IDEAS FOR A SHARED LIFE AND FUTURE

Common Language

From Understanding One Another to Building Iran

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PHILOSOPHY · PSYCHOLOGY · POLITICS · ECONOMICS

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Common Language

This book begins with lived experience and a shared question: how can people cooperate for Iran's future while retaining their intellectual, political and social differences? Philosophy, psychology, politics and economics meet in that task, from understanding reality and one another to organising cooperation and releasing a nation's capacity to build.

> From individual experience to shared understanding.
> From shared understanding to national responsibility.

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Preface — A Question That Began at Home

The Suitcases That Remained Packed

The question from which this book takes its name has been with me since childhood: how can we find a common language for living and building together when our beliefs and experiences differ? That question was present in our home, among people who loved one another yet sometimes stood on entirely different sides of the argument about Iran's future. Today, after revolution, war, migration and life in different societies, I still return to the same question. What has changed is the size of the home I have in mind. My concern now is Iran.

An image from the days of the revolution has stayed with me. We were in Tehran. Our bags were packed, we had thirty thousand dollars in a handbag, and our military passports were ready for the journey. We were due to travel to America for my father's assignment—an assignment that, in our family's account, involved bringing back submarines purchased for Iran. To me as a child, the future was something you could pack a bag for and set off towards. Then we heard that the flights had been cancelled. We went back, and life took another course. I still remember that brief distance between being ready to leave and not going.

My father was a naval officer. He had come from a village and worked his way to a position that carried a clear meaning for him: a person could move beyond the circumstances into which he had been born. His support for Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was bound up with that experience. During those days in Bahman (January–February), he tried to gather people to go out and chant "Javid Shah" ("Long live the Shah")—people whom their opponents called "club-wielding thugs". Yet behind that label I saw my own father: a man who had experienced advancement and feared that the path opened to him would be closed.

In his view, studying, working and having the courage to act could change the course of a life. A person could study in the evenings, enter education or industry, and take on greater responsibilities. That outlook stayed with me: we should not regard ourselves as permanent prisoners of our starting point. Modernisation, institution-building and the opening of paths to advancement have an important place in my judgement of the Pahlavi era. When I speak about that past, my father's experience speaks with me. Other people carry different memories of the same period; if we are to understand them, the opportunity to listen must remain.

Disagreement Alongside Affection

Our family was not politically uniform. On one side were supporters of the Pahlavis; on the other were left-wing and Marxist relatives who spoke of the liberation of the people, the working class and a different society. The family was largely non-religious, and its most prominent differences concerned these political outlooks. I listened to both sides, and my curiosity about history and philosophy grew. I wanted to understand how people who both wanted a better future had arrived at such different conclusions.

Sometimes it seemed that the name of a school of thought passed judgement on its adherents in advance. Support for the Pahlavis could be called servility, while the defence of communism was seen as a sign of courage and a desire for liberation. My mind resisted these ready-made judgements. Why should someone's loyalty mean that they were incapable of thinking? Why should the name of a belief, on its own, establish the courage or wisdom of the person who held it? I wanted to reach the human being behind the words: what had that person seen, what did they hope for, and what did they fear?

Despite all these differences, our relatives cooperated and helped one another when help was needed. Affection and family responsibility did not depend on holding the same beliefs. That experience matters to me. People could disagree in political discussion and still look after one another. It was there that I first felt what a common language might mean, in a bond that disagreement had not destroyed. Years later, I asked myself what would be needed for the same possibility to emerge on the scale of a nation.

A nation is, of course, not simply a large family with uncomplicated relationships. Society involves interests, power, rights and public responsibilities, and affection must also find expression in dependable rules. But that early experience had shown me that disagreement is not the whole truth of a relationship between two people. Something else can remain alive alongside it: concern for one another's lives and hope for a future in which both have a place. A politics that denies this possibility from the outset loses much of its strength before its work has begun.

The Human Being Behind the Political Position

Watching the documentary *The Queen and I* brought these memories back to me. Nahid Persson Sarvestani, who had once taken part in the revolution against the monarchy, meets Empress Farah Pahlavi. Their pasts differ, and disagreement remains present in their conversation. Yet the experience of exile and suffering creates room for them to understand one another as human beings. What I saw in this encounter was the value of drawing closer: an opportunity for the person before us to become more than the image we have already formed of them. [1]

This book grew out of that need. I want us to be able to know another person before reaching our final judgement, and to continue looking for ways to cooperate once we do. I understand loyalty as a conscious choice, made by someone who retains judgement and in-

dependence of mind and accepts responsibility for their own work. A person who loves Iran should be able to use their knowledge and experience, recognise a mistake and speak about it. Building a country requires the full understanding that people bring—the understanding they have accumulated through their lives.

Today I see many Iranians who have experienced war, migration, repeated new beginnings, and learning a language or profession in unfamiliar surroundings. Inside Iran, too, people have kept work and knowledge alive amid everyday difficulties. When I think about the future, I have these capacities in view. I want the energy we have devoted to protecting our families and building our lives to find a path towards building our country as well. In my view, love of Iran widens the circle of affection and brings us closer to friendship with the peoples of the world.

In the chapters of this book, I move through philosophy, psychology, politics and economics to return to one question: how can the scattered abilities of Iranians be brought together in a shared endeavour? The answer must be found in life—in freedom, education, production, prosperity and the trust that makes it possible to plan for tomorrow. I came to this question from a home in which different beliefs lived together. I still believe that we can disagree and look after one another. I want us to see what kind of Iran we can build with that same reason and affection.

Part I — Thinking About a Shared Future

Chapter 1 — Understanding a Changing World

Philosophy in Everyday Life

The question that has accompanied me since childhood now confronts a whole country: how can we build a shared future with people whose pasts, beliefs and experiences are different? Before we discuss the form of an organisation, the name of a leader or an economic programme, we must know what world we are talking about. Two people may debate Iran's future while holding such different pictures of society that they are not, in fact, discussing the same thing. One sees Iran through memories of youth; another through experiences of discrimination; a third through the frame of the news; and a fourth through the daily life of their family. A common language begins by bringing these pictures closer to reality.

In my view, one of philosophy's essential tasks is to explain the world around us and its changes to people. Philosophy should be able to clarify the relationships between power, culture, economics and human life. It should help us understand why a promise becomes attractive, why a society turns away from a political order, and why a word that once inspired hope can, in another period, remind people of fear. If thought cannot help us understand life, its distance from people grows, and easy, emotionally stirring answers take its place.

To explain this responsibility, I distinguish two dimensions: the static and the dynamic. This is a framework I use to make the discussion clearer. The static dimension asks where we stand now; the dynamic dimension asks where we might go, given the forces in motion and the choices before us. Understanding today and thinking about tomorrow must remain together. Without the first, our aspirations lose touch with the ground; without the second, knowing our difficulties may leave us trapped within them.

A Static Picture and a Moving Reality

The static picture is formed from our information, experience and assumptions. We want to understand the relationships of power, who benefits from the status quo, what problems people face and what possibilities are available to society. The quality of this picture depends on our honesty in looking. If we assemble only what pleases us, we will have an agreeable picture that may be of little use when the first serious decision arises. Understanding requires us to see the unwelcome parts of reality too.

The world does not remain within the frame we have made for it today. A new generation enters the scene, technology changes how people communicate, relations between countries shift, and people draw new conclusions from their experiences. Someone who yesterday placed their hope in reforming a system may today have moved beyond it. Someone who once thought only of leaving may become interested in finding a way to build. Thought that fails to see these movements gradually falls behind the reality it seeks to understand.

The dynamic dimension of philosophy begins by asking about these very movements. Which force is growing? What obstacle might stop it? If a political opportunity arises, how prepared is society to use it? If circumstances do not develop as expected, what needs to change in our decision? As I understand it, looking ahead means weighing possible paths and the consequences of our choices. Its value lies in preparing people to decide better. Every analysis should make clear which assumptions support it and which change in circumstances could alter its conclusion.

This approach allows us to be hopeful while planning responsibly. Hope becomes a capacity for action when we know what we can do to move towards our destination. If we leave everything to one great event, we will neglect many small but necessary tasks—the very tasks that, when an opportunity arrives, make the difference between readiness and confusion.

The History of Thought and Independent Judgement

Familiarity with the history of thought gives this understanding depth. We can learn from Greek and Roman philosophy, Iranian thought and other Eastern traditions, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, industrial change and the political experiences of recent centuries. For me, the importance of this familiarity lies in the possibility of comparison. Under what conditions did an idea emerge? What did it promise people? When it came to power, how did it treat their freedom and their lives? Which part of it still helps us understand our problem, and which part belongs to circumstances that have changed?

Knowing philosophers' names does not, by itself, give someone judgement. A person may have read many books and still refuse to see anything that does not fit their beliefs. Reasoning makes a difference to life when we can connect what we know, take a new question seriously and test our views against experience. I speak of 'mental gymnastics' because the mind, too, must be able to move: to leave familiar ground, see a problem from another angle and return with a richer understanding.

A political activist is committed to a movement and a programme. People should know what that activist wants and which proposals they are prepared to take responsibility for. I do not conceal my own political preference: I advocate a secular, democratic constitutional monarchy. Yet the responsibility to think requires me to keep asking whether what I sup-

port serves people's freedom, prosperity and development. Does our behaviour match the principles we proclaim? Do we want our critics to have the same right to think and speak that we consider essential for ourselves?

No name or emblem can relieve us of this responsibility. Loyalty to a path remains informed when we exercise our own judgement within it. A difficult question may briefly unsettle our circle, but refusing to hear it can prolong a mistake. A society that intends to draw on Iranians' abilities must also make room for their independent judgement.

Making Our Disagreements Precise

Political disagreements are not all of the same kind. Sometimes we disagree about a fact; sometimes about a value we prioritise; sometimes we see different routes to the same destination. Two people may both want freedom and prosperity, but one favours a larger role for the state while the other places more trust in individual initiative. Clarifying that difference creates more room for dialogue. When we reduce everything to whether people are good or bad, the real issue disappears from view.

Some of our hostilities also persist through the pictures each group has constructed of the other. We have lived for years within a closed circle, heard the labels and assumed that we know the people behind them. Then the first encounter turns into ridicule or a defence of honour. To untie this knot, we must bring our questions closer to life: what does justice look like in a school or hospital? What rights does freedom give an opponent? What responsibility does loyalty ask of me?

We may still have serious disagreements after such a conversation, but their subject will be clearer. We can then see where we compete and in what work we can stand together. This is the capacity we need to build Iran: to clarify words sufficiently to make decisions about their consequences. The first word that must be brought back into life in this way is freedom.

Part I — Thinking About a Shared Future

Chapter 2 — Freedom and Informed Loyalty

Freedom in Everyday Life

For me, freedom acquires meaning through human experience: thinking, speaking, writing, making films, creating art, and expressing love and feeling. A person should be able to make decisions about their life, ask their questions and share what they believe to be right. A woman who wants to live independently, an artist who wants to show the world in their own way, and a young person seeking a new path for the future each encounter the meaning of freedom somewhere in their lives.

When I defend broad freedom of expression, I mean that no idea, authority or tradition should be immune from questioning and criticism. A writer should be able to write, and a philosopher should be able to raise even an unpopular question. An idea should be answered through thought and argument. If a person is constantly worried about which word might get them cast out of a group, part of their mental energy will be spent protecting themselves. In such an atmosphere, repeating familiar answers becomes easier than finding a better one.

This right must also allow participation in public life. Someone with a view should be able to express it in the media, start a discussion about it and persuade others. The strength of our belief in freedom becomes apparent when we want the same possibility for our rivals. The Iran we seek to build is home to all its citizens, including those who have not accepted our argument and have another proposal for the future.

Alongside this freedom, people need the opportunity to build their lives. Constant anxiety about food, housing, healthcare and a child's future consumes much of a person's energy. I want Iranian citizens to have both a voice and the opportunity to develop their talents. Freedom opens the way for their participation, and security in life gives them the chance to use it. Politics must be able to recognise these two needs together.

For me, the separation of religion from government also begins with this human right. A citizen can be Muslim, Jewish, Christian, a follower of another faith or non-religious, and still enjoy equal rights. My opposition to political Islam and religious government is directed at an order that turns belief into an instrument of power and discrimination. The freedoms to believe, to change one's beliefs and to criticise beliefs must all be protected together. A national alliance does not require agreement on one another's personal faith; it requires us to agree on laws that preserve everyone's right to life and equal participation.

A Modern Nation and the Language of Respect

Iranians at home and abroad possess extensive knowledge, skills and experience. People have worked in many professions, learnt other languages and seen different ways of organising society. Many are familiar with revolution, war, migration, failure and getting back on their feet. Such people are not merely recipients of orders; they can understand problems, propose plans, accept responsibility and carry out the work. Political relationships must recognise this ability.

We cannot speak to today's society in exactly the language of the late Qajar period or the beginning of Reza Shah's rule. Circumstances have changed, and new expectations have emerged. Respect for the past helps us build the future when we also understand the person living today. That person wants their presence to make a difference and to have authority over the responsibility they accept. If we ask only for loyalty while closing the route to participation, we set aside part of the very capital the country needs.

That is why I emphasise friendship, affection, trust and companionship. For me, these words belong within politics. Working with an independent person requires respect: they must feel able to bring their full understanding to the task. Trust is also built through clear promises and dependable behaviour. Someone who has accepted a responsibility should know what is expected of them, and the group must provide the necessary authority and support. Affection keeps the bond warm; responsibility makes it firm.

Pahlavism and the Liberation of Human Potential

I consider Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi the foremost focal point for bringing people together around Iran's future. My support is connected to my vision of a free, modern, secular Iran with parliamentary institutions. I favour a constitutional monarchy that combines national continuity with the rule of law and the accountability of elected institutions. This preference must be capable of being explained to the people and drawing its legitimacy from their free choice.

The Pahlavism I defend finds its meaning in freeing Iranians' abilities. Iran's resources are not confined to what comes out of the ground. Knowledge, skills, creativity, initiative, capital, experience and love of country are also our resources. I want these forces to have room to act and to become a better life. That is why, in 'Pahlavism — Liberation or Obedience?', I emphasised an alliance of free, capable individuals. Anyone who joins this path should bring their ability to think with them.

Loyalty can be seen in the work we do, the responsibility we accept and the commitments we fulfil. Someone who honestly identifies a fault and works to put it right can be a dependable companion. Constant approval, by contrast, may conceal mistakes and lead to worse decisions. I believe in a relationship in which support for leadership goes together with initiative, criticism and independent work. Iran needs people who can run the country, solve problems and answer for their work.

Support for constitutional monarchy should not make cooperation with a republican compatriot impossible. We can differ over the form of government while agreeing on freedom of expression, the separation of religion from government, equal rights, the country's unity and the people's right to choose. These principles give cooperation meaning because they preserve everyone's right to participate in the future. Someone who fails to win a majority in free competition remains a citizen with rights: they can criticise, organise and work to persuade people.

What a Slogan Asks of Us

When I hear Javid Shah or 'This is the final battle; Pahlavi is coming back', I connect them, in my reading of the movement, with the longing for liberation. Within this horizon, Javid Shah also carries for me the meanings of long live freedom, long live Iran, and long live the people's right to build their own lives. This is my interpretation of the slogan's potential to express a desire for freedom—a meaning that must take practical form in our relationships today and the rules of tomorrow.

A person who risks their security and their life hopes for more than a change of titles. In that hope, I see a desire for liberation from repression and discrimination, freedom for women, dignity at work, opportunities for young people and an end to economic desperation. Loyalty to those who pay the price places on us the responsibility to explain the future. We must be able to say how their rights will be protected and what real possibilities they will have for a better life.

Moving beyond the Islamic Republic cannot be assumed to be simple or without cost. Human lives must remain at the centre of political responsibility. People's passion and courage do not remove the need to weigh the risks and consequences of decisions. The greater the hope we inspire, the greater our obligation to prepare dependable paths. The longing for liberation grows stronger when people can see a connection between our words and how we behave.

A freely chosen alliance needs people who can stand by their principles and also work with others. Declaring a position alone does not create this ability. We must develop in ourselves the capacity to listen, tolerate uncertainty and revise our judgements. Here, the philosophical question of the book reaches our inner experience: when we encounter someone different from ourselves, what happens in our minds and our behaviour?

Part II — Understanding One Another

Chapter 3 — Stepping Outside Our Own Bubble

The Comfort of a Familiar Circle

The easiest thing for the mind is to see the world only through the window of its own life. In this state, our own needs, memories and interpretations seem sufficient. If we look for companions, we find people who think like us and give the answers we want to hear. Such a group can be comforting. The difficulty begins when we mistake that circle for the whole of society and assume that anyone outside it has failed to understand the issue.

Society is much wider than our circle of friends and like-minded people. People are born into different families, do not have equal opportunities and do not travel similar paths. What signifies progress to me may be linked, for someone else, to a memory of loss. What I regard as a danger may, in their experience, have seemed a route to liberation. If I do not see these differences, I will have an incomplete picture of the country and use that picture to judge everyone.

I call this condition living in a bubble. Within the bubble, we hear our own voice from other people's mouths and grow accustomed to its affirmation. An encounter with a different voice can disturb that calm. If we have made our identity dependent on others' constant agreement, even a simple question may provoke anger or fear. Instead of considering what has been said, we then look for the speaker's political camp and their intentions.

For me, psychological strength in social life is connected to the ability to withstand this encounter. I am speaking of a capacity for living and working together that we can develop in ourselves. Can I hear a question whose answer I do not yet know? Can I accept that part of my judgement has been incomplete without feeling that I am falling apart? Am I still able to think and engage in dialogue in a group where not everyone agrees with me?

Growing as a Person

The sentence that makes this meaning clear to me is this: the more a person grows, the smaller their problems become. I mean that, as understanding expands, more ways of confronting a problem open before us. Suffering, poverty and injustice do not disappear through a change of mindset; but, when facing difficulty, a person can gain access to tools

and possibilities they could not previously see. A problem that produced only hostility within a closed outlook may become something that can be examined and resolved within a broader one.

This growth requires us repeatedly to step outside familiar boundaries. We must also see history through the eyes of those who stood on its other side. We need to understand their class experience, social life, family roots and political position. A worker, an industrialist, a young woman, a migrant and a villager have different windows onto the same country. None sees the whole view alone. Dialogue helps reveal some of what remains hidden from where I stand.

This also increases our independence. Someone who feels secure only among those who agree with them remains dependent on that environment for peace of mind. Outside it, they quickly feel alone and threatened. A person capable of listening can enter a new group, reason and learn. They do not need to abandon their personality or beliefs to encounter someone else. They trust themselves enough not to fear learning.

In my view, an Iranian monarchist who wants to understand Iran must be able to look beyond the window of monarchism too. This ability gives depth to their argument. When they understand a republican's or a leftist's actual concern, they can offer an answer that addresses it. Otherwise, two people may speak for hours while each responds only to the image of the other they hold in their mind.

Empathy and Listening to a Life

For me, empathy means trying to be born alongside you: to know your parents, live in your town or village, attend your school, look for work, fall in love, fail and hope. If you have migrated, it means trying to see what leaving home meant from your position. Before judging the outcome of a life, I must attend to the path that person has travelled. This human imagination can open the door, but a more accurate understanding also requires us to hear the person themselves.

From the outside, I cannot guess everything that is happening in another person's mind. I must ask what they have seen, what has frightened them, what they have placed their hopes in and which experience changed their view. I must then compare my interpretation with their account and allow them to correct it. Research by Eyal, Steffel and Epley also points to the importance of obtaining another person's perspective directly through conversation; merely imagining their position does not guarantee accurate understanding. [2]

To practise this, we can restate what the other person has said before answering and ask whether we have understood correctly. If they say, 'That is not what I meant', there is still work to do. The rush to answer often means that we hear only the part of a sentence that gives us an opportunity to attack or defend. Listening fully takes time and sometimes changes our first response.

As I understand it, the fullest empathy means extending this effort. Understanding someone who resembles us is usually not difficult. The value of this capacity becomes clear when we encounter someone different. We can understand them and still disagree with their choice. Knowing their path makes criticism more precise, because we now know which experience, argument and consequence we are discussing. The human relationship also gains a chance to emerge from beneath the weight of a label.

A Path to Changing One's Mind

If we want society to change, we must also make room for people's thinking to change. Someone may have supported a movement for years and now reach a new conclusion. They should be able to express that change, explain their past and contribute to useful work. If, whenever they take a step towards us, we only confront them with their past, we effectively close the route we claim is open.

Individuals remain responsible for their actions, but understanding a person must also allow us to see their movement. Within a life, belief, fear, belonging, economic need and new experiences can take on different weights. Asking about this journey helps us both understand mistakes better and recognise the possibility of change. A society that leaves no route for reconsideration expects people to remain forever where they first stood.

I ask Iranian psychologists and social researchers to engage with this issue: which forms of dialogue lead to listening? What behaviour intensifies a sense of humiliation? How can we clarify a disagreement without destroying the human relationship? Answers must come from listening to diverse lives and be brought back in a language that families, schools, the media and civic groups can use. Iran needs this knowledge because different people are going to live together in one country.

Part II — Understanding One Another

Chapter 4 — Iran's Diversity and the Art of Living Together

Behind Political Labels

Why did someone join the Tudeh Party? Why did another join Peykar, the People's Fedayeen or the People's Mojahedin Organisation? Why did some join the Basij or the Revolutionary Guards, or become clerics? Why has someone who once placed their hope in the Islamic Republic now turned away from it? For me, these questions are part of understanding society. Behind every label are people who have travelled different paths. If we take the name of an organisation as the answer to every question, we will learn nothing more about their lives.

When examining a life, we need to ask what the person knew, what was hidden from them and whom they regarded as an authority. What future were they promised? What part did friendship, ideals, family, economic need or fear play in their choice? Which later experience strengthened or unsettled their belief? We cannot assume that these factors carry the same weight for everyone. Understanding society requires precisely this attention to differences.

I enter this dialogue as a supporter of constitutional monarchy and Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi. I want to understand what worries a republican and how a leftist sees justice. If I trust my argument, I should be able to explain it in response to their questions. Many of those with whom I disagree today will tomorrow be neighbours, colleagues, party representatives or critics of the government. Practising this shared life cannot be postponed to some unspecified day.

Examining motives makes our judgement of actions and their consequences more precise. To prevent damaging experiences from recurring, we must understand how people came to follow those paths and what other route might have been available to them. The question 'Why?' sets understanding in motion again. Sometimes, through it, we can reach ground for cooperation that has been hidden beneath years of suspicion.

One Iran and Different Experiences

The same reasoning applies to ethnic, linguistic and regional differences. A Persian should be able to hear the experience of a Kurd, Baloch, Arab or Azerbaijani, just as each of us should try to understand other Iranians' lives. Within every community there are also dif-

ferences of generation, class, gender, family and belief. An ethnic group's name is not the life story of all its members. Someone who truly wants to understand people must give them the opportunity to speak for themselves.

I want a united and strong Iran. Preserving that unity requires an understanding of people's problems. We must be able to ask what circumstances lead some individuals towards separatism, pan-Turkism or pan-Arabism; which experience has gone unheard, which promise has become attractive, and what part propaganda or political interest plays in each case. We must find the answers through research and dialogue. Attributing a single motive to a whole population takes us further from understanding.

If a citizen feels that their language, culture or local concerns have no place in the picture of the future, repeating slogans of unity will not be enough. They must be able to experience a shared Iran through equal rights, opportunities to progress and participation in decision-making. Belonging to one's birthplace can coexist with belonging to Iran. Persian can also be the language that connects us while the diverse cultures and languages of Iran's people have room to flourish.

When I speak of bringing people into the mainstream of national life, I mean expanding this opportunity to participate. People do not all need to become alike to build their country. There must be a way for a local problem to be heard, for a citizen's ability to be put to use, and for the country's future to have meaning for them too. I connect Iran's strength with the strength of citizens who see themselves as present and effective within it.

Coming Down from Everest

Political purism begins when we make cooperation conditional on ever greater similarity. It is no longer enough for someone to love Iran, work for freedom or be trustworthy in a particular task. They must share our memories, use our words and like or dislike the same people with the same intensity. Each new condition makes the group smaller, until those who remain may be people who add nothing to one another's understanding.

The image I have for this is of someone standing on the summit of Everest and saying, 'Anyone who wants to unite with me should come up here; we will unite here.' They may be happy with their position, but most of society does not live at that altitude. In towns and villages, at home, at university and in the workplace, people face their real problems and limitations. Politics requires going among these very people and making the effort to understand them.

We must step into the arena. We must ask, listen and find a point from which to work together. Someone who demands that everyone reach their position before a conversation can begin has left the hardest part of political work to others. Our ability to organise cooperation becomes apparent when we can bring people with different backgrounds and preferences together around a clear purpose and commitment.

Clear principles are essential to this work. We can stand firmly for secularism, democracy, equal rights and Iran's unity while differing over historical interpretations or political preferences. Political maturity requires us to recognise how these things relate. If we treat every small difference as a sign of betrayal, the movement's energy will be spent policing its own members. That energy could instead go towards understanding society, supporting those who have suffered and preparing paths to reconstruction.

Trust through Working Together

Our understanding of others does not change only through discussion; the experience of completing a task can also affect it. In Pettigrew and Tropp's meta-analysis, contact between groups was associated overall with reduced prejudice. This finding does not guarantee the success of every encounter, but it gives us more reason to take opportunities for acquaintance and cooperation seriously. [3] When we know someone only through their group's slogans, our picture is limited. Working together shows how they listen, what responsibility they accept and how far we can rely on their word.

My proposal is to connect dialogue with a real issue: education, the environment, helping those who have suffered, research or preparing a reconstruction plan. The task needs to be clear and responsibilities defined. People should be able to disagree over methods while knowing which outcome they are pursuing together. Every fulfilled commitment provides a new reason for trust.

Such experience also increases society's capacity for reconciliation. Leadership can call for people to come together, but we must develop the ability to answer that call through our own behaviour. We cannot wait for a united nation while closing the way for part of that same nation to participate every day. Unity grows in relationships where disagreement can be expressed, changing one's mind is possible, and a person can accept a shared responsibility while remaining independent.

Here, common language enters politics. Understanding reality and people must lead to rules, organisation and decisions. A free Iran needs citizens who can work together and institutions that make this cooperation endure. We must now ask how to turn this human capacity into an effective alliance and the responsible management of disagreements.

Part III — The Politics of Cooperation

Chapter 5 — Foreign Policy and the National Interest

Politics Begins with Seeing Clearly

Sometimes politics is simply what takes shape before our eyes. Forces stand alongside one another, their interests become intertwined, and the consequences of their decisions enter people's lives. To understand this situation, we must be able to look before passing judgement. Who benefits from the continuation of the status quo? Who wants change? Which relationship creates opportunities to work and advance, and which keeps the country in fear, poverty and isolation? When we have already fixed the answers to all these questions within a closed ideological system, we no longer see the world; we search it for confirmation of what we already believe.

For me, politics begins with human life. It matters to me that an Iranian should be able to study, work, support a family and put their talents to use. Foreign policy should open the way to such a life. A government that makes enmity its permanent identity will eventually devote much of its people's capacity to sustaining that same enmity. In such circumstances, the simple question, 'What has this policy added to our lives?' can be more revealing than many noisy speeches.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, hostility towards the United States and Israel has occupied a central place in this government's language and conduct. This orientation has gone beyond slogans, shaping regional relationships, support for aligned forces and the country's priorities. For me, the issue lies in this relationship: a government that expects people to bear the cost of permanent enmity must be judged by the consequences for those people. Invoking Palestine, justice or independence does not, in itself, answer questions about Iranians' freedom, security and welfare.

Do Not Put Ideological Allegiance Before Life

Within some currents on the left, hostility towards the United States and Israel has acquired such importance that the Islamic Republic's treatment of its own citizens has sometimes become a secondary concern. I regard this reversal of priorities as a fundamental error. How can one defend workers while overlooking their right to form independent trade unions? How can one speak of human liberation while playing down the repression of women, students and political opponents because the government is hostile to the West? Being progressive must be evident in our relationship with human freedom.

Coming together against a shared enemy does not guarantee tomorrow's freedom. In this respect, the experience of the Islamic Republic offers me a clear lesson: a force that cannot tolerate other people's independent thought and organisation may also cast aside yesterday's ally. I therefore do not want national cooperation to rest solely on hatred of a particular power. We need to know what rights we will recognise for one another once the common obstacle has been removed, and how we will deal with the disagreements that remain.

Revisiting the past requires the same care. In my reading, fear of the spread of Soviet influence and the radical left weighed heavily in Cold War calculations, while the long-term danger of political Islam was not sufficiently understood. American documents from after the revolution also demonstrate the importance attached to countering Soviet influence and left-wing forces. [4] Yet understanding that period requires us to consider the decisions of foreign powers, the domestic crisis and the actions of Iranian forces together. The lesson I draw for today is clear: a force's willingness to stand with us against our present rival is not enough; we must consider what future that force is creating for people and society.

The Right to Friendship with Israel and the World

I see no reason to regard the Islamic Republic's hostility towards Israel as the Iranian nation's eternal destiny. Iranians and Israelis can talk to one another, travel, learn and work together. Relationships can be built between universities, doctors, researchers, entrepreneurs and families. For me, the appeal of such a relationship lies in the possibility of turning knowledge into a better life: the experience of one society can help solve a problem in another.

When I look at the achievements of scientists such as Ada Yonath, a joint recipient of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, I think about the potential of research and its connection to humanity's future. [5] I want Iranian researchers, too, to be able to ask questions in a free environment, connect with colleagues around the world and see the results of their work in medicine, industry and education. Friendship has a tangible meaning for me: a path that begins with people meeting and leads to cooperation from which both sides benefit.

The historical memory of ties between Iranians and Jews can also contribute to this understanding. The memory of Cyrus within that history matters to me, just as the longstanding presence of Jews in Iranian culture and life matters. I want this inheritance to become a living relationship. The value of friendship should be visible in trust today, scientific cooperation, trade, travel and mutual respect. The past helps the future when we use it to build the capacity to connect.

From Alignment to a Lasting Relationship

In the confrontation between the Islamic Republic and the United States and Israel, I see the possibility of alignment between some of these countries' interests and Iranians' desire to free themselves from ideological government. This is my political judgement, and it needs to become concrete work: dialogue, a precise expression of the Iranian people's wishes and the building of relationships that serve the country's future. Iranian political forces must be able to explain a free Iran's potential for cooperation, development and regional peace. Waiting for others to decide cannot replace our own organisation and responsibility.

The relationship I want with the United States, Israel and Europe rests on the national interest, mutual respect and clear agreements. Mature friendship requires independent judgement. We must be able to learn from our partners, negotiate with them and answer to our own people for the decisions we make. A country that trusts its citizens' abilities has no need to feel inferior when engaging with the world, just as it does not have to regard everyone as an enemy in order to preserve its independence.

By an orientation towards the West, I mean access to institutions and methods that allow criticism, research, competition, production and reform. I want Iran to contribute to the world's production of knowledge and wealth. Loyalty to ideological camps must not prevent us from seeing results. My measure is what a particular relationship makes possible for people: better universities, more capable industry, employment opportunities, security in life and a future for which they can plan.

Part III — The Politics of Cooperation

Chapter 6 — An Alliance for Transition and Reconstruction

Cooperation Begins Where We Actually Stand

Those who want the Islamic Republic to end have not necessarily arrived at that desire by the same route. One person has been wounded by religious discrimination, another by the destruction of economic opportunity; one is concerned about women's freedom, while another begins with the fate of their language, region or family. I do not expect these differences to disappear before cooperation begins. I expect each person to be able to find a path from their own concern to the common question: what kind of country should Iran be for its people to live freely and with dignity?

An alliance becomes serious when we move beyond declarations of general agreement. If two groups both speak of freedom, they must also be able to discuss the right to oppose them. If they defend popular sovereignty, it must be clear how they will respond to the people's decision if they dislike the outcome. For me, common language acquires its value precisely where it turns agreement from a pleasant feeling into an intelligible commitment. Cooperation needs trust, and trust is built through predictable conduct.

In his speech in Toronto on 19 September 2026, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi identified Iran's territorial integrity, the separation of religion from government, individual freedoms and citizens' equality before the law, and the people's free and fair choice of their future system of government as the basis for cooperation. In the text of the speech, this framework encompasses republican and monarchist forces, as well as currents on the left and right. [6] The importance of this commitment, for me, is that those working together should be able to retain their own views while cooperating under clear rules.

Leadership and the Independence of Those Who Join It

I consider constitutional monarchy suitable for Iran's future, and I support Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership through the transition. I have made this choice with historical continuity, the possibility of national convergence and the need to build an accountable government in mind. But, for me, joining this effort does not mean suspending judgement and initiative. I want to be a companion, a collaborator and a responsible person on this path: someone who understands their own abilities, takes on a task and adds its results to the collective effort.

If every idea, assessment and initiative is supposed to come from one person, the capacity of millions of Iranians will remain unused. Leadership can accomplish more when capable, independent people are present around it. Doctors must understand the problems of healthcare, economists must work on production and welfare, and water specialists must examine solutions to water problems. Political support serves the country when it connects these abilities and turns them into results.

In my essay 'Pahlavism — Liberation or Obedience?' I emphasised this same point: the aim is to free Iran's human and natural resources. A liberated person must be able to think, make proposals and accept responsibility. Loyalty shaped by fear of questioning is not enough to build a free society. Conscious commitment can be both steadfast and honest; it can defend a shared direction while also speaking about mistakes, delays or weaknesses in implementation.

Let Us Not Turn Four Decisions into One

Cooperating to move beyond the Islamic Republic, accepting leadership during the transition, choosing the final form of the political system and electing future governments are related but distinct matters. If we compress them all into one decision, we close the door to many people who could make a useful contribution. A republican committed to freedom and Iran's territorial integrity can take part in a shared undertaking without being required to become a monarchist in advance. I, too, can advocate constitutional monarchy without treating other people's right to choose freely as something to be suspended.

Within such a framework, transitional leadership should help make national decision-making possible. Debate about the form of government must take place in an environment where citizens can obtain information, hear opposing views and choose freely. The government elected afterwards will also be judged by its record. A historic name or symbolic standing can bring people together; lasting trust depends on the quality of institutions, the fulfilment of commitments and the capacity for accountability. This is the connection I seek between national feeling and the building of the future.

For this reason, 'Pahlavi Plus' has a forward-looking meaning in my view: drawing on the inheritance of development and national integration, alongside guaranteed rights and the ability to reform the exercise of power. This expression is my own conceptual framework. It should not be confused with an officially adopted programme or a set of firm promises. Its value for this discussion is to remind us of our responsibility both to draw strength from past achievements and to recognise past shortcomings, so that they are not imposed on people's lives again.

A Society Capable of Reconciliation

A leader of national reconciliation needs a society in which the capacity for reconciliation has grown. If each group regards its own memory alone as the whole truth, even the best invitation to cooperate will come to a halt when it encounters distrust. We must be able to hear different experiences of suffering without surrendering the future to a competition in revenge. Identifying individual responsibility, examining evidence and addressing wrongdoing fairly are compatible with preserving society's capacity to carry on with life. Iran needs justice, and building justice requires institutions.

During transition, the country must be able to breathe. Water and electricity, schools, hospitals and essential services are part of people's lives. Changing the government must not mean disabling all the knowledge that exists within the country's administrative and professional institutions. We must distinguish between preserving public service and preserving relationships of patronage and privilege. As someone who has worked with injury and reconstruction, I know that stopping bleeding and maintaining vital functions create the conditions for subsequent treatment. In rebuilding the country, too, the continuity of people's lives must remain central to decisions.

A national alliance is not completed by a group photograph. It comes alive when people can apply their experience, information and abilities to a shared problem. A force on the left can work on security in workers' lives, a liberal force on freedom of economic activity, and a women's rights activist on removing discrimination in law and practice. These efforts reinforce one another when each group regards the others as partners in the country. What matters to me is increasing Iran's capacity for transition and reconstruction; every act of cooperation should be judged by what it adds to that capacity.

Part III — The Politics of Cooperation

Chapter 7 — Order and Responsibility in Collective Work

Let Us Clarify the Purpose Before We Begin

Many of our disagreements begin when we have started something enthusiastically without stating its terms. One person assumes they are responsible for the final decision; another considers themselves an equal. One expects consultation, another expects implementation. Nor have we reached a clear agreement about money, the group's name, releasing information or resolving disputes. Then, when someone behaves contrary to our expectations, we call it disloyalty—even though those expectations may never have been expressed.

In my discussion of 'The Need for Order in the Lion and Sun Movement', I addressed this very problem. Order begins with clarifying relationships. Before accepting a responsibility, we need to know what work is to be done, how much authority each person has and how the result will be reviewed. This discussion is not an obstacle to progress; it is part of progress itself. The time we spend making commitments clear can save us from far greater exhaustion halfway through the work.

Working Together Requires a Shared Understanding of the Relationship

Within the movement, not everyone who invokes the name of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi necessarily understands their relationship with him in the same way. One person already regards him as king; another emphasises his role as leader of the transition; someone else waits for him to provide the answer to every problem; and another wishes, by their own free choice, to be a collaborator and companion on this path. Until this difference is made clear, a shared term may conceal entirely different expectations.

I see myself in that last sense. Working alongside him means doing my part, remaining faithful to the agreement and taking responsibility for what I can do better. Symbolic closeness to the leader is not supposed to take the place of ability. Someone who understands the problem, gives their time and completes the work strengthens the shared endeavour. If our only measures are louder slogans or a longer record of support, we may keep the most capable people on the margins and then complain that we lack people to do the work.

An Orchestra Rehearses Before It Performs

The image of an orchestra helps me explain this kind of order. The conductor provides direction and coordination, but a good sound comes from instruments whose players have learnt their craft. If everyone arrives without practising and expects the conductor's hand

movements to compensate for every weakness, the music will not come together. In national work, too, we must understand what knowledge each field requires, who is ready to do the work and how people will coordinate their results with one another.

For example, a small group that wants to work on water problems can begin with a specific question. What data are needed? Who will examine them? Who will listen to local experience? When should a usable report be ready? If a meeting is merely an opportunity to repeat concerns, it creates a feeling of participation but does little to move the work forward. When the task is clear and the result is brought back to the group, knowledge becomes shared memory, and the next group does not have to start everything again from the beginning.

Authority and responsibility must be proportionate. We cannot ask someone for results while taking away every opportunity to make decisions. Nor can we grant authority without asking for reports. Within this relationship, questions about progress or how money has been spent should not be treated as insults. Clear accounts protect trust. If a problem has arisen, raising it in time gives the group an opportunity to correct it; hiding the problem to preserve appearances transfers its cost to others.

The Quality of the Relationship Is Part of the Result

Order among people requires the capacity to listen and make corrections. We may have allocated responsibilities badly, or someone may be unsuitable for a particular task. We must be able to change assignments without humiliation and learn from experience. A correction should not turn into a personal feud. A group in which no one dares to raise a problem may look calm from the outside, but it loses the information it needs to act properly.

In this respect, women's participation is, for me, a real measure of how modern an organisation is. If we speak of freedom and equality, women must also have an effective share in identifying problems, making decisions and carrying responsibility. The same measure applies to the younger generation and to specialists who do not belong to established circles. An organisation must be able to recognise talent and open the way for it to enter. The society we are working to build takes shape through these very behaviours today.

I want a strong nation, a capable and accountable government, and a respected Crown within the framework of law. Achieving such an order begins with small responsibilities: a promise we keep, a report we write clearly, a disagreement we resolve through dialogue and a task we complete. When common language becomes order, it allows people both to remain independent and to be dependable partners. This capability is one of the resources Iran needs for its future.

Part IV — An Economy of Freedom and Prosperity

Chapter 8 — From Oil to the Liberation of Resources

Wealth Must Not Become an Instrument of Dependency

For me, economics begins with the question of how people can build their own lives. An Iranian should be able to advance through knowledge, skill, work and initiative, and see the fruits of that effort in their family's security and their children's future. If every step depends on proximity to power, their abilities cannot serve a life of freedom. In such circumstances, economics is also bound up with power: who has access to resources, on what basis do they distribute them, and to whom are they accountable?

Iran has industrial, agricultural and service sectors, but oil revenue continues to exert an important influence on economic activity and government finances. The World Bank describes this dependence while also noting the relative diversity of Iran's economy. [7] My concern is not simply the amount of oil we sell; it is the relationship that develops around its revenue. When public wealth is placed in the hands of a narrow circle, those in power can use contracts, privileges and payments to build a network of dependants and loyalists.

In my reading of modern history, this structural weakness existed under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and continued under the Islamic Republic. I defend the Pahlavi era's legacy of development, but that defence must not prevent us from recognising the relationship between oil and concentrated power. The Iran of the future needs arrangements that limit the conversion of public wealth into personal and political loyalty. Revenue from natural resources must be subject to audit, scrutiny by the people's representatives and questions from citizens. People must be able to understand where the country's wealth has gone and what has been built with it.

Oil and gas can still contribute to Iran's progress, provided their revenue increases the country's capabilities: better education, reliable infrastructure, research, industry and opportunities for economic activity. I want citizens to be able to rely on their own skills and efforts to get ahead. The more independent routes there are to production and income, the greater society's ability to stand on its own feet. This is where citizens' economic independence and government accountability meet.

Raw Materials Are the Beginning of a Chain

A society of more than ninety million people has needs that extend far beyond basic subsistence. [8] People want good jobs, decent housing, education, healthcare and opportunities to advance. Iran's educated workforce is also a resource that must not remain on the margins of economic planning. We cannot ask young people to spend years learning and then tell them that their country intends only to sell raw materials and distribute enough for people to stay alive. Their knowledge must have room to contribute to production and decision-making.

Raw materials can be the beginning of a chain in which knowledge and skill add value at every stage. I want an Iran that can compete in pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, advanced materials, machinery and engineering services. A more sophisticated product has meaning when a buyer chooses it for its quality, price and reliability. Having a factory or adopting the name of a technology is not enough; we must ask what problem is being solved, how sustainable production is and how the product will reach the market.

The same approach applies to bridges, roads, housing, energy, water treatment and digital infrastructure. Domestic needs can become a training ground for capabilities that later find applications in other countries. But a project must not be judged simply by how impressive its scale appears. Its cost, available resources, maintenance requirements, actual need and environmental effects must be clear. Engineering serves the country when political decision-makers are also willing to listen to expertise and answer for the results.

Enabling People to Use Their Abilities

When I speak of the liberation of resources, I am not thinking only of oil wells and mines. A doctor's knowledge, a worker's skill, an entrepreneur's capital, an artist's creativity and a young person's initiative are also Iran's resources. Women's abilities, the experience of Iranians abroad, trust between people and the capacity to cooperate belong in the same picture. A resource that cannot be put to use does not become wealth in people's lives. Freedom gives these capabilities a route into activity and connection.

I have discussed this same obstacle in *Induced Poverty*. Possessing tools does not, by itself, make an independent livelihood possible. A tailor needs customers, materials, access to markets and dependable rules. A fisherman needs more than a boat: they need the legal right to work and the means to transport and sell their catch. If the links in that chain are blocked, the value of the initial assistance may soon be exhausted. For me, reconstruction means opening the routes by which ability can become a result. A citizen must be able to make a start, learn and benefit from their work.

Iranians abroad are also part of this capacity. They do not all have to uproot their lives at once in order to contribute. Scientific cooperation, periodic teaching, investment, sharing experience and building relationships between institutions can all make a real contribution. Such participation becomes more useful when it is combined with the knowledge

and experience of people inside Iran. Someone who has learnt abroad has something to add; someone who has lived with a problem at close quarters for years also possesses knowledge that cannot be replaced from a distance.

Opportunity Must Reach Every Part of Iran

The national economy must encompass the whole of Iran. Baluchistan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Gilan, Azerbaijan and Khorasan are all parts of our shared home. Birthplace must not determine how much opportunity an Iranian has to learn and advance. I want a young person in Sanandaj to be able to start something new in artificial intelligence, a young person in Zahedan or Zabol to have access to skills and capital, and a group in Chabahar to be able to work with researchers and entrepreneurs in other cities.

Speeches will not bring this vision into being. It needs reliable internet, electricity, education, financial services and clear rules. Nor does equal opportunity mean carrying out identical projects everywhere. Each region has its own capabilities and needs, and its people must have a part in identifying problems and making decisions. Connecting local initiative with national resources can improve the quality of a programme and deepen the sense of belonging. Citizens who can see their own place in Iran's future will have more energy to help build it.

Part IV — An Economy of Freedom and Prosperity

Chapter 9 — Creating Wealth and Expanding Wellbeing

Disagreement over Shares Requires Rules

A common economic language is not meant to turn the left and the right into a single school of thought. One may begin with labour rights and another with freedom to invest; one may be concerned about taxation and another about security during unemployment. These differences are real and will remain in a free society. The question is whether we can work within a common framework to create wealth and widen access to its benefits. I look for the answer in political competition, independent organisations, clear contracts and accountable government.

My preferred framework is a national parliamentary system within a secular constitutional monarchy. Political movements must present their economic programmes, seek votes for them and be judged by the results of putting them into practice. We can disagree over taxation, wages, public services and investment priorities, and negotiate in parliament and in society. That possibility requires that no group claim the sole right to define the country's economic future.

In my view, a programme aimed at abolishing private property, seizing factories and eliminating investors is not a suitable path for Iran's reconstruction. Such a course weakens the trust that economic activity needs and turns disagreement over shares into a struggle over whether the other side should exist at all. I want workers and employers to be able to negotiate working conditions, with both able to envisage a future in which production continues. Defending labour must be reflected in real improvements to workers' lives, their bargaining power and their participation in the benefits of production.

Workers Are Citizens with Agency

A worker is not simply a unit of labour or a member of a crowd to be brought into the street. A worker is a citizen with the right to choose, organise, protest and be represented. Workers must be able to have independent trade unions, freely elect their own representatives and negotiate wages, safety and working conditions. No political party or movement should dictate from outside what they must believe or whom they must vote for. An organisation's independence has meaning when this freedom of choice is recognised.

Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining also have a clear place among the International Labour Organization's fundamental principles. [9] For me, these rights are part of building a modern society. At the same time, a business needs skilled people, the ability to plan, a market and dependable contracts. The law must create an environment in which disputes can be addressed. If each side sees the destruction of the other as its only means of survival, the country will be deprived of knowledge, capital and work.

Security in life is not confined to a monthly income. Illness, unemployment, pregnancy and retirement can change a family's future. A society to which its members feel they belong must have arrangements for these circumstances. I see social protection as part of our shared responsibility, including support for those who are unable to work. At the same time, sustaining that support requires resources, management and trust. Production and public services must be able to reinforce one another.

The Tangible Possibilities of an Open Economy

Tourism is one of the fields in which culture, freedom and economics meet. Persepolis and Pasargadae, the historic city of Yazd, the hydraulic structures of Shushtar, the Hyrcanian forests and the Lut Desert are examples of Iran's recognised heritage. [10] Alongside them, food, music, handicrafts and people's hospitality can create an experience that visitors want to return to. Local guides, artists, farmers and small business owners must also benefit from these visits.

Realising this potential requires freedom of choice and a sense of ease. Women and men, Iranians and foreigners, must be able to travel and live with mutual respect. Freedom of dress, safety, transport, suitable accommodation and the protection of heritage are all parts of that same economy. We can plan to compete with destinations such as Turkey and Greece, but we must understand our own advantages and take seriously the cost of preserving them. Tourism that erodes heritage or excludes local people from its benefits weakens the foundations of its own long-term future.

As a trauma surgeon, I also regard the abilities of Iranian doctors as part of the country's potential. Medical tourism must rest on the quality of treatment, reliable facilities, clear communication with patients and follow-up after treatment. Medical credibility comes from results and responsibility. Growth in this field must also help strengthen the services that people in Iran need. Foreign patients and Iranian citizens alike need a system that takes quality and accountability seriously.

Universities can also connect science, culture and the economy. International students, joint courses, research and cooperation in mathematics, physics, engineering and medicine need an environment in which questions can be asked freely. Someone who has a valuable experience of learning and living in Iran also develops a relationship with the Persian language and Iranian society. The spread of a culture is more enduring when others wish to come closer to it and maintain that connection.

The Benefits of Growth Must Reach People's Homes

Ultimately, economic results must be visible in a family's purchasing power, the ability to find work, access to housing and healthcare, and confidence in the future. Growth in production can provide more resources for education, insurance and public services, but those resources do not reach their destination automatically. Budgets must be transparent, managers must be competent and citizens must be able to ask about the results. I want public welfare to be built into the design of the economy, rather than remembered after all the decisions have been made.

Women's rights, environmental protection and the elimination of discrimination must also be part of that design. Access to work must not depend on gender or a relationship with someone in power. Water, soil and people's health are part of the country's wealth, and the cost of damage to them must be taken into account in decisions. An economy that can produce and opens access to its benefits also strengthens national cohesion. People must be able to feel their country's progress in their own lives if they are to regard building it as their shared responsibility.

Part IV — An Economy of Freedom and Prosperity

Chapter 10 — An Economy That Can Learn

Do Not Confuse the Destination with the Name of a Doctrine

My central question in economics is how we can increase the ‘area under the welfare curve’. I use this expression as an image of how widely, and for how long, a better life can be enjoyed: wellbeing for more people, in more aspects of life and over time. I do not mean a ready-made figure or a formula that has somehow resolved society’s difficulties. When we speak of success, I want us to consider both the reach of its benefits and their durability; both life today and the ability to sustain it.

The name of a school of thought does not, by itself, answer this question. We may enter the discussion from a liberal democratic or a social democratic position, but we must explain what a policy means for production, opportunity, security and quality of life. My primary loyalty is to Iran’s progress and the improvement of people’s lives. If a policy is implemented under a name I favour but destroys the incentive to work or leaves some people more vulnerable, I must be able to examine it again. That capacity for reassessment is part of political responsibility.

A Ship Needs to Correct Its Course

I compare governing society to steering a large ship. The captain must know the destination, observe the state of the sea and adjust the course as conditions require. At one time, it may be necessary to open up more space for economic activity: starting businesses, investing, expanding industry and creating wealth. At another, the more urgent need may be to direct a greater share of the wealth produced towards roads, libraries, universities, healthcare and social protection. A movement to the right or the left in this image should follow the problem and the result.

Correcting course does not mean making sudden, unpredictable decisions. A ship will not reach its destination through erratic changes of direction. People and businesses must be able to understand why policy is changing and how it relates to the country’s enduring rules. The security of contracts, property rights, labour rights and public accountability form the basis of that trust. Within this framework, we can debate tax levels, spending priorities and forms of support, and learn from experience.

If society has fallen into stagnation and passivity, and the incentive to produce and invest has weakened, we must identify the obstacle. Taxation, regulation, monopoly, mistrust or inadequate infrastructure may play a part. We cannot determine the answer before we

understand the problem. Reducing an obstacle is useful when it opens the way to real activity. Conversely, if growing wealth has been accompanied by greater insecurity for parts of society, we must reassess public services, social protection and the distribution of opportunity. Both decisions require observation and evaluation.

Information Must Travel from People's Lives into Decisions

An economy that learns needs information that does not come solely from managers' offices. A worker knows things about the workplace that do not appear in an aggregate report. An entrepreneur can show which obstacle has made it difficult to start a business. A family struggling to obtain treatment or housing has experience that must find its way into public decisions. Universities, professional associations, the media and elected representatives can examine these experiences and turn them into issues that can be addressed.

To assess results, we must move beyond broad terms. When we speak of employment opportunities, the quality and durability of that work also matter. When we speak of expanding healthcare, we must look at access and the results of the service. When we speak of regional progress, we must ask how people in that region have gained access to education, communications and markets. Aggregate figures are necessary, but they must not conceal differences in the experiences of groups and regions. Policy must be able to explain its effects on people's lives.

A learning institution does not run away from unwelcome news. If a report shows that a programme has not met its objective, that report is an opportunity to improve. We must be able to distinguish a sound objective from an unsuitable method. Sometimes the method needs to change, sometimes the timing, and sometimes the original assumption itself. An organisation that always announces success and finds only external culprits for failure loses the knowledge it needs to improve.

Society Extends the Reach of Our Responsibility

For me, saying that society is an extension of the family means extending our sense of responsibility. The quality of my life is not separate from other people's lives. Good schools, dependable healthcare, a healthy environment and opportunities to work are assets that strengthen our shared life. Freedom allows people to demonstrate their abilities, while social security helps ensure that illness or failure does not destroy their entire future. This relationship must take tangible form in institutions and public services.

No single economic decision will govern the Iran of the future for all time. Technology changes, new generations develop new needs, and experience raises new questions. A common economic language must keep open the possibility of discussing these changes. I want a society that can create wealth, care for people and learn about the path it is taking; a society that does not have to reopen the struggle over the very basis of living together every time it needs to correct its course.

Part V — The Iranian Renaissance and Our Responsibility

Chapter 11 — A Renaissance Taking Shape in Society

Society Has Not Waited for Our Permission

When I speak of an Iranian renaissance, I am referring to a transformation whose signs I see taking shape beyond my individual will. Society has not waited for me to define this movement for it. In conversations, the media, my travels and encounters with Iranians, I see a return to Iranian identity: a desire to understand history, read the Shahnameh, reclaim national symbols and seek an image of ourselves whose boundaries an ideological government cannot entirely determine. To me, this effort to regain the authority to define ourselves carries profound meaning.

A section of society wants to make Iran the measure of political judgement. People ask what a policy has done for the country, what an enmity has cost, and what sort of life all this sacrifice is supposed to create. In that question, Iranian identity stands against the primacy of the religious community over the nation and political Islam: against an order that repeatedly asks Iranians to postpone the needs of their own lives in favour of an ideological mission. In this change, I see an effort to bring the country and the citizen back to the centre of politics.

For me, rereading the Shahnameh is also more than an interest in an ancient text. A young person searches its stories for the strength to stand firm, rise again and carry on. History reminds them that Iran's life is not confined to the present condition. They want to know where they have come from and what possibilities lie ahead. This renewed relationship with the past can lead to confidence and responsibility towards the future. I see its value in that possibility: the past gives strength to life today and opens our eyes to tomorrow.

Before Judging a Symbol, Listen to What It Means

Not every expression of this movement will suit your taste or mine. A young person may tattoo a crown, Reza Shah's signature or Mohammad Reza Shah's signature on their body. Their manner of expression may be forceful, or they may use words we dislike. My question is whether, before passing judgement, we have heard from them what this choice means. That image may be connected to a family memory, a protest against humiliation, a wish for freedom or a vision of Iran. Until we have listened, we do not know.

National belonging does not emerge through the same path for everyone. One person reaches it through literature, another through discrimination, another through migration and another through seeing an opportunity lost. A thinker must be able to recognise these paths. If, from the outset, only their own preferred form is considered valid, they will set many people aside before ever speaking with them. Their understanding and their ability to make a difference will remain limited as a result.

The same applies to foreign policy. Some Iranians see the confrontation between America and Israel and the Islamic Republic as an opportunity to strengthen their own struggle. Understanding this view requires understanding their experience of the Islamic Republic and their search for a way out. The consequences, dangers and opportunities must then be assessed. Anyone who feels responsible for people's lives does not lightly dismiss the cost of a political decision. But assessment, too, begins with seeing what people actually think and want, even when that reality does not fit the familiar categories in our minds.

Thought Must Enter the Life of Society

Society brings together different needs and hopes. Someone on the left may seek the liberation of workers; a defender of women's rights may emphasise women's freedom; an environmentalist may be concerned about water, nature and animals. These concerns are part of Iran's future. The difficulty begins when each person treats their own angle as the whole picture and asks the movement to take the exact shape of their school of thought before making any move. Such an expectation postpones cooperation to a time that will never come.

I expect a thinker to make the relationship between their concern and people's lives clear. If they speak of workers' rights, they should show how production and the right to organise can contribute to a more secure life. If they speak of women's freedom, they should explain what strength society gains when women have greater scope to decide and take the initiative. If they defend the environment, they should connect water and soil to health, work and children's futures. This effort brings ideas into public discussion and finds people willing to work on them.

Reasoning requires "mental gymnastics": the ability to move the mind and see an issue from another position. Someone who asks only why a group is not exactly the group they would like it to be loses the opportunity to learn and contribute. We must go among people, ask, explain and accept responsibility. This is how I understand joining the movement of society: bringing our knowledge into the work and making it more precise and useful through contact with other people's experience.

The Thinker at a Birth

I find the image of a midwife helpful in explaining this responsibility. We can see society as pregnant with change. A new life has taken shape within the mother. The midwife brings knowledge and experience to accompany her through a difficult passage. The value of the midwife's work lies in understanding the situation, recognising danger, calming fear and acting at the right moment. Both mother and child matter; the quality of their passage through that moment is taken seriously because life continues after the birth.

A thinker, too, should be able to stand alongside society and help its new capacities emerge. They should recognise anger and open a path from anger towards considered decisions. They should understand fear and preserve the possibility of cooperation. They should learn from the past so that familiar mistakes are not imposed on people again. This work requires knowledge and humility together. Society is not the personal property of any philosopher, economist or political leader. Each has a responsibility towards the people whose lives are caught up in this transformation.

In this interpretation, there is no predetermined timetable or guaranteed outcome. Opportunities can be lost, and the strength to rise can be scattered. That is precisely why responsible involvement matters. If I wait until everything suits me, society will not stand still in the meantime. We must think about Iran among these very people and within these very difficulties. The question from this point is clear: what, among the things I know, can help people make a more considered passage and live better lives?

Part V — The Iranian Renaissance and Our Responsibility

Chapter 12 — From the Strength to Rise to the Capacity to Build

Experience That Must Be Put to Work for Iran

Those of us who have lived through revolution, war and migration have not learned about life only from books. Many of us have started again several times: learned a new language, studied in unfamiliar surroundings, found our place in another society and encountered different ways of working and organising life. These experiences have not come easily, and they can show us that people do not always have the same answer to the same problem.

A person who has learned several languages knows how one word can carry different meanings in two minds. A person who has migrated knows the difficulty of not being seen or heard. A person who has lived through war understands that behind political decisions lie homes and families. This knowledge can give depth to our judgement. Its value becomes clear when we turn it into human connection and useful work—when we can place experience that has cost us dearly at someone else's disposal.

Living outside Iran gives no one ownership of the country's future. Inside Iran live people whose knowledge of everyday needs and practical difficulties cannot be replaced. A constructive relationship begins with recognising what each side can offer. One brings experience of another institution; the other knows what obstacles that experience would encounter in their neighbourhood, city or profession. They must be able to examine the problem together. Belonging to Iran allows many forms of participation: returning, teaching, cooperating, investing or sharing the knowledge we have.

Let Us Be the People Who Bring Others Together

Sometimes I see our society as a broken porcelain vessel, with each group holding one piece. Each imagines the whole vessel from the shape of its own fragment and wonders why someone else cannot see the same picture. But the fractures and the relationship between the pieces become clear only when they are brought together. Repair takes time and careful attention. Disparaging one fragment does not make the vessel whole; hastily putting the pieces together does not create a lasting bond either.

Iran needs people who can bring others together. People who clarify something that has been misunderstood in a group, carry one generation's concerns to another, and open a conversation between the experiences of a worker, employer, teacher and researcher. Such

a person may be the one who notices a disagreement early, listens patiently and helps people sit down again around a specific problem. Part of a nation's strength is built through this quiet work.

A university degree does not, by itself, make someone a person who brings others together. We must be able to express knowledge in language that means something in another person's life, and learn something from them as well. A common language takes shape through this exchange. In philosophy, we clarify what we mean by freedom and responsibility; in psychology, we understand fears and motives better; in politics, we establish rules for decisions and cooperation; and in economics, we discuss work, production and prosperity. Each part needs the others if our words are to find their way into action.

The Future Is Present in Today's Work

Building Iran must begin on a scale for which we can accept responsibility. People gathering to undertake a task can clarify its purpose, authority, cost and timing. They can establish how they will resolve disagreements and share the results with others. Even a small task builds trust. Next time, they know whose promise they can rely on, where they need help and what must be corrected.

For me, this is where national feeling becomes a force for building. Love of country is visible in the quality of education, the honest handling of shared funds, the care of nature and respect for other people's time. Freedom, too, finds meaning in our conduct today: someone with expertise can ask a difficult question, a capable woman has the authority to decide, and someone who disagrees with us is not denied the right to speak. The future we promise is inseparable from the way we cooperate today.

Nation building connects this sense of belonging to a lasting responsibility. We want citizens to see their own future in Iran's future: in their children's opportunity to study, the security of their work, treatment when they are ill and their freedom to choose. That expectation requires us to move from slogans to precise questions: what institution is needed? Who is responsible? What capacities do we have? How will we assess the result? The answers will be revised along the way, but our willingness to ask and make corrections must be present from today.

A Body That Can Pass Through the Narrow Opening

For this passage, I have in mind the image of a coordinated shark: the eyes see, the brain assesses the route and the body's parts make movement possible. An opening between rocks becomes a way through only when seeing, thinking and acting are connected. The Lion and Sun movement needs the same coordination. My support for Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership is bound up with the hope of bringing these capacities together—the capacities of people who can think, accept responsibility and do their work well.

Building Iran will require all these abilities. The scientist, worker, artist, teacher, entrepreneur and young person who has not yet had a chance to show their talent each have something to contribute. Our responsibility is to open the field of participation and bring this strength together. Wherever prejudice blocks the way, we must increase the possibility of understanding. Wherever mistrust brings work to a halt, we must make a clear promise that can be fulfilled. Wherever human ability lies unused, we must ask what obstacle stands between that person and useful work.

I end this book with the same question that began in my childhood home. Can we be different and still care about one another's lives? I believe we can, and we must find the way in practice. I see the Iranian renaissance as an opportunity to release our capacity to learn, think, produce and build together. We must reclaim Iran and build it so that life there offers room for growth and happiness. I hope that one day a child in an Iranian home will look at a packed bag and know that travel is a choice—that there is still room to build a future at home.

Notes and References

The memories, political judgements and proposals in this book are expressed in the author's voice. The sources below allow readers to follow up historical and research points and stated positions.

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