar. And then, I found this TV personality, Fereydoun Farrokhzad. These were people you knew well, and these were people who were assassinated by the regime.

Tell us a little bit about these people. Tell us a little bit about what happened and also the kind of impact that it had on your life and on your family's life.

PAHLAVI: Well, when we went through the first wave, and that's at the time we were in The Bahamas in May, June of 1979. That's where the massive number of people who were executed by Khomeini, who were former ministers in the government and/or military officers started back then. But beyond the executions, we came to a phase of assassination of opponents to the regime or dissidents. One of the first victims was, as you refer to, my late cousin, Shahriar Shafiq, who was, not because he was a member of my family, but he was probably one of the most popular young officers in the Iranian Navy. Very much revered and adored by his supporters. He came out of Iran, he had to escape the country, obviously being a member of the family. And he came to Paris. And it was not long after he arrived in Paris that he was assassinated by the regime. So obviously, it was somebody who could have played a very significant role, vis-a-vis the forces that were still loyal to my father or in the military. And obviously, he had to be eliminated by the regime.



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Same thing in the case of General Oveissi, who was one of the most prominent senior generals in the Iranian military. Also quite revered among his peers. And General Oveissi, together with another member of the Iranian Armed Forces, General Aryana, who, at the time, were two of our prominent military officers now in exile, were trying to organize, you know, whatever they need to do in opposition to the regime. He was taken out as well. Shapour Bakhtiar, who was my father's last-nominated Prime Minister, who obviously was very much opposed to the regime, both the Marxist forces and the Islamists at the time, and was, as a nationalist, always professing his ideas. I was working quite closely with him when the Iranian opposition was beginning to first form and assemble itself in Paris. It was, of course, himself, and there was also Dr. Ali Amini, who was also a former Iranian Prime Minister, but Bakhtiar was also assassinated by the regime.

DUBOWITZ: Where was he killed?

PAHLAVI: He was actually killed in his own home in Paris.

DUBOWITZ: In Paris.

PAHLAVI: It was an inside job of some form, or at least infiltration, as far as we know. And of course, the personality that you mentioned, Fereydoon Farrokhzad. The interesting story about Farrokhzad is that Farrokhzad himself was of leftist background. In fact, at some point, I think he was a member of the Tudeh Party, or at least had sympathy to the Tudeh Party...

DUBOWITZ: Right, the Iranian Marxist Party.

PAHLAVI: Communist Party.

DUBOWITZ: Communist Party, right.

PAHLAVI: And not that he was necessarily a revolutionary, but he had sympathies to the left. He was one of the first people to openly say how wrong they were in their visions. He pretty much denounced that opinion, was very nationalist, very supportive to the cause. He was a big supporters of myself from the very beginning, and he was quite a well-known figure. And he also did not escape the wrath of the regime. Anybody who would stand against the regime from the very beginning would be subject to assassination.

Other people were also lost. There are people who work with a former Education Minister of ours, Dr. Ganji, and his organization. We had Ghassemloo, who was the leader of a Kurdish Party. He was assassinated in Mykonos, which was a nightclub in Germany. And so on and so forth. If I'm not mistaken, there were 66 successful assassinations by the regime on European soil of Iranian dissidents in the early eighties.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. So, on *The Iran Breakdown*, we're going to do a future episode on Iranian regime assassination campaigns around the world. But I wanted to ask you, because many of these men were assassinated either inside Iran or in Europe, you mentioned that you'd moved to the United States to be more secure. And yet, all these years later, decades later, the regime is operating on American soil. Masih Alinejad, a well-known Iranian dissident, who has been very active in Iranian women's rights movements, has been targeted three times in American soil. They've tried to kill her, including in her home in Brooklyn. In fact, as we're recording this podcast, the trial is taking place in New York. The three men who were hired as agents by the Islamic Republic to kill her are being indicted and hopefully will be convicted.



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But it does suggest that the regime feels that it can operate with impunity. On American soil, it's been going after former American officials, like Mike Pompeo and John Bolton, Brian Hook and General Milley, so U.S. officials, anti-regime dissidents, prominent people that speak out against this regime. And I think, at FDD, we obviously take this personally, because we've been sanctioned by Iran, and six of us have been designated by the Islamic Republic. So we all are very concerned about this issue. What are you – what can the US do to prevent the regime from succeeding in harming us and our supporters?

PAHLAVI: Well, I'm really glad that you asked this question. And by the way, it's not just only Iranian targets. I know, at some point, the Saudi ambassador here was subject to a terror plot that failed. So, I mean, the regime with impunity will try to eliminate anything that they consider being harmful to their interest. And to your point, what I would like to start saying is that, as of late, we have seen that many governments have unfortunately bowed towards blackmail by the regime, in the sense of hostages that they take. And all of this started with the beginning of a position of appeasement, that only emboldened the regime, to realize that, actually, it pays to take hostages. They pay ransom for them, and as a result, they feel more empowered to continue on the same path.

Not only starting from the very beginning, but even as of last month, when I visited Europe, I was supposed to attend a conference at the Munich Security Conference. There was a last-minute intervention by the Foreign Ministry of Germany stopping that from happening, although they claim that they don't have any direct involvement in the decision made by the Security Conference. But people at the Security Conference themselves said that, "Well, we were placed under pressure," because some hostage was supposed to be returned, or I think it was the body of a German-Iranian who was there. In fact, I know his daughter very well. And there's a whole process over there.

DUBOWITZ: Because that got a lot of publicity that you had been disinvited from the Munich Security Conference, right?

PAHLAVI: And from the Foreign Committee of the Dutch Parliament where I was supposed to also visit. And similar to the German Foreign Ministry, the Dutch Foreign Ministry exerted the same pressure, saying that this will threaten the diplomatic relationship with the regime and so on and so forth. My point being is that the minute you start, as a French senator told me when I visited with them a few weeks ago in Paris, he says, "We have become hostages to our hostages." When we start accepting, that it's like dealing with terrorists or playing to that, then there's no end in sight. And that pretty much gives free rein to the perpetrators of this crime to feel totally free to operate the way they want, fund radical organizations on various territories. Khamenei has many offices based in Europe who finance anti-Semitic organizations that threaten journalists or intimidate the Jewish community and so on and so forth.

We've seen the case of how much funding came from Iran indirectly to universities in this country as a result of October 7th and the entire Hamas elements and so on and so forth. You know, I think a lot of it has to do with a laissez-faire attitude that lead us to where we are today. And the only language that the regime has proven to respond to has been strength.

Let me give you a tacit graphic. Perhaps you have seen it already, this is something that NUFDI [National Union for Democracy in Iran] has provided, as you know, an organization that we work together with, that provide this kind of data. When you take the number of assassinations that the regime has conducted in Iran itself, between the Obama administration and the Biden administration, during President Trump's first term, it was literally half, if not more than half, of the amount that we are back to today, in direct response to the amount of pressure that they felt on themselves as opposed to none.



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When you have a regime that was on its way down, in terms of the first campaign of President Trump, in terms of maximum pressure, all of a sudden, the Biden administration decides that we have to counter that. We have to go back to the root of practically appeasement, that led to the non-enforcing of the oil sanctions, which allowed Iran to sell over \$200 billion worth of oil to the Chinese, a revenue that they should not have had access to, which did not go towards building schools or hospitals in Iran or paying the salaries of factory workers or what have you. Instead, it went to reinforcing their proxies in the region.

And I think, in some – perhaps quite a direct way, perhaps led to the October 7th attack. And by the way, it was a few weeks after the paying of the ransom for the six hostages that were released in Iran that they went ahead and did that. And even took some U.S. Navy personnel hostage in the seas. This sort of behavior has only emboldened the regime to take this action. So when you ask me, “are we safe?” in terms of this regime feeling free to do whatever it wants on foreign soil, as long as this attitude remains, we can only expect to see more of the same.

DUBOWITZ: Right. And I want to talk to you about that later in the podcast, because obviously, President Trump is back, with at least an announced policy of a return to maximum pressure. And hopefully, under President Trump, a clear message that, if the regime harms Americans, there'll be, quote "hell to pay," as he said in a number of other different contexts. But because of the threat to Iranians, to outspoken opposition leaders, you're obviously one of the most popular opposition leaders out there.

And I want to talk a little bit about your popularity. Where do you think it comes from? You've obviously been, for now, I guess, 46 years, if I'm counting that right, that you've been out there as a figure of opposition, starting as a young man and now into your sixties. And you have huge support, as I said, in social media, huge support in the diaspora, and presumably also inside the country. Where does it come from? Is it your name? Is it the legacy of your father? Is it a memory of what Iran used to be before the Islamists took over? How do you account for that?

PAHLAVI: I think it's a little bit of all of these elements that you have alluded to. I think there are several aspects to it. Most Iranians, when they meet me, especially those who belong to the previous generations, at least the generation of my parents, those who were old enough to remember the day I was born, they always say that one of the most vivid memories in their lifetime of an event that was for them very, very important, was the day I was born. The reason being that, you know, when my father had, as a result of his first marriage, a daughter, then the constitution in Iran said that the heir to the throne has to be a male descendant of the king. My father divorced his first wife, married his second wife who couldn't bear children so he had to divorce her, and finally married my mother. And as a result of this marriage, I came to this life. And it was a day of celebration for the Iranian people. I mean, everybody tells me, "The day you were born, we remember this, we remember that." I say, I'm glad I could contribute to some joy in your family.

But I was literally the adopted son for millions of Iranians, and they always looked at me as if I were their son, certainly before the revolution. And then we went into the period of the revolution. And in the passage of 40 years, there is one element that could be nostalgia of the past and what they associated the family name to, what was brought to Iran in terms of modernity. Today, I think the level of popularity that my father has, and my grandfather in particular, is multiple of whatever it might have been at the peak of their popularity at their time. There's not a day that people don't chant the slogan “Reza Shah, Roohet Shad,” which means “my grandfather, may your soul rest in peace.” And that's of course in remembrance, but also in defiance of the regime. When you look at the end of every soccer match in Iran, most of them, you hear that chant being chanted by the Iranian people.



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But also, the fact that today's Gen Z of Iranians, as opposed to their parents who called me their child, they call me father. So you know, the seven-year-old of the day of the coronation to the 64-year-old that they now look almost like a father figure, it's a story of a lifetime. It's a story of 44 years of, at least, my life since I've been outside of Iran, but including the life where I grew up to this position. And my own track record and what I've done and the positions I've taken and my vision. They buy into my vision. They see that I speak what is inherently their ultimate aspiration. So, it's not just nostalgia, it's not just name. I think a lot has to also do with my track record.

And one thing that I would be proud to say that defines me, and I think most people including my worst enemies will not argue against, is that what I've been saying for the past 40 years has always remained one and the same. I have never wavered from my core principles. I've always stayed committed to it. And I think this is something rather rare when you see people changing their tune depending on the circumstances. I've always stood the course, and I said one day hopefully they will catch up to the vision that I have had for my country. And I'm glad that today, the trust that they have in me, the reverence they have vis-à-vis me is something that tells me that I haven't wasted 44 years of my life, that it was worth something and it is still going to be an element that could make a huge difference, by the role I intend to play to liberate Iran from this mess and usher in this transition that I've been talking about as part of my general program...

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, I want to talk about that because – so you've been very clear, and as you say, very consistent about your role in a transition from the Islamic Republic to a free Iran and to an Iranian democracy. Some of your supporters have thought of you, as sort of, playing the role of a Constitutional Monarch. Some supporters have thought of you playing the role of an absolute monarch, sort of a Reza Shah II. How do you see your role and what do you say to supporters and critics out there about your vision of your role in a new Iran?

PAHLAVI: And let's not forget, there are some Republicans who want to see me run as a President. But the point that everybody's missing regardless of, whether they are Monarchists or Republicans, is that my entire ambition in life and my mission in life has not been about running for office. My dedication has been to make sure that Iran ultimately ends up with a secular democratic system as an alternative to this clerical dictatorship. That has been my goal in life. And I've always said that the day the Iranian people go to cast their vote in the national referendum, I would have considered my mission in life accomplished. And I'm not looking beyond that point.

Now, if you want to discuss what could be the alternative form of governance in the future, I think there are multiple examples we can point to, both in the Republican system and the Monarchic system. For instance, you can have the type of Republic that you see in India or Israel, where you have the president who plays more of almost like a monarch role that is not directly involved with policy making or governance, but the prime minister is. You have the kind of Republic in France where you have the president and it has a prime minister. You have a kind of Republic in America where the head of the executive is the president. You have the constitutional monarchy the way you see it in Japan or in Sweden or in Norway or in Belgium and so on and so forth. Certainly not absolute monarchy. That's not even fathomable in terms of a legitimate democratic alternative.

But the way you achieve that, the way you ultimately decide what's the best course and option to the nation, that I think is exactly the reason why I've been behind a democratic process to determine the outcome as opposed to pre-designate the outcome. And the reason I say this is for multiple reasons. Number one, in contrast to what happened in 1979, if you ask any Iranian whether they were pro-regime, against the regime, wherever they stood, how many of them actually knew what Khomeini was going to be? The answer to that question is 99% didn't have a clue, didn't even understand what it is that he's really talking about. Back then, they used to say, "the Shah has to leave, then we'll see what happens." Well, guess what? The Shah did leave and then we saw what happened. But by the time it happened, it was too late.



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So contrary to that totally obscure, untransparent process, I am all for CSPAN-type process wherein absolute transparency, you would have the Iranian people observe and understand exactly what is being proposed to them as a constitutional project. Now, in order to get to that, I have to explain that right now we are in the phase of liberation, meaning until the time that the regime is no longer in place. So, we are in phase one of this process. Right after phase one, we enter the transition process. This is where my role becomes the most critical for the people who are following my activities. Because we want to make sure that the vacuum is filled, post-regime collapse, that you're dealing with an element of stability where there is a plan as to how to address the transition.

DUBOWITZ: Because by the way, that's been used as an excuse by U.S. policymakers, European policymakers for years, that they don't want to support the undermining of the Islamic Republic or the collapse of the Islamic Republic because they fear what comes next. They fear there's no day-after plan. And they also make the argument, which I don't necessarily agree with, but they make the argument that whatever comes next could be worse than the Islamic Republic.

PAHLAVI: Well, I have an answer to all of that. If you allow me to just finish that segment, then I can certainly address what you just said. So, what happened during the transition period, you have an interim government that obviously has to make sure the country continues to function in the meantime. But we prepare the stage for the election of a parliamentary assembly, a constitutional assembly, which is exactly where people's representatives will debate whether and how the final form of this secular democratic system we're proposing could be. And this time by offering alternatives. If it's a Republic, in what form; if it's a Monarchy, in what form, so on and so forth. So, people this time have a clear understanding of the options that they could opt to and then let the ballot box decide in majority what Iranian people ultimately want.

I think that the final form that it takes is not so much critical as the content of it. And that's where we come with the elements of separation of powers, we come with the element of a secular system where there's a clear separation of religion from state as a prerequisite to democracy, that we're talking about a constitution that is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So, any form of discrimination is, by a factor of law, eliminated, whether it's discrimination about women or peoples' sexual orientation or political beliefs or ethnicity or religious beliefs and so on and so forth. This is pretty much guarantees of liberty that you will seek in any kind of constitution that gives every citizen of Iran equal treatment under the law.

I think that's very important, but also to make sure that the process is democratic. So, if there's any foreign government looking in, at the end, they say the result will be the most legitimate result because it is at the hand of the people of Iran. It is not by means of foreign intervention or occupation or installing a puppet regime here and there. So, the Iranian people will consider it one of theirs, and the world could say, "Well, you know, that's a legitimate representation." So that's one aspect of it.

But coming to your point, if they're dodging the question of not knowing what happens next, I must say that first of all, the scenario of change in Iran is very different than what we have recently observed occurring in our immediate region. And by the way, I know that in some corridors of diplomacy or politics in this country, the concept of regime change has gotten a bad name. Well, because you poorly executed it in other places. Example: Iraq and Saddam Hussein, and the De-Ba'athification.

DUBOWITZ: But you're not talking about... I mean, I want to clarify this for our listeners because I think when I've said this before, when people say "regime change" in Washington, the brains of our policymakers and our experts freeze. And immediately they think of Iraq, or they think of Afghanistan, or they think of Libya; they think of a military-led regime change, 500,000 mechanized troops invading Iran. You're not talking about that...



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PAHLAVI: Of course not. And that's why we need to talk about this...

DUBOWITZ: And none of us talk about that, right?

PAHLAVI: That's precisely one of the reasons we have to talk about this is because I think that the false fear they have of this scenario is based on an assumption that is just not there. That's not what we're asking for. In fact, if you follow what has been my strategy and the way it should make sense to a foreign government, whether it is here in the United States or in Europe, is that the scenario that I am professing does not require the kind of intervention or involvement that you have seen in those other scenarios, which by the way, ended up with a not-quite-successful end.

But let me explain how I look at this. Look, the agent of change are the Iranian people themselves. Number one. It's not a foreign intervention, it's not as a result of a military intervention of any form, whether it's against Bin Laden in Afghanistan, or for that matter what we saw in Iraq. The process by which we want to bring about change is based on civil resistance in terms of campaigns of civil disobedience, labor strikes, something that can paralyze the regime from within, which is why I've been suggesting to world governments that it's understandable why you need to exert maximum pressure. As a matter of fact, President Trump did that. But maximum pressure has to have a path of maximum support to the Iranian people as a parallel, in so far as you're willing to finally make the decision that the solution to the problem is regime change in Iran, as opposed to 46 years and counting of Western diplomacy expecting a false change of behavior by the regime. The whole premise was wrong from to begin with. We had the carrot and the stick approach...

DUBOWITZ: I mean, the Iranian people, I think you would agree, also recognized that. I mean, there was a time where there was a belief that Iranian "reformists" could reform the Islamic Republic. And that changed. I mean – I think 2009, millions of Iranians were on the streets yelling, "Death to the dictator. President Obama, are you with us or are you with the dictator?" In protest of a fraudulent reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

PAHLAVI:

Right.

DUBOWITZ: But the leaders of that protest movement, at least the most public leaders of that, were regime insiders who were pretending to be reformists.

PAHLAVI: Mhm.

DUBOWITZ: You would agree that that fundamentally changed,,,

PAHLAVI: It has. There's a big contrast.

DUBOWITZ: ...with "Woman, Life, Freedom", but even earlier, maybe even the protests of 2017 or '18 or '19 where they've now – it seems to me, and you obviously follow this much more closely than I do, particularly in your native language, but it seems to me that Iranians have given up on regime reform, and now they are absolutely committed to getting rid of the Islamic Republic. You would agree with that?

PAHLAVI: Yes. I mean, there was a slogan that started about two, three years ago that would say "*Eslah-talab, Usool-gara, dige tamoomeh ma'ajeraa*," which basically means, whether you are a moderate or radical in the system, the game is up, the gig is up. I mean, it's over. That game between the hawkish or the doves within the system – it's a little bit like at the end of the Soviet Union, there was a look towards the Soviet Union, who are the more moderate elements as opposed to the more hawkish elements within the Soviet Communist Party. I remember that as I was old enough to remember the narrative within Western diplomacies, especially back here in America, where they said, "You know, maybe we should talk to Andropov. He seems to be more manageable than, let's say, Brezhnev or the others."



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DUBOWITZ: Well, that's right. I mean, we had a generation, I'm old enough to remember too, we had a generation of Sovietologists.

PAHLAVI: You remember they used to say, "Well, why we can talk to him more?" Say, "Well, he likes jazz music and drinks whiskey." That was the rationale back then. Not understanding that at the end of the day, it's the Communist Party. It doesn't matter which represents them. And I'm making the same comparison to the Islamic Regime of Iran, that when you have Ali Khamenei at the head, and you've wasted time thinking that Khatami, or I don't know, his successors all the way to today are in fact the difference makers, they're all just puppets to Khamenei. They don't represent anything other than the will of the supreme leader at the end of the day.

DUBOWITZ: But yet American policymakers, American presidents and secretaries of state have really walked into that trap, "Rouhani is the moderate, Zarif is the moderate." Right? "And now we have a new moderate Iranian President who really is committed to moderation and reform and openness." I mean, they keep falling into that trap.

PAHLAVI: They keep falling into the same trap.

DUBOWITZ: And it's the same trap.

PAHLAVI: Absolutely. And that's what's delaying the problem. And that's what's frustrating millions of Iranians on the streets who are risking their lives every day, they're getting shot in their face, they are surviving sometimes getting caught, because if they get caught, they get tortured and they probably end up being executed by the regime. And they keep saying to the outside world, for instance, chanting slogans like "*Doorugh migan Amrika-ast, doshmaneh ma hamin jast,*" which means, "They lie to us when they say it's America. Our enemy is right here." So you see a regime that is so antagonistic to the outside world, particularly to America.

This is a regime that wanted to assassinate President Trump, whether the Iranian people are standing there in demonstration asking for their liberty with the Israeli flag along the Iranian national flag against the narrative of a regime that simply want to wipe off Israel from the face of the map.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah.

PAHLAVI: That's the contrast. And as long as you have politicians, including today's administration in the United States, thinking that they can reason or come to terms or make a deal with this regime and its representatives, especially when they have no legitimacy left whatsoever, and they do not represent Iranian people, my friend, this is adding insult to injury. This is a slap in the face of millions of Iranians who have the very same values that are cherished by American citizens, by French citizens, by anybody living in the outside, free, democratic world.

DUBOWITZ: So, I think you know that at FDD, we absolutely agree with you. But I would say this, it's been heartbreaking for me, and I'm sure it's been much more heartbreaking for you given the trajectory of your life. I remember Israel's last ambassador to Iran, Uri Lubrani, who I think you knew as well. It was 30 years ago that he was predicting that the Islamic Republic was on the precipice, and it just needed a little more outside pressure to crack the regime or this much more support to the Iranian people. And I think that even members of the clerical regime thought that "Woman, Life, Freedom" was going to be generating enough outrage that it would crack the regime's security forces. And yet, unfortunately, the regime has triumphed. In fact, they launched chemical weapons attacks against Iranian schoolgirls to break the back of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement.



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Instead of a million protests in Iran, we've now seen kind of an unorganized opposition, and they're falling back to weekly sporadic protests. We track them at FDD. We have a weekly tracker here where we're tracking protests. They exist, but it's dozens of protests, it's not hundreds of thousands of protests. And it's hundreds of people, not millions of people. I guess the question I have to you: after seeing these protests erupting since 2009 and yet the regime continuing to win, how do you see the regime's string of victories ending?

PAHLAVI: First of all, if you want to have a realistic viewpoint, we have to understand that when you're fighting such totalitarian, dictatorial, repressive regimes, there are always ebbs and flows. When I was in Geneva a few weeks ago for the Human Rights Conference, and I had the opportunity to visit with some of the representatives of different countries as dissidents from Venezuela, from Cuba, from Hong Kong, from other places, you know we all realize, being in the same boat, of how many ebbs and flows we have to face, moments where we are closer to success, sometimes it backfires. I must say unfortunately, the policy of the Biden administration delayed the process. The regime was on its heels, and they got a second lease on life as a result of all that appeasement approach. So, there is a direct correlation, but how much outside pressure is exerted with the survival of these kind of regimes?

And by the way, let's not go too far. We have successful models that proves that with direct support, many campaigns that did not include any kind of foreign military intervention put an end to unwanted regimes. The end of the Soviet Union did not come with a single bullet fired by a Western soldier or tank or aircraft.

DUBOWITZ: Well, certainly not against Soviet troops.

PAHLAVI: Certainly not against Soviet troops. When the Red Army did not stop Boris Yeltsin when he was standing in front of the Duma, they ultimately ushered in the end of the Soviet Union. And Gorbachev had to sue for *glasnost* and *perestroika*, but also because there were two strong leaders at the time that put the ultimate pressure on the Soviet system, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Let's not forget that. So strong leadership in the free world does matter.

DUBOWITZ: Oh, yeah. No, I have to say this is a model that we talk about all the time at FDD, is the Reagan model against the Soviet Union, which really combined, in your words, maximum pressure on the regime...

PAHLAVI: Yeah, [inaudible] would not have been successful.

DUBOWITZ: ...and maximum support.

PAHLAVI: Nelson Mandela would not have been successful without that kind of support.

DUBOWITZ: That's right.

PAHLAVI: And what we're asking in Iran, and I think that's something that President Trump should appreciate, because at least if that's what he's calling for, that we don't want to get engaged or involved in anything. Again, Mr. President, the best way you can guarantee that American troops or American taxpayer dollars will not have to sustain endless years of campaign and presence in the Middle East is by helping Iranians liberate themselves from this regime. Because we will be the boots on the grounds, not your soldiers. We can repurpose frozen Iranian assets that belong to the Iranian people in the first place to finance the kind of campaigns we need to put pressure on the regime from within, without a single American tax dollar being paid. I'm a U.S. taxpayer, by the way. I don't want my money to be spent on those kind of elements either.



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So, I think that's exactly one thing that if he intends to divest from being engaged, well, the best way you can disengage is by allowing something to replace what would otherwise force you to be involved, whether you like it or not, which is bound to happen if this regime continues to be there. Why? Because it will continue to be a threat, because it will continue to be a problem for the world; whether it's disturbing maritime traffic in the Middle East, in the region, whether it is the regime continuing to finance these proxies, whether it is the existential threat against Israel because of the nuclear threat, and so on and so forth, or further proliferation in the region. No matter how you look at it, everything ties back to this regime continuing to be in place.

And in 46 years and counting, not a single government came and said, "It is time we start thinking that the alternative does not lie as a result of our diplomacy that has failed, or our military campaigns that have not ushered in an Iran [?] stability." But this could be a different scenario that is win-win in the sense that it's good for the people of the Iran, the people of the region, but also in the best interest of the citizens of the free world.

DUBOWITZ: So, I'll tell you what policy makers say to me, and they've been saying this to me for over 20 years in Washington, right? I've been through now a number of administrations, from Bush to Obama, to Trump to Biden and back to Trump, and that is - I want to get back to this issue of the opposition. There's no doubt in my mind that millions of Iranians despise this regime. Maybe it's even the majority of Iranians that want to see the end of the Islamic Republic. There's no doubt to me that a free Iran would be a prosperous and successful Iran, because I've always said that the only place where Iranians don't succeed in the world is inside the Islamic Republic of Iran. I grew up in Toronto, "Tehranto", as they call it. I've been in communities in Los Angeles and in New York and around the world, and it's always remarkable to me how successful Iranians are wherever they go. The only place where they've been denied that success is inside the Islamic Republic of Iran, because of its brutality and its corruption and its repression.

But what policymakers say to me is, "You know Mark, if we could only get a unified Iranian opposition inside the country and outside the country, then we would have a unified opposition to work with. And we must have a unified opposition if we're able to take on the thugs of the Islamic Republic. So, bring me back a unified opposition and then we'll talk about maximum support for the opposition." What do you say to that objection?

PAHLAVI: Look, the expectation of seeing more unity among opposition is not an unfair expectation. The question is, there are many elements that expedite and encourages more unity in an opposition as a direct result of your own behavior, vis-a-vis the issue.

Look, what would be the incentive of an Iranian activist, dissident, political prisoner, irrespective of their political persuasions, to think that they have a chance to overcome a regime that will execute a singer for just singing a song against them? While you're sitting here, continuing to negotiate with the regime and these representatives, not taking any action against their behavior because while they're taking hostages, they still have elements related directly either to the top heads of the regime and their families that are money laundering in Toronto or in London, or have members of their families that are employed by the U.S. government that have direct relation to the IRGC, for instance. When they see all of that happening, they say, "Well, how clear are you in your heads of assessing the situation properly?"

I want to go back to a point you raised and then tie it into the opposition and the expectation that they have. We talked about the era of the Green Movement and the fact that yes, of course Mousavi and Karroubi were of course challenging the result of the election, but they were still in the context of the regime, its laws and its constitution. Today's movement where people say, "Death to the dictator and an end to the Islamic regime," and elements who until yesterday were on their side who were now joining forces with us, that's the big sea change that the world needs to see.



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When somebody like Mehdi Nasiri, who was a right-hand person to Ali Khamenei, who was the editor-in-chief of *Kayhan* newspaper, the equivalent of *Pravda* in the Soviet Union, who today says we have to work with Reza Pahlavi to usher in an era of change beyond this regime, it's meaning that we're beginning to peel away from the regime and converge with us. Those of us who from the very beginning were secular Democrats, vis-a-vis this regime, and former reformists who now are disillusioned and want to join with us. And this is a phenomenon that's happening inside, not in Los Angeles, not in Toronto, not here in Washington, but in Iran itself.

DUBOWITZ: Well, that's a huge change.

PAHLAVI: This is a huge change.

DUBOWITZ: I think people don't recognize that again, there are millions of Iranians who despise the regime. There's no doubt I would say that there are also hundreds of thousands, if not maybe a few million young men who are Islamists who are willing to go to the streets and kill their fellow Iranians to defend the regime. But what you're pointing at, which I think is really important and it's not discussed enough is, there are persuade-ables inside the regime. There are people who once supported the Islamic Republic who are now recognizing there is no future for Iran with the Islamic Republic.

PAHLAVI: Exactly.

DUBOWITZ: And those people are starting to speak out.

PAHLAVI: Exactly. And look, many who were the worst enemies of my father want to work with me today towards that solution. And you know what? I've been calling for a coalition of the willing, and I want to simplify one question, if I may. I believe that in this world, we have two categories of people in general, whether they're Iranian-Americans or others.

The first category are people I would qualify as being part of the problem. They're not willing to change. They are hellbent on their own radical ideas. They're not willing to compromise. They're not willing to abandon or admit when they were wrong in some judgment before. So, they continue to be part of the problem. And my friend, I don't waste a minute of my time on them. The second category of people are people who want to be part of the solution, and they are willing to change their ideas. They're willing to adapt to the new circumstances. They're willing to see that now we need to be able to do this. And in my judgment book, I think that the people I want to be able to work with are people who are today committed to a solution that is the best interest of the Iranian people, irrespective of where they stood yesterday. That's the basis of the coalition I want to create and propose.

So, as long you understand that the demeanor and the mindset of those who can be part of this diverse coalition of the willing and able, and they are diversified in opinions, they're representatives of the left, of the center of the right, they are Republicans, there are monarchists, but the issue for us is to achieve the ultimate goal of democratization in Iran on three key fundamental elements: Iran's territorial integrity, which is very important to us. The issue of human rights as a matter of principle and values and systems and laws, and of course, secular democracy, which means a clear separation of religions or governments. I think on that you will discover that the majority of Iranian democratic forces agree on this.

There are some groups that we cannot work with. I'll be very honest, we cannot work with the MEK [Mojahedin-e-Khalq, People's Mojahedin Organization], we cannot work with separatists. And the reason is very simple, because either they are inherently non-democratic, or they go against the grain of challenging or threatening Iran's territorial integrity. I'll be very honest with you: I cannot work with these two groups, but I can work with every other groups, including those who were at some point revolutionaries of yesteryear but today agree that they went the wrong path and we need to now regather forces for a better future.

DUBOWITZ: So, I...



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PAHLAVI: And that's also goes to the spirit of my view of national reconciliation towards a better future. Maximizing defections from this regime to minimize the resistance against Iranian people for that change and guarantee that the transition will be as smooth and as least costly to the nation, but I need to have that element of foreign support in this.

So, that's where I come back and tell those contrarians or naysayers or people who might be worried that are we yet again, not sure as what the outcome would be, the devil that we know is better than the devil that we don't. Which I think is a big excuse. I say look, look among yourselves. Look how many people – just by looking at the Iranian diaspora, you made an illusion to it when living in Toronto. How many successful Iranians who are doctors, who are entrepreneurs, who are CEOs of this and that company who run the world as we speak, including here in America? How much potential exists between them being the link between a once-freed Iran with a country like America?

I think President Trump will understand that at the end of the day, it's good for business as well. When you have entrepreneurs including one of his people, Elon Musk, who could have a Tesla plant in Baluchistan, for instance. Or we have people from Uber, from eBay, from all of these big Iranian entrepreneurs from Silicon Valley and elsewhere who can commit billions of dollars of investment to rebuild Iran in the future. And this is not just limited to America, mind you. None of this will happen when you have a corrupt regime with a paramilitary mafia running the show, intimidating the world by taking hostages, threatening the existence of a country by trying to wage nuclear war against them, and all of that. And you still think that the solution is to negotiate with them? Seriously?

DUBOWITZ: So, I want to get to that, and I agree with you, and I think it's a critical message to the Trump administration that if you want to make Iran great again, you got to make Iran free again. And the answer is not some nuclear deal, that it's some minor improvement to the 2015 Obama deal. It puts a few more years on the sunsets, because that deal is only kicking the nuclear can down the road, which is going to explode in our faces, and it's only going to send billions of dollars into the coffers of the regime that it can steal, and that it can use for repression and to fund its proxies.

But you've mentioned a couple of times, Israel. And I actually met you for the first time in Israel, in Tel Aviv, and I remember thinking, "wow, it is remarkable that you were there." And tell us a little bit about your decision to go. I mean, it was quite a brave decision. I would imagine it was quite a controversial decision within the broader Iranian community, though I think you're exactly right. I mean, I've been struck by the fact that really sometimes the only people that are at rallies after October 7th with Jewish Americans or Jewish Canadians or Jewish Europeans against Hamas and against Hezbollah and against the Islamic Republic of Iran, are Iranians, are Muslim Iranians who are at the same rally. And so, it seems to me that at the personal level, there's a really deep connection between Jewish Americans and Iranian Americans, between Israelis and Iranians. Do you get that sense as well? And was that sort of one of the reasons you wanted to go and really connect with Israelis in the way that you seem to have done?

PAHLAVI: Yeah, well, of course. And what made it even more imperative was the fact that within the last four or five years, we have seen hundreds of thousands of Iranians, although many of them were denied access but at least tried to get there, to gather by Cyrus the Great's tomb in Persepolis. As a symbol of Iran's heritage, culture, tradition, civilization, identity. And among them would be people representing different faiths and ethnicities and that celebrated that Iranian-ness. Anything that this regime from the get-go was against, anything that had to do with Iran, the celebration of our history, of our culture, an anti-Iranian regime, in essence, started there.

And when you start thinking of Cyrus the Great, you cannot help but to remember that 25 centuries ago when he liberated the slaves in Babylon, helped them rebuild their temple in Jerusalem, we are talking about the uniqueness of the relationship of two nations that no other country in the world can claim, to have that kind of a biblical relationship. Iran and the Jews, and later on, when the state of Israel were created. It is unique to the world; I don't think there's any parallel that you can name except for these two.



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And one of the reasons I wanted to go to Israel was beyond the obvious taboo-breaking of the issue, but to point that today, Iranians who celebrate their traditions and their history and their civilization and this, we as Iranians have no hatred or animosity towards other faiths or other cultures or nationalities. And what could be more symbolic than to show that unlike this regime who hates the Jews, who promotes antisemitism, that actually wants to wipe up a country off the face of the earth, that we Iranians, unlike them, are certainly looking at Israel as an extremely important partner and strategic partner in the region. We don't have any animosity towards our Arab neighbors. We want to, in fact, be the country that helps seal what was the spirit of the Abraham Accords, which of course was welcomed by the Israeli counterparts in the Arab world, only to be sabotaged by the regime, which obviously felt threatened by that.

But the reason I wanted to go there, and I studied at the press conference in Tel Aviv, I think it was, that I hope that one day we can elevate the Abraham Accords to the Cyrus Accords. Whereas Iran, a different Iran, would be the element that will seal the deal permanently, that will ultimately allow for actual stability and freedom to exist, which will ultimately be conducive to eliminating all the proxies that the regime has had, all the elements that have been preventing from true peace to happen, and ultimately even the dual-state solution and for the Palestinians to have a real chance to have finally there their independent state. None of this can happen under this regime being in place. That has been the delaying factor. And Iranians want to be part of that equation. They want to prove the world that we, unlike this regime, are the agent of peace. We want to be part of those who want to be the peacemakers as opposed to a regime that has been practically representing the warmongers. The narrative is already there, the story is already there for all to see.

And that's why it's important for the world to understand that if we want to avoid conflict, if we want to avoid escalation, today, we have an opportunity, a window of time that is not going to remain open forever. This is an opportunity if we don't want to get to a point that Israel might have to take the initiative of striking Iranian facilities or what have you, or there's an escalation of conflict, or Iran's ballistic program begins to threaten Europe. That even if you have the snapback strategy, how far along is their transparency and accountability by this regime? In other words, we can always remain nervous because the finger on the trigger is still sitting there in Tehran. All of that ties back to the urgency of the matter.

I still think that there's enough time to remedy the problem. And one of them, my messages, and the reason I traveled to Israel was also to talk to the politicians, obviously Prime Minister Netanyahu. And in fact, I'm glad that he took my advice of talking to the people directly. I said, "Talk to the people, talk to the Iranian people. Let them hear from you that you make a difference between them and the regime."

DUBOWITZ: And it's worth pointing out to our listeners who may have missed it, but Prime Minister Netanyahu, in recent months, has been sending out videos with Farsi subtitles, speaking directly to the Iranian people over the heads of the regime.

PAHLAVI: And the fact that because he understand that, he also understand the logic behind why I say it's important to have a policy on maximum support. Because by bringing pressure only, is it sufficient to make the whole thing tip over? You have to give the Iranian people a fair chance of fighting the regime. So far, they've done it completely unaided and alone. Had it not been for Elon Musk and Starlink, God knows how much access to the internet will still be available to the Iranians inside Iran to communicate with one another.

DUBOWITZ: Well, I would say that I think your visit really made a difference, and I think Israelis heard you and I think Israeli decision makers were listening. I don't want to get into it in detail on an open podcast, but I think there is a sea change with respect to how Israel sees the Iran issue today. And I think for the first time ever in Israeli history, they've made maximum support for the Iranian people a central pillar of their strategy. And it's not just rhetorical, but it's...

PAHLAVI: Because they understand the Iranian people.



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DUBOWITZ: Correct.

PAHLAVI: Israelis, and I think a lot of people within the international Jewish community, not to mention the Iranian Jewish community, of course, actually understand and see why a different Iran can in fact bring about – they know the Iranian people much better than an American politician, or for that matter, a European politician might know. At least not as much as they would understand it, which makes it even more ridiculous where you have a country that understands Iran better than any of them who understand the necessity for that to happen. And you proclaim to have that country as your most trustable ally, you don't even listen to them. You pursue your own assessments and analysis, which is still based on that flawed expectation of behavior change.

DUBOWITZ: Well, that's certainly...

PAHLAVI: And we just wasted time.

DUBOWITZ: Right. I mean, that's certainly the frustration in Israel as they have encountered multiple American administrations who aren't listening to them on the issue of how to deal with the Islamic Republic.

I mean, it is a good reminder: ancient Persia, ancient Israel, modern Israel, and hopefully one day a modern and free Iran. And it does remind me that when President Harry Truman made the decision to support the independence of Israel, against, by the way, the advice of numerous people in the State Department and elsewhere in the U.S. government, and he made that decision. And it was obviously a critical decision to the U.N. vote that brought the modern state of Israel into being and brought Israel back after 3,000 years.

He said, "I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus." And Truman had that sense, that historical sense that he was Cyrus. He was bringing the Jewish people back to Jerusalem, in the way that Cyrus had brought the ancient Jews back to Israel, as you had said. So, there's certainly that kind of continuity.

But I want to end with this, Your Highness, and that is that we've covered a lot of ground. We've talked a lot about your background, the Iranian people, the Iranian opposition. We've talked a lot about what has worked, what has failed, your aspirations. I want to end with a couple of questions, maybe sort of lightning round questions.

First is, when you think about Iran today, I've heard you say that Iran in the 1950s and '60s and '70s was on a trajectory to be South Korea, but ended up as North Korea, or not the people, but the regime. When you think about the Iran of the future, a free Iran, what country do you have as a model? Is it a South Korea? Is it a America? Is it a U.K. constitutional monarchy? Aspirationally, when you think of Iran, what is the model in your mind?

PAHLAVI: I would say that long before America came to existence and claims to be the melting pot of the world, Iran was the melting part at least of the region. For centuries, we had a country that was represented by various ethnicities and religious communities, that lived side-by-side in peace in nation states for centuries.

If you look at the Middle East, half of the countries that you see on the map today did not even exist before the end of the Ottoman Empire. Many of them were manufactured artificially by some European diplomat at the end of the First World War.

When you look at Iran and the fact that it goes back centuries of civilization and tradition, a country that survived multiple invasions, whether it was the Mongols, the Turks, the Arabs, and what have you and we are still standing as a nation without losing our identity and culture, that's a very strong statement to make.

DUBOWITZ: So, your answer really, I think, I'm gleaning from this is, your answer is modern Iran should look in many ways like ancient Iran?



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PAHLAVI: What I'm saying is that in the 21st century, where we are seeing a world where, how do you serve the best interest of your respective citizens when you start looking at issues differently than the optic you might have had before? If MBS today with his ambitions for Saudi Arabia is distancing himself from the old-school, traditional point of view, and the religious elements of the Wahhabis and the Salafis, and what have you.

And we had the same problem in Iran. And Khomeini created that problem, as the clerics that resisted all the advance of Iran into modernity and emancipation of women, and everything that was the resistance against that, as the Islamists were at the time. And of course, again, against the free world when you had the Marxist elements that were stopping that. All of that happened and put Iran on the wrong trajectory.

But Iranian people are gathering themselves again, having gone through that sad, tragic episode of having to deal with the Islamic Republic, but you know what? We are better for it. Why? Because if you were trying to make people in Iran understand why it is that a secular system is so vital, where separation of religious from state is so vital...

DUBOWITZ: They've just seen the alternative.

PAHLAVI: ...they have seen now the alternative.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah.

PAHLAVI: And that only puts us in much better shape than we were in the '50s, '60s and '70s to achieve that. Because I think that part of a country's ability to manage itself, it's a learning curve. In other words, it's not just enough to bring in a text and say, "This is the new law or the constitution." America started with a Declaration of Independence, which led, of course, to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

But in between, you had the Civil War, you had many other issues. You had the movement of a protest, Martin Luther King, all the way until where America is today, despite the fact that you had the laws and all that. But there has to be also a culture of tolerance. There has to be also a culture of acceptance, of diversity, and respecting that this is a learning curve that a text by itself cannot guarantee.

We have gone through that. The reason I have optimism and faith about my fellow Iranians, is that I think that they're best prepared to not only usher in that era but belong to it and be directly responsible in preserving that. Because they have paid such a high price to appreciate the importance of it, and that's why they're still fighting, and that's what gives me hope.

But what I hope the world also understands, is that the best way to guarantee your interest is to know what horse you're betting on. If President Trump wants to be a peacemaker, then he has to stop negotiating with warmongers. The peacemakers are not the regime and its representatives. You're wasting your time, even if you have to it for good form.

But I'm sure he doesn't realistically believe that this regime would even come clean. I know there are people in this administration who understand more than ever where Iran is. At least the first time, I see somebody at the helm of the State Department, who since the Revolution, has a better understanding of Iran than any of his predecessors and that's Marco Rubio.

And I've met him, and I know how he thinks. This is very important, because if we have a misread on what's happening there, once again, we're missing the boat. I'm glad that today the viewpoint in Israel is much closer to our viewpoint because they understand what can happen. I hope that this administration catches up to that reality as well and say, "Let's guarantee."



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Or not having to get engaged by eliminating the problem once and for all. I hope the European governments will also have a reset in their policies. Because if they keep dragging their feet, they will have more problem with immigration, which has a direct play into the way politics is changing in those countries. The energy dependence and the blackmail coming from Moscow every time the winter hits.

A different Iran could provide all of those requirements. It's only win-win, but for God's sakes, let's not waste time.

DUBOWITZ: So, let's end with this, your favorite book on Iran. I know there's a number of our listeners who want to learn more about Iran. They're going to learn obviously quite a bit through this 10-part series.

But if there's one book you could recommend, it doesn't have to be about politics, it could be poetry, history, culture, literature. What book should they read to give them a real, real insight into your country?

PAHLAVI: I think to be absolutely on par with the sentiments of the nation today. And again, I think, the most vivid element and aspect that we have seen in recent years, is this renewal of an Iranian identity renaissance of some kind. And I would say what effectually, even though it's not actual history, it's more of a legendary book.

But it's our most famous poet called Ferdowsi, who wrote The Book of Kings, which basically shows all the heroism and all the sacrifice of keeping our identity alive as a nation. And that's exactly what I see in the spirit and the resilience of our young kids today.

When I was in Munich a couple of weeks ago, and working together with this new coalition that we are forming among Iranian opposition groups, that is also part of my activities and talking to diaspora. I had a chance to visit with some of the recent victims ever since the Mahsa protests, and the kids who were shot in the eye and all of those guys.

And when I was asking them, "Well, what keeps you guys going? I want to hear it from yourselves, how do you look at it?" They said, "What's a life worth living if at the end, you don't think that you haven't died in vain?" That you have died because others could one day see you as their heroes, and we have had heroes.

We have had heroes since the Mahsa movement that today, are celebrated and remembered in Iranian social media. You can actually feel it's a sense of sacrifice, but sacrifice because Iran is too big for an Iranian not to be willing to do all of he or she can do. And when you're dealing with that kind of sentiment, when you're dealing with that kind of dedication.

And what a far cry it is, that the frenzy that happened in 1978 that ushered in this regime, that's a huge contrast. And anybody who has the correct read on where Iran is today, will finally understand how it can change and what is not only good for them, but also good for themselves. And that's my ultimate message that I leave behind here in Washington or the various capitals in the free world that I'm visiting.

I say, "Look, we are going to get this done, whether you like it or not, whether you are with us or not. We are not counting on anybody other than ourselves to get the job done, but our life will be much easier, much less costly to bring about this change, if this time you stood on the right side of history."

Stay with us, the peacemakers. Give up the pursuit of trying to expect a different behavior and attitude by the warmongers. That is the determining factor, and you have the time right in front of you to do it. So whether it's President Trump or anybody else out there listening, understand that everything you say, we want it too. But it's not by pursuing the wrong approach that we're going to make it happen.

At least give the Iranian people a chance of proving all the contrarians wrong that we can get it done, before you have to resort to much more sinister scenarios, and who knows what will be the outcome?



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DUBOWITZ: Yeah, I think that's a great message, don't engage with a dictator. Support the Iranian people, and I want to thank you. I want to thank you for coming in and sharing with us your story, and your insights and your courage.

And I hope that, as we say in my faith, we say next year in Jerusalem. But I would say next year in a free Tehran, I hope to see you next year in a free Tehran, when the subject of the podcast will be about how the Islamic Republic of Iran was brought down by the brave men and women of Iran. So thank you, sir.

PAHLAVI: Well, hopefully we can celebrate our Nowruz and the Jewish New Year in a free run, as opposed to having to mourn our martyrs and victims and celebrate life.

DUBOWITZ: And with that, I actually want to also wish you a meaningful and a beautiful, and soulful Nowruz and to all our listeners out there. And again, thank you, sir. Thank you for coming in.

PAHLAVI: Thank you very much, much appreciated.

DUBOWITZ: Thank you.

PAHLAVI: Thanks.

Let's keep it short, please.

DUBOWITZ: Your Highness, I have to tell you, I'm very worried about another Iran nuclear deal, and I'm very worried about Khamenei running circles around yet another American president.

Give us your view of where Khamenei is today versus where he has been over the years.

PAHLAVI: Our take on the situation is that Khamenei is getting more and more isolated. The scope of his tent is becoming much more limited than it was before. There's more fragmentation within the system. We have seen even in the last few months, a lot of dissension among the ranks, and this is only an indicator what's to come.

I don't think he can usher in a successful successor to himself. I don't think that if he's hoping that his son, Mojtaba, is going to step in, he will even have the credential or the legitimacy to play that role of the supreme leader. There's been talk about some council ruling.

But the nation is so beyond that, that I don't think that the nature of the regime, especially the paramilitary mafia that the IRGC represent, are going to put up with that anymore. So I think we are facing more and more internal dissension and conflict, which is an opportunity to utilize, because the regime is at its weakest in that point.

And I don't think that Khomeini is going to be... Let me rephrase it. I wouldn't be surprised if he rejects this proposal, because either way, it's lose-lose for him. But at least by rejecting, he tries to maintain the last remnant of his hardcore support behind himself. The minute that he caves into that, he loses that as well, so he only expedites his own demise.

It's one thing for the calculation in Western diplomacy to think what's in it for them to accept. They cannot understand that the minute you ask this regime to change its conduct, then it's no longer what it is. The entire response has been that. The minute Khomeini is to concede on any of this point, he might as well kiss the Islamic regime goodbye. Of course, he's not going to do that.

His last-gasp attempt is to keep this regime surviving at any cost. And once again, they might try to pull the wool over the eyes of naive diplomats in the Western world and buy some time for themselves. What else is new? I agree with your point, but guess what? There're others who don't see it that way, others who say, "Whether the rest of the world is lagging behind or not, we have to take initiatives."



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Bibi Netanyahu took an initiative, if it didn't strike back against Hamas and Hezbollah, we'll still be sitting here. Maybe Bashar al-Assad would still be sitting in Damascus. Things do change based on certain actions, and today, clarity of the message is very clear. The regime has lost, let's understand that.

That's what Washington needs to understand, London needs to understand, Berlin needs to understand, Paris needs to understand, and of course, everybody else in the world needs to understand. What you need to now understand, it's not that the regime has lost the case. It's that the chances for changing Iran is at its highest right now.

But we can give certainty to guarantee a better future by being clear on the alternative. Look, my strategy is to encourage maximum defection. So we smooth the process of change by including the majority of those who don't have their hands soiled in the blood of the Iranian people. Survive regime change, complete different process of De-Ba'athification in-

DUBOWITZ: So that's, by the way, a great strategy. It's maximum pressure on the regime, maximum support for the Iranian people.

And maximum defection for those inside the regime, who understand that their future is tied to a free Iran, not an Islamist Iran.

PAHLAVI: And that they have a role to play to maintain stability and order. And that's my answer to those who say, "Well, we don't know what's going to happen next." I guarantee you one thing. If you start dragging your feet yet again, you're only guaranteeing escalation of conflict and a different reality in the world.

On the other hand, if you helped Iran liberate itself, not only you immediately eliminate most of the problem associated with the regime at once, but you make sure that we can have a very soon to be restable future. Because now the people who are out there dealing with you, are willing to work with you, have the same values and principles that you are professing.

And we can work in absolute partnership to remedy the problems of our region, which are numerous. Water shortages, the economic situation, anything that stand in waiting depending on how long this regime survives. So I think it's the only way to look at it as a win-win proposition. As I said, I'm doing my part together with my fellow Iranians.

I hope we will find some partners in this that are willing to join in on this mission that could liberate the entire world. We can have a different world as a result very soon, depending on how fast we are willing to act now.

DUBOWITZ: Well, you have a willing partner at FDD.

PAHLAVI: Thank you so much.

DUBOWITZ: Thank you.