



The Future of Iran: A Conversation with Reza Pahlavi

TRANSCRIPT

Introduction.....	2
• Kenneth Weinstein, <i>President, CEO, and Walter P. Stern Chair, Hudson Institute</i>	
Discussion.....	2
• Reza Pahlavi, <i>Former Crown Prince of Iran</i>	
• Michael Doran, <i>Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute</i>	

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Please note: This transcript is based off a recording and mistranslations may appear in text. A video of the event is available: <https://www.hudson.org/events/1767-the-future-of-iran-a-conversation-with-reza-pahlavi-12020>

KEN WEINSTEIN: Good afternoon, and welcome to Hudson Institute. I'm Ken Weinstein, president and CEO of Hudson Institute. Our mission is to promote U.S. international leadership and global engagement for a secure, free and prosperous future. My colleagues and I are absolutely delighted to welcome Reza Pahlavi back to Hudson Institute to discuss the future of Iran at this critical moment in history, a moment that in early December, 2019, Nobel Prize winner, human rights activist Shirin Ebadi termed, quote, "the beginning of the fall of the Islamic Republic," end quote.

(APPLAUSE)

WEINSTEIN: Not used to applause during my introductions, but then again, I'm not used to standing ovations for speakers either unless they're in our government. This week, we are once again seeing thousands of Iranians take to the streets to demand an end to the regime, this time in response to the regime's delayed admission that it shot down Ukrainian International Airlines flight 752, killing all 176 passengers on board. These protests, of course, followed anti-regime protests in the streets of 21 major cities in November, with 1,500 or so protesters murdered by the regime in the aftermath of a major increase in gas prices which came under mounting pressure from the Trump administration's economic sanctions, part of its maximum pressure campaign. And of course, the most recent protests we've seen the last few days come - came on the heels of a new stage of the elimination of Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force, an Iranian proxy force that's throughout the Middle East, by bold American action on January 3.

At this critical moment, we are very fortunate to hear from Reza Pahlavi, the former crown prince of Iran. He needs no introduction whatsoever - a prominent opposition leader, well known in Iran for his call to replace the Islamic Republic with a secular, liberal democracy. After Mr. Pahlavi offers keynote remarks, he will engage in conversation with Hudson senior fellow Michael Doran, one of our nation's leading analysts of U.S. policy towards Iran and the Middle East. Mike, who served most notably as senior director for Middle East Policy at the National Security Council, was a member of the faculty in Middle East studies at Princeton University, where he earned his doctorate. He joined Hudson from the Brookings Institution and is a frequent contributor to major publications, including Foreign Affairs, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Reza Pahlavi to Hudson Institute.

(APPLAUSE)

REZA PAHLAVI: Thank you. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. Before anything, I would like to thank Mr. Ken Weinstein of the Hudson Institute for inviting me to this event. When the request first came several months ago, we had some scheduling issues that pushed the date to today. Little did we know then that the timing was going to be incredible, albeit under sinister circumstances. I am also glad that millions of my fellow compatriots inside and outside the country are watching this live event on television and social media. This is perhaps the first time in 40 years that they can follow my comments to a foreign audience as it is unfolding. Allow me, therefore, to offer some opening remarks before we move to the Q and A. The history of the Islamic Republic and its reign of terror in Iran and abroad traces back roughly 40 years. Looking across the arc of this history, we see that not much has changed. I would like to recall some of this history with you today. In 1979, within weeks of its inception, the regime executed many civilian and military officials and murdered hundreds of individuals based

on religion, ethnicity, profession, culture or belief, including Farrokhroo Parsa, Iran's first female cabinet minister, and Habib Elghanian, the leader of Iran's Jewish community.

That same year, it took 52 American diplomats hostage and held them for 444 days. Beginning in 1980, it launched an international killing spree, assassinating exiled Iranians, like Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar, General Gholam Ali Oveissi and Abdul Rahman Boroumand all in France, and Fereydoun Farrokhzad in Germany and Ali Akbar Tabatabaei here in Washington. At the same time, it was using Iranian children as minesweepers, sending them to their deaths in a disastrous war with Iraq, which had dragged on shamefully for eight years. In 1983, it arranged an attack on American Marines in Lebanon, killing 241 servicemen in their barracks. In 1988, on orders from Ayatollah Khomeini, it executed thousands of young Iranians for their purported leftist political beliefs.

In 1994, it coordinated the bombing of a Jewish center in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people and injuring more than 300. Then in 1996, it targeted the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 American soldiers. In 1999, under the administration of so-called reformist Mohammad Khatami and at the urging of Qassem Soleimani, it crushed a wave of student protests by terrorizing universities, including killing students in their dorms. Later, in 2009, it repressed brutally a wave of massive, non-violent public demonstrations during the Green Movement, murdering many innocents, such as Neda Agha-Soltan, in the streets. In the years that followed, its IRGC Quds Forces led efforts to preserve at any cost the blood-soaked dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, including 20,000 children, and the displacement of several million others. On the heels of two years of national nationwide protests, just a few weeks ago at the height of anti-regime demonstrations, in more than 150 cities and towns, it cut off internet service and intercommunications blackout that ensued. It massacred an estimated 1,500 protesters and detained at least 7,000 others, including grieving parents. And most recently, after launching missiles into Iraq, it shot down Ukraine Airline flight 752 above Tehran, killing all 176 of its passengers, many of them Iranians. Just as the regime has shown an undeniable pattern of consistency in its behavior, so have Western democracies in their behavior towards the regime. For much of these 40-odd years, the leaders of the free world have sought to engage this regime both in trade and in diplomacy.

Along the way, there have been limited episodes of political pressure, almost always led by the United States. But there have also been episodes of outright appeasement, also led by the United States. If not motivated primarily by economic interests, all such efforts have focused on changing the regime's behavior. All have failed. It has long been time to recognize that this is not a normal regime and that it will not change its behavior. Consider, for example, the latest regime atrocity. What normal government launches over a dozen missiles from its territory into the territory of a neighboring state without grounding commercial flights? What normal government places the security and administration of such an airport in the hands of a repressive paramilitary force? With this regime, there is no reasonable prospect of sustainable de-escalation. But with the Iranian people, there is the opportunity for sustained peace and friendship because there is no quarrel to begin with, just shared interests, shared values and for now, a shared enemy. To my compatriots, this regime is an anti-Iranian occupying force with no regard for the history, the culture or national interests of Iran and Iranians. And to you, this regime is the greatest single menace to peace, stability and prosperity in the Middle East, not just because it sows division, destruction and death across the region, but also because it stands between you and the Iranian people, one of your most natural allies anywhere in the

world. My compatriots understand that this regime cannot be reformed and must be removed. For years, they have been risking their lives to confront this regime. They were protesting courageously again this last week. It is long past time for you to hear their voices.

In offering the regime negotiations without preconditions, you neglect the people's demand for unconditional support. In fact, you betrayed them by accommodating their oppressors. International attention and solidarity are vital to any movement seeking to overthrow a totalitarian regime. The Iranian people's struggle is no exception. This is precisely why the regime's proxies and apologists in the Western media and policy communities work diligently to frustrate any form of support for the free world, whether by advocating cuts in funding for civil education or human rights initiatives or by peddling the absurd argument that even speaking of the regime's crimes will undermine democratic progress. Let us consider again the regime's latest crime against humanity, the shooting down of Flight 752. After four days of deplorable obfuscation, the regime was forced to take responsibility for the murder of 176 innocent men, women and children, but only because of international scrutiny and persistence. Imagine a slightly different fact pattern - an Iranian airline, a domestic route with no foreign or dual nationals. We would never have learned the truth. Leading democracies like Canada and the United States have a decisive role to play in holding this regime accountable. This latest episode is a compelling illustration of the impact they can have. Just like the victims of Flight 752, the Iranian people deserve your attention and support. Today, I look forward to discussing a new path, one that focuses on engaging the true sovereigns of Iran, the people of Iran. This regime deserves every form of maximum pressure, but my people deserve every ounce of maximum support. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

MICHAEL DORAN: Thank you very much for that. It's very exciting to have you here, especially at this moment. And thanks to all of you for coming. I'm Mike Doran. I'm a senior fellow here at Hudson. I'm going to talk. We're going to have question and answer for about 20, 25 minutes, and then we'll take questions from the audience. I think we're going to take the questions electronically, and there'll be a - there should be up on the screen behind me an address to which you can send your questions. For members of the press, we're going to have a press conference after the audience Q&A, so if you could wait till the very end, we'd appreciate that. Well, these are stirring times. My feeling in watching the press reports of what's been going on during the November protests but also during this last wave of protests is that the Western press has - to call its coverage inadequate would be an understatement. I wonder if you share that opinion.

PAHLAVI: That's precisely the question that is posed every single day for Iranians who are acting at home or on social media - how little coverage, for instance, the protests of last month got into Western media as opposed to recent coverage due to the killing of Qassem Soleimani, in contrast. Being selective in reporting is not the best image to convey if you are talking about a free world where information is crucial in order to make decisions, whether it's policymaking, whether it is sending a message to the people who live in that country. And in that case, I think some of the responsibility is in the hand of the free press. If you're supporting protesters in Hong Kong, if you're supporting protesters in Venezuela, the same should apply to Iran. Much more could be said, particularly that in contrast with 40 years ago, where unless you had boots on the ground in terms of reporters covering an event, in today's world of social media, with all sorts of clicks and information that comes out and is easily accessible, checking the veracity of

information, it is not lack of information; it's lack of coverage that is needed. So, yes, I also appeal - not just me. I think millions of Iranians appeal to the free world and the free press to make sure that if they're going to brave their lives and, in fact, are losing their lives on their path to liberate themselves that the world shows their solidarity and support. And the first line of defense is media because the regime - guess what - is trying to shut down people by jamming satellite signals, by interrupting the Internet. Why? Because they don't want people to find out. And people need the information. And it's the free media that offers that information for all to see. So I hope they do their part.

DORAN: You know, there was a persistent media line that the killing of Soleimani brought all of the Iranians together, united them in solidarity against the United States. I mean, I think we can see clearly that that's completely false.

PAHLAVI: There has been tremendous amount of chatter on social media regarding this event, and as much as some selective footage is by the typical rent-a-crowd that the regime could mobilize, there were also many protests that was not covered or talked about - about burning his picture and people chanting against him. I think the Iranian people make no mistake about those who serve the country as opposed to those who serve the regime. And the regime has for 40 years shown that its agenda is not Iran and the Iranian people, only its own survival at the expense of oppressing people and repressing them to the point of killing. As I said, just last month, 1,500 people just for being - peacefully protesting them.

DORAN: Let's talk a little bit about the repression. One of the questions I have in my mind in watching what's happening is whether we are really at the end of the Islamic Republic or whether it can limp along like this for a long time. I mean, we see people are being killed in the streets, and repression works, unfortunately. Where do you think we are at this point? Are we - could we see more - years more of the Islamic Republic, or is 2020 going to be the year that it goes down?

PAHLAVI: In recent years, the regime have had to utilize other nationals as the repressive forces to repress the Iranian people. What I mean by that is that the disillusionment started a long time ago. What can prompt a massive defection or stand-down from a position of being stuck with the regime against the people - and I mean by that particularly the paramilitary forces and their elements of support of Basij (ph), along with the military, to facilitate a smoother transition. Based on my overall strategy of a nonviolent campaign of civil disobedience is to allow for that exit strategy and for those forces to join with the people. I think people smell the opportunity for the first time in 40 years this time - very different than 2009, even very different from 1997. The people have had it. Today's generation of young Iranians cannot take it anymore. They want to have an opportunity for a better future. They want to be on the path of modernity and freedom. The only thing that stands between them and the free world is this regime - a regime that is squandering our national resources to maintain its proxies with a war it has with the world and a regime that cannot claim that it did not have an opportunity in 40 years to normalize and to take care of its own people. While we cannot even manage victims of a flood, whether in Khuzestan or Baluchistan, the regime keeps doing what it's doing at the cost - and an opportunity cost, I might add - for a nation that can be on a quick path to recovery. But literally every month or year that goes by, that opportunity cost is increasing.

The good news is that there is a solution to the problem if it's left in the hand of competent people who care first and foremost about their own country as opposed to the situation we left in

the hands of people who don't even consider themselves Iranians. Let's not forget this regime is based on the premise of being representative of ummat (ph) and not millat (ph). And the people of Iran are a nation with thousands of years of civilization, of different ethnicities, of different religions who have lived side by side for centuries. This is not a nation today represented by this regime and a longing to be able to break free from this jail and be back in touch with the world. We can expedite this. And, yes, to answer your question, we are beginning to see the end of this regime. All I have to say about this to the regime leaders, including Mr. Khamenei, it is time for him to let go and step down. Allow for the people of Iran to free themselves with the minimum amount of casualties. And to the forces that are keeping repression as a tool, all I can say is that there's not enough people they can kill to maintain this regime in power. They better stand down and join with their brethren.

(APPLAUSE)

DORAN: Just for our viewers in Milwaukee, you said that there's a distinction between the - the regime sees itself as the representative of the universal Islamic community as opposed to the nation, and we want - you want to transition to nationalism away from this universal ideology. You've mentioned a couple of times now peeling off members of the Revolutionary Guard or staunch supporters of the regime. You know, years ago, in 2006, I met with a prominent British diplomat who'd spent a lot of time in Iran. And he told me that he was amazed at how many members of the Basij he met who would ask him for visas. So people who were actually - you know, whose livelihood is tied up with the regime were looking for a way out back then. That's, you know, 13 years ago. Do you have any ideas about how to - in a situation like this where it's so polarized and where it's turning violent, how do you encourage defections and get people to - whose heart is no longer in supporting the Islamic Republic but whose livelihood is tied to it? How do you go about doing that?

PAHLAVI: To put it in the most simple terms, the fact that they can survive regime change and belong in a future system with their own people, and also a sign that there is support for that change, so they are not caught in no man's land. When you look at changes that occurred, let's say, in the past 20 years or so, whether it was in South Africa or it was in Eastern Europe, one key factor was the fact that, A, the people who tried to put an end to their respective regimes, whether it was in Moscow or in South Africa or in Eastern Europe, knew that they had the support of the free world and that the free world was resolute in putting an end to that situation. Today, it is very difficult for anyone in the outside world to expect the people of Iran to be able to take alone this repressive regime without knowing that this time, the world is on their side as opposed to continue insisting on negotiating with the regime and bringing back to the table, albeit under some kind of a modification of their behavior. As I said in my opening statement, the regime has been what it is from Day 1. It is like suggesting that - well, let me put it this way. You can tame a horse - a wild horse. You can even tame a lion. But I doubt that you can tame the shark. It's in its DNA. This has been the regime's DNA from Day 1. Don't forget one thing. The founder of this regime, Khomeini's first word to a reporter asking him the question about how he felt returning to Iran after 15 years of exile - his answer was one word - nothing. And this nothing is now haunting this regime because millions of Iranians care about Iran.

And therefore, isn't it time to end a dialogue that is pointless and start a dialogue with the people of Iran, with the secular democratic forces? Because we are part of the solution, but this regime remains part of the problem. And change cannot occur if we keep repeating the same mistake and expecting a different outcome. I trust that my compatriots do not need any particular

coaching in terms of understanding what should their aspiration and desire be to live in a free society where they are sovereign and have responsible and accountable governance. We are very close to getting there, but we need every ounce of encouragement and support. The people of Iran need to know that there is light at the end of the tunnel. They need to have hope that they won't be abandoned because they have already braved and risked their lives with no support whatsoever. Imagine what they can do if they start having real support for a change beyond rhetoric - beyond rhetoric.

DORAN: I wonder if we could turn to your role in this process. And maybe we'll just start by me asking you, how do you envision your role in this, the final months, year, years of the Islamic Republic?

PAHLAVI: To the extent of the trust and - that people place in me and the name recognition that I have, I certainly have tried to do the best I can to encourage as much coordination and unity among like-minded forces because we have a common agenda to free our country. There'll be plenty of time to debate our differences in a democratic atmosphere. And at the end of the day, the best that I can say to people is regardless of what they believe in, the only way to measure ultimately what people want or desire is the ballot box. And how could we possibly determine our future if we don't have the opportunities to have free elections? Any democracy functions that way, and it should be no different for Iran. So the quickest we get to a point that we can finally organize elections and have the ballot box speak the will of the majority, we will still not be able to achieve our aspirations for a free and democratic society. We have never had in our entire history free elections in Iran, have we? Isn't it about the time to say we belong to the 21st century rather than the medieval ages? I believe that's what millions of Iranians are chanting in the streets today. When they challenge the regime's legitimacy, when they call down to the end of this dictatorship, their voice is beginning to finally get heard - not just heard but responded to. And one of my tasks and what they have asked me throughout the years is to convey their message to the free world and to be able to bring as much support as I can possibly orchestrate towards their goals and ambitions inside.

Now, clearly, there has to be a distribution of tasks. A lot needs to be done inside and outside of Iran. But it is with a common agenda that we will be able to succeed because where we differ in some opinion and ideology, I think the majority believe that we have a far more common agenda, a national agenda that transcends ideological preferences or party politics. It is truly a national challenge that faces my compatriots today. We do have the backdrop of history. We have the backdrop of civilization. But we also have to have a vision. And I've always said in all these years that I never look back. I only look forward. We have to have a vision. And that vision starts with a national dialogue. And that national dialogue can only exist when there is no muzzling of the free press, when there's no repression of ideas or opinions - basically a free society. And for those people who might second-guess the Iranians' ability to do that, I say you cannot not say that they deserve a chance to prove themselves. And I believe in that chance, and that's what for 40 years and counting I've been trying to do. Put them on the driver's seat, and let them be masters of their own destiny - nothing else.

(APPLAUSE)

DORAN: I think you basically just answered this question, but I want to ask it anyway because I got - when we announced this event, I got, through Twitter, all kinds of messages from different points of view in the Iranian political spectrum. I got - many, many people said thank you, thank

you, thank you. And then I got people who said, how can you do this? You have to ask him this. You have to ask him that, and so on. And so I got messages from people in the MEK saying that you don't represent them. I got messages from ethnic minorities saying you don't represent them. What would you say to those people? I think you just answered it, but I'd like you to - give you the opportunity to say directly to them who are saying that you don't speak for them. What would your answer to them be?

PAHLAVI: Well, I've always said in all these years that first of all, it's not about me. It's about the people of Iran. And No. 2, you may not like the messenger, but is there something wrong with the message?

(APPLAUSE)

DORAN: Let's switch now to the role of outside powers. Your - in your opening remarks, I took that to be a very blunt statement, I would say, to the Trump administration - don't negotiate with the regime at this point. What would you like to see them do at this stage? What are they - let's evaluate. What are they doing right? What would you like to see them do differently?

PAHLAVI: Over the past 40 years and counting, all the preceding administrations, whether Republican or Democrat, I can safely say that this is the first administration to be as vocal in demonstrating some support towards the Iranian people and clearly making a distinction between the people or the regime. Having said that - and I know that there is always this sort of allergy towards the concept of a change of regime, but all I wanted to say is to say look; you expect to have a nation achieve freedom perfect. As a democracy, it is in your interest to see that other places in the world, there is a process of liberalization and democratization, right? After all, history has shown us that seldom do democracies go at war with each other, which basically means a safer world for all of us. But insisting on maintaining the status quo of a theocracy, which is nothing close to conventional democracy, is a little bit like a contradiction in terms. And again, that baffling question for many of us Iranians was, while we understand that diplomacy should be a better alternative before a war is contemplated, but then again, it's also a matter of how long are you willing to stretch that argument. Hasn't there been enough water under the bridge for us to assess that this regime cannot be trusted? It has never been transparent. It has never been honest. It has proven time and again that it's willing to sacrifice the lives of millions of Iranian people just to maintain itself in power. And the message you'll be sending to a nation that is trying to get free from this regime that we are still insisting on having some dialogue with them.

It's not an encouraging message. It can only be interpreted as something, to put it bluntly, discouraging. And by saying that - and I think the time has come to finally realize that expecting the regime to change anything different than what it's done for the past 40 years is literally a waste of time. Bring in the X factor that has never been considered for 40 years, and that is the people of Iran. Have a dialogue with the representatives of the Iranian people, of the secular democratic forces. Have them be offering you the ways that they can help themselves achieve that freedom because as I said before, we have the shared values of freedom and human rights. And we are part of the solution, but we have never been, until now, a factor as a nation. And what better investment can any government of a foreign country in terms of its own national interest ultimately do in long term that guarantee positive relationship and a better world than investing on the people? Because history has shown us that regimes don't survive, but peoples are eternal. And it's the people factor that counts here, not regime factor. We're no longer in the

20th century. We are in the 21st century. It's a big difference than that era, where *raison d'etat* or *detente* or some *realpolitik* was the order of the day - not anymore. You can't stop the people. You can only help them. And this is what it boils down to.

The people today listening to us in Tehran, in Mashhad, in Tabriz, in the four corners of Iran expect the world to show more than just moral support. They expect them not to be thrown under the bus in the name of diplomacy and negotiation. That's what they want to hear from you. And that's my message to this administration, to its Western allies. Do not count this factor because, if anything, the best way to de-escalate is by not relying on this regime anymore. But we are relying on a people that have no quarrels with you, that are in the same boat. And we can expedite the process. And if this message is sent loud and clear - trust me - more and more members of the military forces and paramilitary forces will say, the time has finally come for us to lay down our arms and join our brethren on the streets because now we know that the world is committed. We're no longer in no man's land. If we're trying to avoid violence, if we're trying to avoid war, if we are trying to avoid and minimize the loss of life, that's the only course of action that remains because diplomacy has failed. And nobody wants war. So the only alternative is to help the people because they are the solution as opposed to a regime that, as I said before, is the problem.

DORAN: The other debate that broke out on my Twitter feed when we announced this event was among Americans and, in particular, supporters of the Trump administration because there's one element in the sort of more - for lack of a better word - isolationist element in the Trump administration or the element that's urging restraint looks at the developments in Iran actually with fear or concern. And the concern is that what we're looking at is going to be a repeat of the Iraq War where the United States is going to get sucked into a protracted conflict inside a foreign country that is going to lead to massive expenditure, loss of life and responsibility for political processes that we don't - basically don't understand and can't find our way through. What would you say to those people?

PAHLAVI: Well, first of all, it's a totally different scenario. Since 9/11, we saw changes in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it was provoked or whatever it was. The consequence - it was actually a foreign intervention that changed the circumstances. The difference with Iran is that nobody other than the people of Iran are asking for change to begin with. It's not a matter of the foreign policy of this or that foreign government. It's the desire of the overwhelming majority of a nation. They're not asking you to make the choice. They're asking you for support - No. 1. And No. 2, I think that the most important thing for all of us Iranians is that Iran should not be a matter of partisan politics. It is about freedom. It is about human rights. And it is not an exclusive privilege of the Democratic or Republican Party to opine on that. That's why we expect Americans, regardless of which side of the aisle they are in their own domestic politics, not to make Iran an issue of partisan politics. That's the first thing we expect as a nation.

DORAN: Did you hear that, Democrats?

(LAUGHTER)

DORAN: Sorry. I had to take a little partisan advantage of your nonpartisan statement. The - what do you expect the regime will do as - I mean, I don't expect them to just go quietly into the night. And even if they already know that things are difficult, they're going to fight. In what way are they going to fight?

PAHLAVI: The degree to which complete demoralization occurs in totalitarian regimes is directly correlated to the degree of optimism and hope that the people facing them sense at a crucial moment in history. You know, when you think of one thing that is known in the annals of history of a Santiago moment when it came to the struggle against the Pinochet regime in South America - when you're talking about the beginning of a different take on where a nation is, when you see some images of a young Chinese student in Tiananmen Square in front of a tank or, God knows, so many examples that has happened since then, and you think of the person sitting in a position of decision to repress and quash people. What is their ultimate hope to survive? Part is that they can continue repressing without pity with no consequences on the basis of the outside world, which is why it's important to maintain maximum pressure. That's one of the dimensions. But it's also because they realize that it's pointless. I think Mr. Khamenei, for the first time, in the last few weeks had realized that this is beyond salvaging, that people are openly chanting for his, you know, basically removing himself from the picture. It has gone to a point where the slogans on the streets are so visible that only by miracle, if they are thrown a lifeline again in the name of foreign diplomacy and negotiation, can he try to survive a little bit longer. But I think the events have passed this regime.

We are in a mode of a final implosion. And I use the term implosion on purpose because I think the only way we can avoid anarchy in a post-collapse is to work the problem. And that's precisely why dialogue is needed for the forces of change - so that the people of Iran and the world realize that there is a process that will occur immediately upon the collapse, that there will be a transition plan in place in terms of addressing the temporary management of the country's affairs, but at the same time providing grants for a democratic process, starting with a constitutional assembly, to begin debating every aspect of what Iran needs to ultimately decide for itself in terms of the form of regime or government it would like to have. For all this process to be kicked in, we have to already anticipate all these moves. And I have always talked about this, for those of you who have followed me all these years - that the issue is not just to get rid of this regime but to also have an alternative in mind. Very different than back in 1979, where the majority of those who were against my father's regime said, let the shah go, then we'll see what happens. Well, guess what. And we don't want to be caught in the same unpredictability again. For those who are using this excuse that, well, we don't want to have another scenario of America being dragged into anything, America is not being dragged into anything other than what people are asking. And again, let me repeat that.

All we need to know is that you're on the right side of the equation. The people are doing the job. It's not going to be American forces. It's not going to be an intervention of any sort. It's basically supporting a nation on its path to claiming their country back from a regime that has put them literally in jail for the past 40 years. That's the investment. But we cannot just talk about it. We have to actually take some steps towards that. We have to do our part. When I say we, I mean we, the Iranian people, both at home and abroad. This is why over all these years and particularly in recent months, I, for one, have been constantly increasing my dialogue with people inside Iran, people who can be the forces of change in terms of administrative skills, various form of managers and people who, obviously, under the circumstances are forced to work and operate under the radar because they cannot prematurely be exposed.

So they can be the components to fill in that gap, together with the diaspora members of the democratic forces in exile and in opposition, to coordinate a plan and to have this dialogue among ourselves, make our necessary presentations to the outside world, but also to incentivize

the people in the final blow to the regime, which I have always believed would be in combination when the whole country comes to a standstill with major labor strikes. And I have some specific suggestions as to how that could be assisted. All of this means that we're not just sitting here saying, this regime must go. We also have a plan in terms of how to replace it and with what. But we need to have much better dialogue with the outside world, not only for them to understand that there is going to be a solution, it's not going to be mayhem, but also to identify the forces at play so that, basically, we're all on the same frequency. That's very critical. And it will expedite and smooth the process of transition in a post-regime collapse.

DORAN: We'll move now to questions from the audience, which have come to me through the magic of the Internet. And let me just take up with what you just said because I have a question right here before me, clearly from a supporter. Why doesn't his highness call for a general strike?

PAHLAVI: I think that the general strike will occur at a point where we have an increased ability of coordination of street action inside Iran. One thing that has been missing - and I would pretty much admit to this - is the fact that there is a lack of interim or middle management. You have the people on the streets. You have a general desire. But the daily aspect of managing, coordinating, orchestrating variety of campaigns requires more than the limited resources that currently exist. Now, a lot of it is financial because we have to be able to finance that. But the time where we can call upon a national strike is for us to have the ability to tell that would-be striker that he's going - he or she is going to be compensated running the risk of losing his wages as a result of going on strike. For years now, I've proposed the formation of what I would call a strike fund, a dedicated amount of money that will be there to guarantee financial compensation for the worker and his families that would go on strike. These people are hardly surviving these days economically. They cannot be expected to risk everything with nothing in return. You need to incentivize them. So that's one aspect which will then be - make it easier to call for a nationwide strike. The timing of the strike is also important because we cannot sustain such strikes for months at a time. It has to be part of a climax which forces the final nail in the coffin of the regime so that immediately when the implosion occurs, that element of transition can be in place. These two go together hand in glove, so the timing has to also be right.

Now, in preparation for all that, you need - a lot of groundwork needs to be done. And for the most part, Iran's civil society in various sectors have done pretty well given the circumstances, which simply need to increase their abilities to implement this. We also need to make sure that communication and coordination remains part of the equation. Most of my compatriots that talk to me about this are fearful of, yet again, another interruption, for instance, in Internet access or broadcast. And I think this is where, again - we talked earlier about the role of media in general, and social media, which is our primary tool not only of communication but of operation these days, as a vital element that will assist the people when they are coordinating, whether on tactical basis or other issues, their daily actions in their respective sectors. All of this is part of what needs to be further explored. I have had some limited initial dialogue to that nature from some governments who have shown more interest in seeing in what way can they be of assistance. But as I said, this is something that I would leave to the experts and the people who are in a position to pretty much put down together their list of asks in terms of specifically what can be done. And again, it goes back to my point that once this dialogue actually starts with all these forces, a lot of the answers to many of these questions will be found, some of which I may

be able to answer. But most of it will be answered by those who are, in fact, in a position right now, as we speak, to orchestrate or organize any action within Iran or, for that matter, outside.

DORAN: How about - here's another one. Would you support the establishment of a constitutional council or a parliamentary constitutional convention?

PAHLAVI: Well, a lot of questions over the years have been asked about why not form a government-in-exile? This is probably the most frequent, common question over the years, including recently, that has been asked. I don't think that's a practical avenue, A, because, again, for a government-in-exile to have any sense, that means that any foreign government would have to cease official recognition of the existing de facto government and begin to officially recognize such governance. And then the question is, on what basis and by which mandate are the people supposedly forming such a government base their legitimacy on? And that is a harder pill to swallow when it comes to actually thinking of it, as opposed to veer back towards the direction that we have done all these years, is, A, there is a synchronicity of a common agenda between a very vast array of Iranians in their diverse political families, which agree with one aspect - that the ultimate decision has to be left at the hand of the people of Iran through a constitutional process which has to occur in Iran. That means the election of a constitutional assembly. Such elections cannot be held as long as this regime is in place. It goes without saying that the minute this regime is no longer there, there has to be a transition team - we can call it a transitional government or a transitional council - which, in effect, will be responsible for identifying those who can take the responsibility of managing the country's affairs in an interim period of time, but to immediately set the stage for the elections of that parliamentary process, the constitutional assembly.

So minimal work is done in terms of new legislation. To that effect, I've been asked the question, well, during that period - let's say it takes a year, a couple years or maybe three years at the most during that transition phase - the country's governed based on which laws? Are we going to operate under the laws of the Islamic regime, or are we going to fall back to preceding laws predating this regime, at least as a frame of reference, so that some order is brought back to society? What is the role of the militia during that time? To which I say, isn't it their first job to preserve order and security in Iran, to prevent vigilantism or pillage? That's what their role should be, as opposed to turning their gun on the people - make sure that they can maintain law and order. That's part of the equation. That's the role and definition of a transitional government is to make sure that these roles are defined. And ultimately, making sure that as we are working on that first phase of transition, as of now, we can encourage people to form their political parties because guess what. At the end of the day, let's say there's a national referendum that decides the final form of the regime that the majority of the people want. The first step towards normalcy would be the elections of the first Majles of this new democratic system. And, of course, the result of the first election organized by political parties to form the first government of this new democracy.

So without political parties, how can we possibly identify those responsible to govern the country tomorrow based on elections? We have to think the problem as of now. Now, under this regime, no political parties can form. But they can certainly start thinking about it. They can certainly plan their agendas. I envision a country that will have a - probably a multiparty system, probably a very strong conservative party, Democratic Party, a socialist party, most likely, and maybe a few parties in between. And that's where left from right differs, but the common agenda is to make sure that, at the end, we have elections organized by parties because in any

democracy, governments don't organize elections; parties organize elections. If we miss the vote on that, we haven't solved our problems. We need to think about that as well. So, again, as I said, there's a distribution of tasks. The political opposition of Iran has a hard job these days because they have to be able to provide this avenue without making it again a partisan issue - for the leftists to say, what about my agenda, for the conservatives to say, what about my agenda, for the monarchies to say something, for the Republicans to say another and so on and so forth.

Let's make sure that we can, at all times, guarantee that every voice will be heard and no voice will be muzzled. But there is a rule of the game, the democratic process. Political pluralism has to be, at all times - at all times - observed in Iran. And this is the - for a country that is, in nature, diverse, that is, in nature - how shall I say it? - at least in terms of composition, a mosaic, it goes without saying that its politics will have to be - to pretty much match the same thing. So by all means, form your parties. Think of it because the day will finally have opted for our new system. We go back to business as usual in terms of ordinary governance, which is basically cyclic elections every four or five years and form the government in charge of affairs for Iran. That's the end of the process from where we are now to where we want to be. And in all this process, there are different phases and different times. The most important thing right now as we are approaching collapse is to start thinking much more seriously about the elements that have to immediately fill the vacuum and take over the country so we are in a mode of controlled implosion with a known outcome, as opposed to uncertainty, which usually is conducive to chaos and anarchy, which we will try to avoid at any cost. But then again, to the outside world, my message is the fact that your concern about not having anarchy doesn't justify your policy of maintaining status quo. That is no longer tenable. That needs to change. That's the first element that needs to change.

DORAN: You already addressed this issue, but let me read this question to you. And if you have anything to add, you can add. And if you said everything you want to say, we can just stop right there. It's an election year in the U.S. We have a president whose legitimacy is questioned. Whether it be fair or not is questioned. How do you recommend the Iranian opposition navigate their goal of liberty without getting caught in the crosshairs of partisan politics in the U.S.?

PAHLAVI: As I said, the first hope of any of our activists, civil rights and human rights advocates inside and outside Iran when it comes to the future of our country is not to have the domestic politics of a foreign government divide them over their bipartisan or multipartisan support to the Iranian people. Of course, in any country, you have an internal debate. There's no question that America is, perhaps, more than ever divided when it comes to internal politics. From the day I started to live in this country, I've never seen it as such. But it is happening at a time when the world needs to have clear messages sent to unwanted systems that still prevail. And, usually, those kinds of regimes always find a way to take advantage of any internal division of foreign countries when it comes to their attitude vis-a-vis that given country. They will play to the max through their fifth column and a wave of apologies as we have witnessed many times. On behalf of the silent majority that cannot openly state it back home but would like me to use this platform to convey again to you that when it comes to Iran, we want Democrats and Republicans in America to realize that we, the Iranian people, demand the same freedoms and the same rights as you enjoy in this great democracy of yours in America. And regardless of what domestic argument you have, do not let that affect your unconditional support to our cause. That's my message on behalf of my compatriots to the American people and its

government. And I hope that you will find an answer to this inquiry back to the Iranian people, whether it's the president saying it, whether it's his opponent saying it, whether it's the American media saying it, you are addressing the Iranian people. Here's your opportunity to say, we are with you, as opposed to not. So all of that is, as we speak, unveiling.

DORAN: I think that's a beautiful note on which to end. So please join me in thanking Reza Pahlavi for his very, very informative remarks at this historic moment.

(APPLAUSE)

DORAN: Thank you very much, really appreciate it.